

Parent-Teacher Conferences: When To Speak and When To Shut Up

Description



Listen and learn

During the past school year, my husband and I attended our son's 3rd grade parent/teacher conference and our daughter's 5th grade conference at [The Willows School](#). The second of three conferences, this was a time for teachers to show parents the kids' work, comment on their progress and answer any questions. At our school, only the first and third conferences are accompanied by a detailed written report.

I can't tell you how tempting it can be to go into these meetings with your own agenda. Of course, that list of things you want to discuss may have little or nothing to do with the actual classroom work. That's when, I've learned, it's best to shut up and listen.

For me, mean girl drama is always at the forefront. This year, we've haven't had nearly the array of mean girl complaints that I heard from my daughter in 3rd grade. Nothing rivals our rocky [kindergarten year](#). Still, there are always small slights, hurt feelings, and minor incidents with many of the girls in my daughter's grade. Heading into parent conferences, these are always the issues I'd prefer to discuss. But, I don't. I listen to my kids' outstanding teachers talk about the incredible ways they teach what could be pretty dull stuff like the American Revolution. Or the Salem Witch Trials. Listening to the teachers talk about 5th grade's unit on these subjects, I was captivated.

My husband is a math aficionado. It's safe to assume he'll ask a question or two about the math program. A major overhaul in the school's math program at the start of the year had him peppering the teachers with a list of questions about how it would all work. Fast forward several months later and those concerns have been alleviated. My kids really enjoy the new math program. What did I learn from this? If your child is at a great school, trust that the administrators and teachers know what they're doing, even if it's a bumpy transition at first.

That's not to say I haven't raised issues of concern when it's necessary. Of course, I've asked questions about what the teachers observe with the girls' social scene. With my son, the boy drama tends to play out on the yard, with boys arguing over sports. Occasionally, the grade will be banned from playing a sport until things settle down.

I've learned over the years my kids have been in elementary school to listen first, talk later (if at all) during parent/teacher conferences. I get more information that way because my kids' teachers really know my kids. They get them. And, they like them. I can't ask for anything more. My husband and I leave our kids' conferences incredibly proud of them.

What DO I say? I tell the teachers what a fabulous job they're doing educating my kids and how grateful I am that we have them as teachers.

Enough said!

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