



“Parent-Teacher Conference Information Sharing Form” So What Does It All Mean?

Christine Ammirati

In Autumn 2005, Rock Spring's staff introduced Information Sharing Forms for Parent Teacher Conferences. Staff's underlying goal was to standardize and formalize our feedback to parents and to ensure that all teachers reflected thoroughly and systematically about all students across a range of developmental milestones. This new communication tool was developed by staff over a number of years and was formulated as a group process with many discussions of language choice, assessment areas, format, and general objectives. For example, we chose to forego cognitive milestones, to avoid words such as “average” and “satisfactory,” and to measure against that year's peer group and classmates rather than specific standards within each age group. In Autumn 2007, staff adjusted the form to include an “In Progress” milestone in addition to “Needs Time” and “Participates Fully.” As preschool teachers, we wished to convey our observations of where strengths and interests lie, share concerns, and focus on what specific growth objectives would optimize each child's maturation and commensurate enjoyment of the preschool experience.

Parents and teachers alike have asked for some clarification of definitions used on the forms. Sorry if we have drifted towards jargon! I have offered the following quick explanations to my staff and now pass along this somewhat unvarnished brain dump to you! Does some of this seem familiar? Many of the observation headings are identical to the milestones you pondered this summer when filling out your “PINK FORM” Child Information Sharing.

Still confused? I encourage anyone with general questions to approach me. Specific questions regarding your child or your conference form? Please speak directly with your teacher.

- GROSS MOTOR SKILLS - Walking, climbing, bending, running, throwing, jumping.
- FINE MOTOR SKILLS - Pencil grip, scissor skills, ability to handle small objects, tower building
- SENSORY PROCESSING - ... is the new term for “SENSORY INTEGRATION.” How developed are the child's 7 senses? That is, the five senses you learned in school plus the vestibular sense - balance - and the proprioceptive sense - position of limbs in relation to one another and to the surrounding space with sensations coming from the muscles and tendons. Sensory Processing is a key element in our preschool assessment as it affects attention and distractibility and may require simple classroom accommodations to best serve a student. Is the child oversensitive or undersensitive to touch? Light? Sound? Does the child crave movement? Spinning? Deep pressure? Does the child W sit? Does the child avoid certain balance, touch, or gross motor activities?
- EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE - Speech development? Slurring? Pronunciation? Muscle tone? Drooling? Sound formation? Also, PRAGMATICS and COMMUNICATION. Is the child speaking? Expressing needs? Using language to connect with adults and peers?
- RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE - Is child following directions? Answering questions? Answering to name? Positioning body and face appropriately when listening and answering? Listening for response to own

questions? Is the child actually hearing the teacher? Able to process information? Is there a delay in processing? Any hesitation? Is there reciprocity in verbal exchange? That is, is child ONLY engaging in monologues? Simply imparting information rather than sharing information and awaiting response?

- **PLAY SKILLS** - Solitary play? Parallel play? Dramatic play? Is child using objects to represent other objects, that is, is there abstraction in play? Does child attempt to enter others' play scenarios? "Taking turns" and "sharing" may be addressed here in the context of overall play skills
- **GROUP PROCESS SKILLS** - Can the child make individual needs and desires understood in a group? Can child function appropriate to age in circle time? Is child distracted in large group settings? Can child maintain space in large group time? "Taking turns" and "sharing" may also be addressed here as it pertains to large group time.
- **PEER RELATIONSHIPS** - Has child made friends? Is child interested in making friends? Approaching other children? Degree of interaction vs. observation of other kids? Is there social reciprocity or does child engage in a monologue / "talking at" another individual? Is there a range of interactions or is child interested in only one other child? How is child's quantity and quality of eye contact with peers?
- **ADULT RELATIONSHIPS** - Is the child comfortable with the teacher and the co-ops? Is the child comfortable with the challenge of sharing parent at school? Respectful? Responsive? Fearful? Shy? How is the child's quantity and quality of eye contact with adults?
- **EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT** - Natural temperament is surfaced here. Is the child expressive emotionally? Young for age? Mature? Neutral? Does the child exhibit natural peaks and valleys in emotions and expression of these emotions? Is the child comfortable with separation from parent?
- **SELF-REGULATION** - Does the child control own emotions? Temper tantrums? Separation anxiety? Reaction to pain? Can the child recover from emotional challenges?
- **SELF-HELP SKILLS** - Toileting? Dressing? Taking care of own classroom needs such as hanging bag in cubby? Hanging up coat? Feeding self? Drinking from cup?
- **INITIATIVE & MOTIVATION** - Does the child express wants and needs to adults? Does child simply sit and accept what is on offer or does child take initiative to devise own play? Is child motivated to participate in activities? To try new things? To ask adults to get out favorite play items? Is the child a passive or active participant in class?
- **FLEXIBILITY** - or is there rigidity in a child's routine or play interests? Is the child ritualistic or flexible in classroom habits, transitions, clothes, playmates etc.?
- **CAPACITY TO LEAD/FOLLOW** - Teacher observes duality of play roles. Is the child only dictating play, unable to take on anyone else's ideas? Does child always just follow playmate's direction, subverting own desires in order to make a connection even if inherent interest is not present? Does child share natural abilities and skills with others?
- **ATTENTION SPAN** - At circle time? Also, attention to play of own choosing? To play of the group's choosing? To art activities? To movement class? Does attention and focus wander? Is child fully engaged in play? In adult-focused activities?
- **EMPATHY** - Shows concern when peer is hurt or upset? "I'm sorry" band-aid or general awareness of others' emotions and a genuine caring about these feelings?
- **PARTICIPATION IN CLASSROOM ROUTINE** - Does child "get it"? Fully participates in the well-worn routines and structures of class? Does snack go into the trash can before play resumes or are reminders needed? Does the child respond to transition cues? Does the child participate in circle? In art? In line-up? In bathroom routines?

Ask The Experts:

How to Prepare for Parent/Teacher Conferences

By Cristen Pennington

Why preparing ahead of time is so important:

A conference with your child's teacher is similar to a visit to the doctor's office. You have a lot that you want to talk about, and a limited amount of time. The better prepared you are going in, the more beneficial the meeting will be for both you and the teacher. Here are some tips for a productive parent/teacher conference, along with a list of good questions for you to ask the teacher.

Steps to take before the conference:

Schedule your appointment early If you're one of the first parents to sign up for a conference, you'll be more likely to get a time that works well for you and your partner. If possible, go to the conference together. This lets the teacher know that both of you are involved in your child's education. And you can compare notes on what you heard and talk over how to deal with the information when you get home.

Ask your child how things are going at school Several days before the conference ask your child some very specific questions about school. What would he like you to ask the teacher? What does he like best about school? Are there any kids at school that he's having trouble getting along with? If he could change anything about school what would it be?

Write down your questions Once you're in a meeting with the teacher it may be hard to remember what you wanted to talk about. Jot down your questions beforehand and bring them to the conference.

How to make the most of your conference time:

Stick to talking about your child Most parent/teacher conferences last only 20 minutes. Don't use this time to ask questions about basic school policies. That kind of information can usually be found in the school's handbook, on its Web site, or by calling the office during business hours. This is your chance to get detailed feedback on your child, so grab it while you can. If you have a specific question or issue that doesn't come up, don't hesitate to ask. The teacher may be inexperienced or shy, or just not realize that you're concerned about a particular thing. You know your child better than anyone, so take the initiative.

Establish a rapport with the teacher The first parent/teacher conference is a chance to get to know the teacher. If you're both on the same page from the start, your child will get more out of his year in this teacher's classroom. If you can make a connection early in the year, it will be easier to talk to the teacher in the future about any questions or concerns. To get off on the right foot, first listen to what the teacher has to say, and then base your questions on what is said. You may also want to ask her something about herself, her teaching philosophy, etc. to get a better understanding of who she is.

Try not to get defensive It's natural to feel a bit nervous about parent/teacher conferences. Every parent wants to hear how wonderful his or her child is – and the teacher should tell you about your child's special skills and achievements. But one of the main functions of these conferences is to point out areas where your child has room to develop. The teacher may even suggest testing, special classes, or some change in your behavior. Keep in mind that this is a part of all parent-teacher conferences. Fight the urge to argue with the teacher or dismiss her comments. She is not blaming you or your child. The point of this meeting is to get an assessment of how your

child is doing in school and to look for ways you can help him. Remind yourself that the teacher is on your side and the two of you have the same goal: to help your child learn all that he can.

Take a notepad and pen After the meeting is over you may forget some of what you discussed. Jotting things down as you go along will help jog your memory later. Taking notes is also a good way to let the teacher know you're really paying attention.

Size up the social scene How well your child fits in socially can have an affect on how well he learns. Ask the teacher how he gets along with the other students. Does he always play with the same kids? Who are they? Does he always play the same games with other kids? Which ones? Is the teacher concerned about your child's ability to get along with others and participate in class?

Give the teacher relevant information Let the teacher know of any changes at home. A new baby, a divorce, or a death in the family can all affect the way your child behaves in the classroom. Resist the urge to talk about his successes outside of school, though. As much fun as it is to tell cute stories, this meeting is about assessing your child's academic progress.

Leave with an action plan Before you shake hands and say goodbye, find out the best way to follow-up with the teacher. Can you call her? Does she have an e-mail address you can use? You may think of other questions later so find out the best way to ask them. As you end the conference, review any decisions that you've made together. And if you feel it's necessary, request another meeting.

<http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/refcap/preschooler/ppreschool/65700.html>