Parent-teacher interviews are a great way to find out how your child is going and show your interest in your child’s learning and school life.

**Parent-teacher interviews: the basics**

**Why it’s worth going to parent-teacher interviews**

Parent-teacher interviews give you a great opportunity to:

- learn more about your child’s academic, emotional and social development
- meet and get to know your child’s teachers
- help your child’s teachers understand more about your child
- make plans with the teacher about how you can both support your child
- build a relationship with your child’s school.

If you don’t have any particular concerns, you might wonder whether it’s worth going to parent-teacher interviews. But going along is one way to show your child that you’re interested in his learning needs and what’s happening for him at school.

Of course, if you do have concerns, it’s a chance for you to raise them with your child’s teacher if you haven’t done that already.

You might feel a bit nervous about going to parent-teacher interviews. That’s normal. It might help to know that teachers can feel the same way, especially if there are difficult or sensitive issues to discuss, or if they’re not used to giving parent-teacher interviews.

**What to talk about at parent-teacher interviews**

To get the most out of parent-teacher interviews, it helps to be well prepared.

Interviews are often held around the time school reports come home. One of the first things you can do is read your child’s school report carefully and note down anything you want to ask about.

It can help to take your list of questions with you so you remember what you want to talk about. The interview time tends to pass quickly.

It’s useful to have a few other questions in mind too. For example:

- What are my child’s strengths?
- What does my child struggle with?
- How much homework should my child be doing every night?
- What can I do at home to help with my child with schoolwork?
- What can you tell me about my child’s behaviour in class?
- How is my child getting along with other students?
- What support services are available for my child at this school?

If you don’t get through everything you want to discuss, you might need to arrange another meeting with your child’s teacher.

**Preschool and primary school parent-teacher interviews**
Who will you meet?
At preschool and primary school parent-teacher interviews, you’ll probably meet with your child’s classroom or home-room teacher for the whole meeting.

You’ll have a pre-arranged meeting time so it’s important to be on time. But be aware that teachers might be running late because previous interviews have run over time.

Talking with the teacher
Being open and friendly will set you up for positive communication with the teacher. You can show that you respect what the teacher is saying by listening carefully and trying not to become too defensive, even if you disagree with the feedback.

It’s important to get as much out of the meeting as you can, so it’s OK to be direct when required. For example, ask the teacher to explain to clarify or expand on a point if you don’t understand or fully grasp what’s being said.

If you have a concern about something, try to be specific and avoid blame. Combining a request with understanding will usually help. For example, ‘Freya says that when you explain things it makes it clearer to her. Would you mind if she asked you to take a bit more time to explain things when she’s learning something new?’ It can also help if you can mention something positive about what is happening at the same time.

If you have to discuss any problems with the teacher, it helps to come ready with some possible solutions, or at least some positive and practical suggestions. Be willing to listen to the teacher’s ideas too. The aim is for you and your child’s teacher to work on problems in partnership with each other. After all, you both share the same goal of wanting your child to learn and feel successful.

If you make any decisions, it’s good to agree on who will follow up and when.

Should your child go to the interview?
Whether your child goes to the parent-teacher interview with you is often up for negotiation and needs to be decided before the meeting. You could ask your school what is preferred.

Some primary schools have student-led conferences instead of parent-teacher interviews. In this case your child is expected to attend and lead the discussion about his work. Otherwise, you might prefer to leave your child at home so that you can talk to his teacher freely. You can discuss the meeting with your child afterwards.

Secondary school parent-teacher interviews
Once they’re at secondary school, young people don’t always talk as openly about what’s happening for them at school. But don’t let a lack of communication keep you from developing and maintaining your relationship with the school.

Open communication with your child’s secondary school is especially important through the changes and challenges of the adolescent years. Schools and teachers, as well as support staff including counsellors, are in an excellent position to watch how your child is developing and learning.
**Who will you meet?**
At your child’s parent-teacher interview you might meet with individual subject teachers. In the junior secondary years, this might mean that there are about 10 teachers for you to meet.

It’s not always practical to have an appointment with each one, especially if you have more than one child at secondary school. Instead, talk to your child about which teachers she thinks you should meet.

Generally, it’s a good idea to meet with teachers of the compulsory subjects. If you’ve got enough time, you could also talk with teachers in a couple of the electives where your child has the greatest interest or difficulties.

With fewer subjects and teachers in the senior secondary years, it’s easier to make times with every teacher. In fact, this is particularly important during Years 10, 11 and 12 when your child is deciding on subjects and thinking about opportunities after school.

**What to talk about**
There’s usually only a short time available for each interview so the discussion tends to focus on academic progress, outcomes and career goals.

If you need to talk about other issues, such as behaviour or attendance problems, you might need to arrange a separate meeting.

**Should your child go to the interview?**
At secondary school your child will generally be expected to come to parent-teacher interviews. Teachers will often direct much of the discussion to your child, reflecting his growing maturity and independence.

**After the parent-teacher interview**
You and the teacher need to follow up on any decisions or solutions that you agree on at the interview. For example, you could arrange a second meeting or a follow-up phone call in a month’s time.

If you agree to try some new strategies, a follow-up discussion gives you both the chance to check how well they’re working. If you need to, you can adjust them.

**Arranging parent-teacher meetings at other times**
If you have any concerns about your child’s social or academic development you don’t have to wait for a formal parent-teacher interview to talk about them.

Your child’s teacher will be happy to arrange a meeting with you to discuss any issues. You just need to contact the school to make an appointment.

Parent-teacher interviews are often held in open or public areas. If you know that you want to raise a sensitive or confidential topic with a teacher, it might be a good idea to arrange a separate meeting.
You can also arrange a separate meeting if you want to discuss something that might take longer than your allocated 10-15 minutes. For example, you might want to tell your child’s teacher about something going on at home that could be having an impact on your child’s behaviour or academic performance, such as the death of a grandparent or parental separation.

**Informal contact with your child’s teacher**

If you have opportunities to meet your child’s teacher at information nights or other school events, it can be a good time to socialise. This can help when you meet for formal parent-teacher interviews.