

Unplanned Parent Conferences

1. Don't act surprised. Often you will just have a gut reaction based upon something that happened during the day or the previous day. Your past experience with this parent probably had you thinking they would want to meet with you.
2. Parents that greet you early in the morning or well after the school day are not there because they are happy about something. Be ready, and begin to mentally prepare yourself for some questioning or accusations.
3. Be prepared for the parent to begin by raising his/her voice. Please let them do it. Of course if they become so abusive your comment to them could be; "I'm sorry I am not used to being spoken to this way, you can either calm down or we will have to schedule this conference for another time."
4. Ask them to come into your room and excuse yourself for a minute. This allows you the teacher time to leave the room and let someone know what is going on. Ask a colleague to knock on your door in about 10 minutes and to inform you that they need to speak with you. If the meeting is going well you can continue with the meeting, if not you have an out.
5. Sit in clear view of the parent, not behind a desk. Your first objective here should be to sit in physical rapport. People can achieve physical rapport much more quickly than verbal rapport. Don't mimic the parent but rather mirror their body posture and position. Also pay close attention to their breathing and do your best to breath in cadence with the parent. Please be subtle and don't make anything obvious.
6. Be ready to let the parent speak; don't interrupt. Your goal here is to practice good listening skills. Don't interrupt or you will be accused of arguing or disagreeing. Give the parent the floor for about 5-7 minutes always remaining in physical rapport.
7. After 5-7 minutes of good listening change your body position, if the parent changes with you, you are gaining control of the conversation and can now speak and express your concerns. If the parent doesn't change their body position gets back in physical rapport with them. Remember the parent is relinquishing control of the conversation when they get into physical rapport with you.
8. Get to the root of the problem as fast as possible and ask the parent, Ask, "What do you want to have happen or what would you like me to do?" At this point you are seeking a solution. If the parent asks you to do something that could be viewed as unreasonable your goal at this point is to agree in principle only not in content. A comment like: "I see your concern" works well.
9. Don't argue or disagree with the possible solution remember you are almost there and your goal at this point is to begin to end the conversation and have the parent leave.

10. Plan to meet again. This gives you a chance to be more prepared and be able to overcome objections. It also provides you time to speak with an administrator, guidance counselor or another human resource that could attend the next meeting with you.