

Visit With The Utays

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School Psychology and Education Specialists

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Preparing for Parent-Teacher Conferences

10 Steps to Save Time and Energy, Prevent Aggravation, and Meet Goals

Parent conferences are coming up for one of my children and an IEP conference is coming up for my other one. Any suggestions for getting the most out of these meetings?

Most parents and teachers head to the parent-teacher conference with the same general goal: to figure out the best ways to help the student get the most out of their learning experience. When everyone comes ready to work together to share and plan, it can be a very meaningful experience for you and ultimately benefit your children.

To, as you put it, "get the most out these meetings," we offer a 10-step process for preparing for Parent-Teacher conferences. They can be useful for preparing either for simpler (shorter and less complex) meetings or for much more involved IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings.

1. **Update your parent notebook.** All parents should have a place, such as a 2-inch binder, divided by grade level. In each section should be work samples, standardized tests, report cards, and a picture of your child at that time. Also, information from doctors, eye exams, and teachers are much more easily accessed if you keep them in one place. Your first step should be to review this material.
2. **Focus.** Pay particular attention to past notes and report cards. If your child has an IEP, reread it. Create a list of what has worked, even somewhat or temporarily, and what is not working as well as it can.
3. **Prioritize.** It is easy to list things needing change, but you will be more effective, efficient, and successful if you prioritize and only work on the issues with the greatest potential impact.
4. **List bottom line issues.** You've reviewed, brainstormed, and prioritized. Next, before the meeting, when you are not under time pressure, think through the most important issue that must be decided, or at least discussed, before you leave the meeting.
5. **Take responsibility for your child.** What new information about your child might be useful for teachers to know? If your child has a particular challenge or disability and you have heard or read about interventions that may help, bring that information to your meeting.
6. **Bring someone to the meeting with you.** Someone else there taking notes will free you to participate more fully in the discussion. If you cannot bring someone else, request recording the meeting. Explain that it will be only for your reference and ask if there are any school guidelines or policies that you should be aware of regarding taping.
7. **Consider the student's participation.** If there is a part of the process, not necessarily the whole meeting, their perception or input would be useful, include them. An alternative is having them write a letter about their learning experience so far this year, goals, and plans to reach them.
8. **If needed, add professional help.** If you need more information, find out more about your child through an academic evaluation. Also, you can speak with a professional educational advocate about the meeting process itself.
9. **Be able to measure progress.** Understand how progress will be measured. Clear measures of change will make the next step much easier and useful.
10. **Follow up.** Call, email, or meet briefly with teachers to check on how the plan is going. Discuss how obstacles can be addressed at home or school. Plan this follow-up process during the conference.

The three well-known rules for developing a successful business are location, location, and location. For reducing stress, Thoreau suggested, "Simplify, simplify, simplify." If we summarized these 10 tips in three words, they would be, prepare, prepare, and prepare. It is one more important way you can have a powerful influence on helping your children prepare today for success tomorrow.

For more information on any of these steps to preparing for successful school meetings and other education issues, call Total Learning Centers (724) 940-1090 or visit www.TotalLearningCenter.com. Ask for a free cd of interesting information about education and other issues.

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