



Family Conferencing: Asking and Listening

[?] What's In This Kit?

This training kit is designed to introduce teachers to family conferencing. It contains:

- Expected educational outcomes
- Preparation instructions
- Training strategies and tips
- Implementation steps
- Follow-up activities for teachers
- Follow-up activities for administrators/directors
- A learning assessment
- A training evaluation/further needs assessment
- A resource list
- The article "Parents' Perspectives on Conferencing" by Roslyn Duffy
- A training certificate to award to teachers for attendance and participation
- A certificate for the trainer and other presenters

🎯 Who's the Target Audience?

The target audience for this kit is teachers working with children from birth to age 8. Participants will learn skills for effective family conferencing.

Teacher Skill Level



Children's Age Level





Kit Timeline:

Preparation time for this kit is estimated at 45 minutes to 1.0 hour. Implementation time is 1.5 hours.



Training Outcomes:

1. Teachers will identify effective conferencing techniques.
2. Teachers will evaluate their current level of knowledge and information about the children in their classrooms.
3. Teachers will improve their ability to ask for information.
4. Teachers will enhance their skills for listening to family members.
5. Teachers will contribute ideas to pre-conference family questionnaires.
6. Teachers will learn how to create action plans in collaboration with parents during conferences.
7. Teachers will complete conference-planning forms as a part of conference planning process.

These training outcomes address the following American standards:

- 7.A.03, 7.A.06, 7.A.09, 7.A.10, 7.A.12, 7.A.14, 7.B.02, and 7.B.05-06 of the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Performance Criteria (2005), www.naeyc.org.
- Standards 1, 2, 3, 4a, 4b, and 5 of NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation, Initial Licensure Level (2003), www.naeyc.org.
- 1304.21(a)(2)(i), 1304.21(a)(3)(i)(A), 1304.40 (a)(1), (4), (5), and 1304.40(e)(1), 1304.40(e)(3) of Head Start Performance Standards (Federal Register, Nov. 5, 1996, Volume 61, Number 215), www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/.
- D1, D3, D4, D5, and D7 of the National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs, National Association of Child Care Professionals (2005), www.naccp.org.

You may want to take the time now to locate additional state and local standards that relate to this topic or requirements of other regulatory bodies specific to your program. Add those to this plan to personalize it.



Preparation:

1. Read the article "Parents' Perspectives on Conferencing" by Roslyn Duffy. Locate and read any of the following resources to support an understanding of the topic.
Beginnings Workshop. (1997). Parent Conferences. *Exchange*, 116, 40-58.
Beginnings Workshop. (2001). Parent Involvement. *Exchange*, 138, 44-62.
Neugebauer, R. (1994). *Parent Relations: Building an Active Partnership*. Redmond, WA: Exchange Press.

Riepe, L. (1990). For the Benefit of All: Planning and Conducting Effective Parent Conferences. *Exchange*, 74, 47-49.

2. Gather the forms currently in use in your program for family conferences and your school's confidentiality policy. Make copies to share during this training session.
3. Read through the entire training kit to familiarize yourself with the kit's design, implementation, handouts, etc.
4. Copy and distribute the article for teachers to read before the training session.
5. Duplicate Handout #1: *Do I Know?*; Handout #2: *Information Update*; Handout #3: *Parent Expectations*; and Handout #4: *Conference Action Plan*.
6. Collect the supplies and materials needed for each session including flip chart paper and markers, classroom enrollment lists, scissors, and envelopes or paper cups.
7. Cut apart the classroom enrollment lists and place the names of the children in each classroom in separate envelopes or paper cups. Label each one with the classroom and teachers' names.
8. Duplicate the learning assessment and the certificate of attendance and participation.



Training Strategy:

- Individual worksheets
- Group brainstorming
- Group planning session

Training Tip: Create an atmosphere of safety and trust by explaining that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the "Do I Know . . ." worksheet. The answers simply provide a way of understanding how much or how little information classroom teachers have available to them about the families of children they teach.

Another Training Tip: Steer away from discussions of what information is appropriate to ask and what isn't. As information is voluntarily provided, there is no pressure on family members to reveal information they feel is too personal.

Yet Another Training Tip: Take this opportunity to reiterate your school's confidentiality policies. Talk with teachers about appropriate and inappropriate ways to use information provided to the school about families.



Implementation:

1. Pass out Handout #1: *Do I Know?* to each participant.
 - a. Ask each teacher to select a child's name from the cup or envelope and then to complete the listed items for that child. Reassure participants that this is not a *test* but a means of figuring out what information teachers already have.
 - b. Allow approximately 3-5 minutes for teachers to complete the questions.
 - c. Facilitate a discussion about what teachers learned by completing this exercise.

Some questions to ask include:

 - Which questions were easy to answer? Why?
 - Which questions were hardest to answer? Why?
 - What would be the simplest means of finding out this information?
2. The group will identify that family members are likely the easiest source of such information. If this idea does not come up, you may suggest it.
3. Distribute copies of Handout #2: *Information Update*, Handout #3: *Parent Expectations*, and Handout #4: *Conference Action Plan*.
4. Allow several minutes for participants to read through the handouts.
5. Divide teachers into teaching groups. Ask the groups to discuss the forms and decide if they want to use them, consider suggestions and amendments, or allow each teacher to customize the forms to meet their needs.
6. End this session with a commitment to increase the amount of asking and listening included in family conferences by using the forms, either with corrections and additions or as modified by each teacher.
7. Distribute certificates of attendance and participation.



Follow-up Activities for Teachers:

Use *Family Conference Preparation* forms for upcoming conferences.



Follow-up Activities for Directors:

1. Make changes/additions to the *Family Conference Preparation* forms as determined during the training session or see that copies of teacher-customized forms are duplicated and available to their respective classrooms.
2. Provide copies of all necessary forms for teachers to use at conference time.
3. Revise these forms based upon the teachers' post-conference evaluation of their usefulness.

4. At the next staff meeting or training session, evaluate how helpful the forms were:
- What worked best?
 - What did not work well?
 - What could be changed?

Invite teachers to share any tips for using the forms.



Learning Assessment:

Ask teachers to complete the learning assessment to validate their understanding of the topic.



Training Evaluation/Further Needs Assessment:

Ask teachers to complete the evaluation. Use the results to evaluate the effectiveness of the training and to identify further training needs.



What's Next?

This kit is designed to be use independently or as part of a series of sessions on conferencing with families. If the training evaluation and further needs assessment indicates that your staff needs further training in family or parent conferencing, take a look at Conferencing: Developing Trust (Out of the Box Training Kit #4400401) or the remainder of the kits in the Family and Community Partnerships category of Out of the Box Early Childhood Training Kits. For a complete list, go to www.ChildCareExchange.com.



Resources:

Beginnings Workshop. (1997). Parent conferences. *Exchange*, 116, 40-58.

Beginnings Workshop. (2001). Parent involvement. *Exchange*, 138, 44-62.

Neugebauer, R. (1994). *Parent Relations: Building an Active Partnership*. Redmond, WA: Exchange Press.

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*You can purchase *Exchange* articles at www.ChildCareExchange.com.



Handout #1:

Do I Know?

Answer the following questions about the child's name you selected.

1. What are the names of the adults who fill parenting roles for this family?
2. Is this child's nap schedule the same at home as at school?
3. Who are this child's favorite playmate(s) at home?
4. How many brothers or sisters does this child have? What are their names and ages?
5. Does this family have special (or favorite) types of food they eat at home?
6. What is the biggest worry this child's parents have about him (or her)?
7. Name skill(s) the parent(s) are most interested in this child learning:
8. Do this child's parents read aloud at home? When? Favorite stories?
9. Does this child watch television? When? How much? What programs?

Handout #2: Family Information Update

Please complete these forms and return them to your child's teacher or bring them with you to the conference. If you do not wish to provide information for any reason, feel free to leave that item blank.

Child's Name _____ Date _____

1. What are your child's favorite things to do at home?

2. Who are your child's most frequent playmates at home?

3. What are your child's favorite foods?

4. Does your child or family eat special foods or follow a special diet (vegetarian, halal, kosher)?
If so, what kind?

5. Does your child have anything s(he) is afraid of or worries about?

6. How often does s(he) watch television? What are your child's favorite television programs?

Handout #2 (cont.)

Family Information Update

Child's Name _____ Date _____

7. What changes have taken place at home in the past months? (a move, job change, illness, divorce or separation, new household member, other) Please elaborate.

8. Do you feel your child behaves differently at school than at home?

For example: Is s(he) outgoing at home but seems reserved at school?

9. What is your child's nap schedule at home?

10. Who does your child spend more time with at home? Adults? Other children? If time is spent with other children, are they younger or older? Siblings? Classmates?

11. Does your child take enrichment classes (music or dance lessons, foreign language, gymnastics)?

12. What interests, activities, or stories does your child enjoy?

Interests (such as fairies, fire trucks): _____

Activities (such as dancing or playing outdoors): _____

Stories (such as *The Three Little Pigs*): _____

Handout #3: Expectations

Please think about the following questions and share your answers with us at our upcoming conference.

1. What do I most want my child to learn from his experiences in this program?

2. How do I think my child is developing. . . .

Physically?

Intellectually?

Emotionally?

Socially?

3. Do I have any worries about my child's development?

4. What is most difficult for me about having my child in this program?

5. Any other comments?

Handout #4:

Conference Action Plan

Child's Name _____ Date _____

As a result of this conference, we plan to do the following at school:

1.

2.

3.

As a result of this conference, we plan to do the following at home:

1.

2.

3.

Teacher's signature _____

Family Member signature _____

We will check in with one another to report our progress on these goals on _____(date).

Learning Assessment

Family Conferencing: Asking and Listening

Name_____

Date_____

1. List 1 type of information that would be valuable for caregivers to know. How would this information be helpful?

2. Describe 3 ways in which you plan to use new information about a child in your classroom to enhance your curriculum.

Learning Assessment Evaluation Rubric

Family Conferencing: Asking and Listening

1. List 1 type of information that would be valuable for caregivers to know. How would this information be helpful?

For example, knowing that a child's parents have separated might help explain his recent withdrawal from peer interactions.

Teachers would be alerted to offer appropriate support such as: reading a story about a child whose parents live in different houses which might lead to a discussion and a chance for this child to identify his own sad or angry feelings.

Accept all reasonable and related responses.

2. Describe 3 ways in which you plan to use new information about a child in your classroom to enhance your curriculum.

For example, finding out that a child visited his uncle's horse ranch could lead to setting out props such as cowboy hats or boots in the dramatic play area or using oats in the sensory table.

Accept all reasonable and related responses.



Parents' Perspectives on Conferencing

by Roslyn Duffy



Children are awake 12 or more hours each day existing in, exploring, and experiencing this world. They snooze away most of the remainder of each 24 hour span. Many spend more than half of their waking hours with people other than their parents. When parents and children separate for long periods each day, there is a tremendous need to hear stories about each other. What did you eat today; did you learn a new song; or were you sad, mad, glad over something? Parent conferences are a formal time for parents and teachers to share stories.

Three Concerns

Parents come to conferences with three basic concerns:

- Do you know and like my child?
- Can I trust you?
- Is my child normal?

These concerns are the bottom line.

Three Messages

Parents want to convey three main messages.

*Roslyn Duffy is the co-author with Jane Nelsen and Cheryl Erwin of **Positive Discipline for Preschoolers**, Prima Press, and co-author with Jane Nelsen of **My First Visit to Preschool**, Fisher-Price. She is a 17 year veteran director of a child care program in Seattle, Washington, lectures and teaches classes for both parents and teachers, and is a counselor in private practice. She has four children of her own.*



- I want to be a good parent.
- I love my child and she is very special to me.
- I want specific things for my child: (PIES) physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially.

Structure

Structure a conference to meet parents' needs. Addressing all three concerns and messages leads to successful parent conferences. Imagine three parts to each meeting:

- **Part One** — Listen and share stories
- **Part Two** — Address the child's school performance
- **Part Three** — Prepare for the future

Part One

The first part of a conference is listening. Give parents a chance to talk about their child. Ask how they think Mary is doing in the program. Allow their concern, love, and pride a place of honor at this meeting. A parent's biggest worry is that her child might get lost in the crowd. A conference is not just for teachers to recount Mary's progress. *It is not a verbal report card.*

Listening allows parents to communicate two of their messages:

- I want to be a good parent.
- I love my child and she is very special to me.

Mary's parents appreciate the opportunity to talk about Mary. "We love Mary. She is very special to us." In the process of expressing their love for Mary, her parents also demonstrate their commitment to being good parents. *When parents feel listened to, they are much more open to listening.*

Sharing comes next. Conferences give a special opportunity to exchange specific as well as anecdotal information. Mary's mom glows with pride when Mr. Franks tells her about a dress-up game Mary initiated with her friends Juan and Sally yesterday. She laughs with him over Mary's originality. She feels pleased that this adult took the time to notice her child. Her child is the most special person in her world and she loves it when others respond in kind to Mary's antics.

The conference begins by giving Mary's parents time to talk about their child. The teacher joins in by relating special stories about Mary, the children she chooses as playmates, and some of her recent experiences at school. Within ten minutes, Mary's parents feel reassured about two of their three concerns:

- Do you know and like my child?
- Can I trust you?

Her teacher notices Mary, enjoys her, and takes note of her activities. That information translates into the message: this teacher knows and likes Mary. When parents receive such a message, they think: Mary is safe here and we can trust this adult. *Trust builds from tiny bits and pieces of experience.*

Part Two

The second part of the conference addresses the child's performance at school. This responds to the third parental concern:

- Is my child normal?

A variation of this question is more basic. Is my child in "trouble"? Trouble includes many aspects of development. Use the acronym PIES. PIES stands for four areas of development: physical, intellectual, emotional, and social. Remember to give parents a serving of PIES.

Parents live with only one or at most a few children. Often there are no other nearby relatives. When four year old Sammy tells a lie, his dad panics. Have I raised a liar? What should I do? Does Sammy lie at school, too? Mr. Silla, Sammy's teacher, has been around hundreds of four and five year olds. His perspective and knowledge of child development enable him to reassure Sammy's dad that lying is fairly typical for children Sammy's age. Children learn to establish boundaries between fantasy and reality in their late preschool years. Mr. Silla can help Sammy's parents plan effective responses when Sammy tells falsehoods.

Alerted to this concern, Mr. Silla pays closer attention at school to see if Sammy's statements are truthful. If he observes Sammy claiming that another child's toy is his, he responds clearly, "Sammy, I saw Mary bring this ball into school this morning. I bet you wish it was yours, don't you?" Sammy nods and learns to express himself honestly without being shamed. "Let's give the ball back to Mary together." Both the family and school work together as a team to support Sammy as he learns needed skills.

Developing social competence takes time. Parents feel less defensive about their child's struggle with new skills once a solid basis of trust exists.

Sylvia, Matt's teacher, expresses a concern about Matt getting rebuffed by the older children when he attempts to play with them.



Parents' Conference Guidelines

Please use the following ideas to help prepare for your child's conference.

The **Suggested Parents' Questions** section is for your use. The **Home Information** and **Parents' Expectations/Perceptions** sections will be added to your child's file as a reference to help our staff serve you and your child in the best way possible.

Suggested Parents' Questions

- What are my child's preferred interests, activities, or play areas at school?
- With whom does my child play most often?
- Does my child demonstrate any skills above his age level in certain areas? If so, what areas?
- Does my child show a developmental lag or need help in any area? If so, what areas and what assistance do you recommend at home, school, or from outside sources?
- Any other questions?

Action Plan

Three things I plan to do at home as a result of this conference are:

Matt's mom recalls that he looked sad last week when she saw him standing at the side of the playground. Sylvia and Matt's mom discuss ways to help Matt with this problem. Matt's mom offers to encourage Matt to invite other friends over to play with him at home. Sylvia supplies a list of names of possible playmates and says she will work with the older children to teach them gentler ways of responding to younger children's requests. She will also bring up the problem of excluding others from games at the next class meeting.

Sometimes a teacher has concerns about a child's development. Betty worries about Justin's difficulty communicating. Justin is over three and uses very few words. The other children cannot understand what he says, and Justin's frustration frequently leads to biting. Betty knows that Justin's speech is much less developed than most of the other three year olds with whom she has worked. Justin's chronic ear infections add to her concern.



Betty has spoken with Justin's parents on several occasions and knows that his speech at home remains unintelligible. They also know about the biting problem and it worries them. Betty had her assistant spend one hour last week recording everything Justin said. At their conference, Betty provides Justin's parents with a copy of the assistant's notes on Justin's speech. She also has copies of several notes that went home previously when biting occurred.

Serious concerns need careful documentation. Ongoing communication alerts parents to problems in advance. *Do not use a conference as a surprise tactic.* Without preparation, parents easily respond with shock, resentment, and defensiveness to information that may be at best frightening.

Be ready with helpful ideas when airing concerns. Betty has several suggestions for helping Justin. She urges his parents to have Justin's language development evaluated by a speech therapist. She offers to ask the public health nurse to come to the center, observe Justin, and offer other possible recommendations. Justin's parents trust Betty, know she cares about their son, and willingly agree to arrange an evaluation.

Sometimes parents do not agree to a proposed course of action. They might feel frightened, insulted, or choose to deny possible problems with their child. This response does not mean the teacher did a poor job of considering, documenting, and communicating her concern. It is important to understand such information may just be too painful for a parent to acknowledge. Sometimes it will take two or more teachers down the road before a parent accepts the possibility of her child being less than perfect. Nonetheless, teachers provide a valuable service to families when willing to initiate seeking special help or support for a child. Someone needs to take that first step.

Part Three

The third and final part of the conference prepares for the future. This involves planning ahead, setting goals, and agreeing on joint objectives. This part of the conference addresses the final remaining parental expectation. It also underscores the second parental message.

A conference is a time for Mary's teacher to understand Mary through the context of her family.

- I want specific things for my child: physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially (PIES).
- I love my child and she is very special to me.

Child's Name _____

Date _____

Home Information

- What activities or people does my child talk about at home?
- Are there any changes at home: past, present, or planned? Please elaborate.
- Do you feel your child behaves similarly at both school and home? For example, at home: Is he talkative? Is he quiet or shy? Does he nap or eat at regular times? Does he prefer self-directed activities? Does he more often choose activities involving adults? Other?
- What topics, activities, or stories captivate his attention the most? (Spiders? Garbage trucks? Swimming? Dr. Seuss?)

Parents' Expectations/Perceptions

- What are my goals or expectations for my child?
Short range:
Long range:
- In what way might the school help attain these goals?
- How do I feel about my child's progress at preschool?
Physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially (PIES)
- Do I have any areas of reservation, conflict, or dissatisfaction?
- How do I feel about having my child in child care?
- Any other comments?

Action Plan

Three things we plan to do at school as a result of this conference are:

of the program. Sharing home and school experiences links the different parts of a child's life together.

At conference time, Tommy's mom told about a visit from her mother-in-law. Tommy's grandmother had run a bakery for many years. During her visit, Tommy spent many hours helping in the kitchen. It was easy for his teacher to ask Tommy to bring in one of his grandmother's recipes to share. Tommy proudly did so and led the class in making crusty bread sticks. Tommy's mother appreciates having her value — the importance of extended family members — reinforced at school. Tommy's self-esteem, emotional growth, and social development benefit from this experience.

Jennifer's mom is very anxious for Jennifer to learn to read. Her older sister had a very hard time learning to read and she frets about Jennifer having similar problems. Jennifer turns five in a few weeks. Lori, Jennifer's teacher, explains the activities offered at the school and how they prepare Jennifer for learning to read. Jennifer's mom feels relieved to hear about the value of play for five year olds. Lori shows her some of the activities Jennifer does daily and explains their developmental role. By the end of the conference, Jennifer's mom feels confident in her daughter's progress. She relaxes her vigilance over Jennifer's reading skills. Once again, trust is being strengthened. Now Jennifer's intellectual development is being addressed in a way supported by her mom, her teacher, and the program's theories.

At Malia's conference, her parents discovered Malia's fascination with whales. Although her parents knew that the class went to the aquarium for this month's field trip, they did not know about Malia's special interest. They managed to adjust their vacation plans to include a side trip to the aquarium to see Orca whales. Involvement in Malia's school experiences is very important to her parents. Malia's intellectual and emotional growth thrives. Conferences give parents a valuable tool to maintain their involvement with school programs. In real life, such details often get skipped.

Parents miss their children. Working parents long to share the little hugs, wipe away the occasional tear, and beam with pride at each new accomplishment. Parent conferences provide a way to enter into the richness of their child's school world. To each parent everywhere, her child is special. This is one mother's summation: "My child is my most precious jewel." Conferences provide a setting for both parents and teachers to display those jewels, even the rough cut ones.

Each classroom constantly changes. The interests of the children ideally play a role in determining the content





EVALUATION

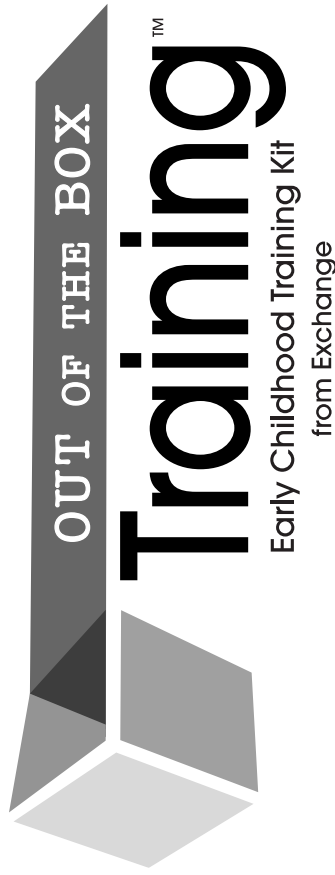
Your Opinion Matters! Please share your perceptions about this session.

Training Topic: *Family Conferencing: Asking and Listening*

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Length and format of the session	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Presenter's instructional style	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Presenter's knowledge of the topic	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Overall usefulness of the information	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Training room comfort	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

The most important thing I learned during this session was . . .

I would like to learn more about . . .



Certificate of Attendance and Participation

1.5 hours training session entitled

Family Conferencing: Asking and Listening

Awarded to _____
by Exchange

Certified by:

Certified by:

Date _____

Bonnie Neugebauer

Trainer's Signature

Kay M. Albrecht

Kay Albrecht, Ph.D.
Out of the Box Training

Bonnie Neugebauer, President
Exchange

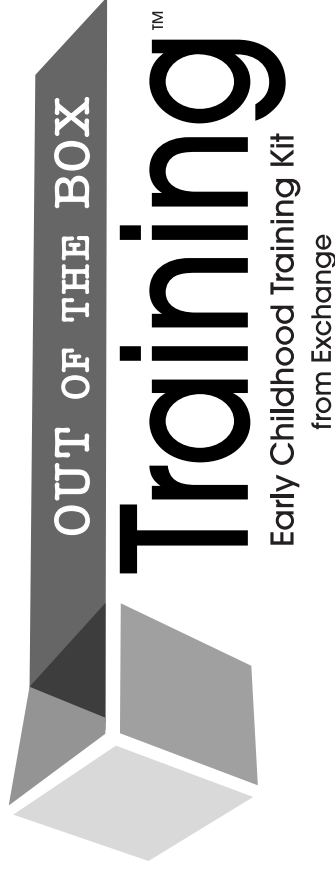
Roger Neugebauer

Roger Neugebauer, Vice President
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Certificate of Training

1.5 hours of training

Family Conferencing: Asking and Listening

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