

Parent-Teacher Conferences can provide a foundation for a trusting relationship and help both you and families learn how to partner together to best support their child/youth. While your conferences will cover a number of topics, integrating the topic of attendance into your conversations at parent-teacher conferences is a great way to educate families about the benefits of showing up regularly to school and discuss absences in a non-threatening setting.

The following framework can help guide your Parent-Teacher Conferences regardless of the topics covered, and the suggestions for questions and issues to cover are by no means exhaustive.

### 1. Learn

Learn something about your student's family. Recognize the family/caregiver's cultural background and build on this strength to partner for attendance. After welcoming the family or caregiver, ask them what their vision is for their student's future. What hopes and dreams do they have for their student? Find out how school is going so far. What do they and their child/youth enjoy? Has anything been difficult?

### 2. Share

Share the positive things—academic and social—about the student. Inform the family/caregiver about the progress you've seen their student make. Start off with the positives. Point out the areas in which the student is excelling or improving, including being on time and attending regularly. Be specific. Families need to know that you are sincere and that you have taken the time to think about their child.

Share your vision for student learning and the experiences you want your students to have in the classroom. Describe what you want your students to experience and accomplish this year.

### 3. Inform

After sharing the positives, share areas where the student can improve or is struggling. Remember that families are not credentialed teachers. They often do not know the academic language that comes so naturally to teachers. As you share challenges that the student is having, show examples of grade-level work and encourage the family/caregiver to ask questions if anything isn't clear. Let them know your policy on how long after an absence a student has to make-up an assignment.

Review the student's report card and update families on their students' attendance data. Prior to the parent-teacher conference, review the attendance data on the report card in order to determine how you want to have that conversation. Here are three possible scenarios:

1. **Satisfactory Attendance:** A student has missed less than 5% of school days or less than 4 days during the first semester. Congratulate the family/caregiver on making attendance a priority and encourage them to keep it up.
2. **At Risk Attendance:** A student missed 5-10% of the school year (between 5- 8 days of the first semester). Let the family know that you are concerned about attendance since it is easy for students to fall behind and feel disconnected from their classmates. Encourage families to keep track of absences using a calendar such as the one in our [Student Attendance Success Plans](#).
3. **Chronic Absence:** A student has missed 10% or more of school (9 days or more in the first semester). If a child has been chronically absent, let the family know that their child has missed so many days of school that they are academically at risk. If possible, offer concrete examples of what a child may have missed in the classroom due to their absence.

Start by making sure that the family/caregiver thinks the record of absences are accurate. Showing them on a calendar can be helpful for this purpose. Download the [calendar](#) on our Student Attendance Success Plan.

Clarify that even when absences are happening for understandable and unavoidable reasons (i.e., a student was very sick or had a contagious illness) absences can still have an adverse impact on their learning and sense of connection to peers and school staff. The point of reviewing absences is to determine how to work together to reduce any negative impacts.

Remember that families may not be aware of the importance of regular attendance for learning and social development as early as preschool and kindergarten.

Have a copy of the [Handouts for Families](#) available and be ready to walk through the key points. Be specific with families about what their child is missing when they don't make it to school. For example, if a student frequently is absent on Fridays, tell families/caregivers about the lessons and activities that their student is consistently missing out on.

For all areas where the student can improve—including attendance—connect it back to the families' hopes and dreams for their child. How will consistently missing school impact their ability to read and keep up with lessons? To get a good job? To go to college? Help families see how what's happening now can affect reaching these goals.

## 4. Discuss

As you talk with the families about attendance, take a positive and problem-solving approach. Start with the assumption that families care about their student's education and have strengths they can build upon. Then work together to address the challenges they face in helping their child get to school.

For students with chronic absence, be prepared to set aside extra time for the conversation and make sure it is happening in a setting where others cannot overhear the discussion. Consider asking a colleague, an attendance liaison, a school social worker or even another teacher with a positive relationship with the student or family, to join you for the conference.

If a child has been chronically absent, spend more time finding out about the situation. What is making it difficult to show up to school? Is there a barrier? Is the student feeling anxious?

Ask them what helps the student and their family get to school? How can you and the family build upon what makes a student excited about showing up to school? Be prepared to listen if absences are a reaction to negative experiences that a child or family has had with school. Focus on how to change the situation for the remainder of the year so absences do not continue to add up.

Consider using [My Family's Help Bank](#) to encourage families to identify their support systems.

### MY FAMILY'S HELP BANK

**MY FAMILY**

**EVERYDAY HELPERS**

**OCCASIONAL HELPERS**

**POTENTIAL HELPERS**

1. **My Family:** List who lives in your house.
2. **Everyday Helpers:** Identify who you can call on to help drop your child off or who can pick him or her up when you cannot. These are people like friends, neighbors and relatives who can help regularly.
3. **Occasional Helpers:** Identify people who probably cannot help everyday, but can help in a pinch. Maybe it's a godparent, a relative or a friend who lives outside your neighborhood but can be there for short stints.
4. **Potential Helpers:** Identify people who are part of your school community, church or neighborhood who are able to help — if you ask.

  

1. **My Family:** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Everyday Helpers:** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Occasional Helpers:** \_\_\_\_\_
4. **Potential Helpers:** \_\_\_\_\_

If I need help getting my child to and from school, I will ask the following people to be our back-up:

Name: _____	Best Contact Number: _____
Name: _____	Best Contact Number: _____
Name: _____	Best Contact Number: _____

**Attendance Works**

To learn more, please visit [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)  
Adapted from materials created by Ready Works at East Bayview Elementary School in Portland, Oregon (<http://www.k12oregon.org/eas-intelnet/eas-intelnet>)

**How can families reinforce classroom lessons at home?** Ask families/caregivers if there are particular areas that they see their child struggling with, or excelling at. Give families “learning at home” activities to support their child’s progress. For example, if a child is struggling in reading comprehension, give the family a few questions to ask their child while reading with them at night. If a child is struggling in several areas, do not overwhelm the families with activities in each area. Start with one or two content areas and let them know you will be checking in to see how things are going. Encourage them to initiate contact as well.

**How can families stay connected?** Let the families know how to keep track of their child’s progress. Discuss how they can get in touch with you if there is a question or concern and when they should expect to hear back. Are there ways to find out how their child is doing on a regular basis (e.g., progress reports, notes sent home)?

## 4. Ask & Arrive at a Plan

Ask if there is anything you can do to support a partnership between home and school. Ask if they have additional questions or comments. Let the family know what you need from them. Don't be afraid to be clear about what you need.

Connect families as much as possible to helpful resources in the school or the community. If this isn't possible during the meeting, explain how you will follow up.

If the child is having attendance issues, consider using the [Student Attendance Success Plan](#) to guide a conversation about improvement planning. Before the end of the conference, review the agreements that have been made. What have you as the teacher agreed to do? What has the parent agreed to do? Set a timeline to check in. Encourage parent- initiated contact.

## 5. Tailoring Parent-Teacher Conferences to Each Student

When it comes to attendance, the conversations you'll have will be very different if the child/youth is regularly attending versus if the child is missing a couple days every month (borderline chronically absent), or if the child has severe attendance problems and is missing weeks of school. Be prepared to invest more time and resources if absences are more severe.

Despite the fact that the challenges and solutions will vary significantly for these different families, always start the conversation in the same way: learn about the hopes and dreams of the family/caregiver, and share your vision for helping their student succeed. Doing so will help build a relationship of trust, which is vital regardless of the child's situation. When it comes down to reviewing the student's progress and attendance data, congratulate, encourage and problem-solve as appropriate.

For students with chronic absence, set aside more time for the conversation and make sure it is happening in a setting where others cannot overhear the discussion. Consider asking a colleague, an attendance liaison, a school social worker or even another teacher with a positive relationship with the student or family, to join you for the conference. Teachers who have siblings struggling with chronic absence should consider talking together beforehand to compare notes and discuss how they might work together to support the family.

If a child is missing school for health-related reasons, Parent-Teacher Conferences are an opportunity to inform families about available health-related supports, such as the school nurse, and to reinforce guidance on how to help students to stay healthy.