Learning Conversations in Secondary School

An Essential Conversation

“As partners in the education of their children, parents work collaboratively with teachers and staff”

Charter for Parents in Catholic School SA

Parent-teacher interviews are an opportunity for you to meet and get to know your child's teacher and build a strong relationship between your home and your child's school. They are an opportunity to share information about your child's progress, interests and needs. They also help the teacher understand more about your child. By asking questions and finding out more about the information on your child’s report you have an opportunity to become further involved in your child’s learning and give support where needed.

Before the Interview

- Your child may try to dissuade you from meeting with his/her teachers/s! Don't be swayed. It's your responsibility to keep connected in this way.
- Know the names and subject areas of your child's teachers.
- Clarify if your child is expected to attend and their role in the interview.
- Discuss the upcoming interviews with your child. Ask “What am I likely to hear about your strengths and challenges in this subject”?
- Reflect on what you know about your child as a learner. Your insights are invaluable in parent/teacher conversations.
- Are there any issues in relation to your child's study/work habits that you'd like to discuss (e.g. attitude, application, punctuality, attendance, work completion, amount of homework)?
- Are there family/home issues (e.g. change in living or working arrangements, loss of grief, illness) that the teacher may need to be aware of to be of support for your child?
- Plan and write down your specific questions/comments before the interview.
- Know when and where the interview will be held.

Parent/Teacher Interview Checklist
You may wish to prepare questions and/or comments about some of the following areas:

Child's progress, strengths and challenges
- Academically, socially, emotionally.

Child’s attitude to school and in class
- Attention and task completion
- Punctuality
- Independence and self-directed learning
- Initiative.

Child's commitment to school's expectations
- In class
- School rules and routines.

Child's relationship with peers
- Friendships
- Team work/collaboration.

How to help at home
- Homework routine
- Time management/organisation
- Hints or strategies to support their learning.

Curriculum and school/class activities
- Program for the term/semester/year
- Topics being covered
- School and class activities/traditions/celebrations
- How parents can contribute to the life of the school community.
Four key questions to ask:

1. What have you observed about my child as a learner?
2. Is there anything about my child’s learning or social needs that I should know?
3. What can I share with you about my child’s learning style, strengths and challenges that would support you?
4. What can I do as a parent to help my child progress in school this year?

Other questions you may like to ask:

- What opportunities are there for me to learn about what is covered in this subject?
- What opportunities are there to see examples of my child’s work?
- What are the assessments and assignments for this subject?
- How does my child participate in class discussions/class room activities, seek support?
- What amount of time might we expect our child to commit to homework for this subject?
- How would you describe my child’s ability to work collaboratively, independently, follow directions and follow the rules and routines during class time?
- What extra resources could we access to support what is covered in this subject?
- How is my child progressing in comparison to others in his/her year level?
- Can you tell me the best time and way to contact you if I have a query or concern?

During the Interview

Attitude

- Approach the interview with a positive and relaxed attitude.
- See it as an opportunity for a two-way discussion where you will be informed as well as actively contribute.
- Set the scene for a positive and constructive meeting by using open and positive body language.

Communication

- Respect the teacher’s professional skills and expertise.
- Be respectfully assertive.
- Be constructive.
- Discuss issues without getting personal.
- Express your needs and concerns calmly.
- Remember you both want what’s best for your child.

Listen

- The best communicators are keen listeners.
- Clarify points you don’t understand.
- If you don’t understand the ‘jargon’ ask for it to be described another way.

After the Interview

Discuss the meeting with your child

- Talk about his/her strengths and celebrate these.
- Talk about the ideas you discussed to continue to support his/her learning.
- Negotiate goals with your child that encourages them to take increased responsibility for their learning.

Follow up agreed action as soon as possible

Did the teacher:-

- Recommend resources or strategies?
- Offer ideas that support your child’s study routine?
- Propose accessing additional support?

Remember:

- Formal parent/teacher interviews are only one form of communication between you and your child’s teacher.
- Keep connected using mutually agreed forms of school/home communication such as email, your child’s diary, communication book, wiki’s, blogs, SMS or phone.
- An important part of your role begins after the formal conversation.

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