

Parent Conferences—The Basics
By Michael Grinder & Mary Yenik

1. Take care of yourself.

- a. Never be alone in the building for parent conferences.
- b. Prepare well, *ducks in a row*, with written documentation of issues.
- c. Breathe well. Take several deep breaths before the conference. During the conference, stop and take two deep breaths any time things get heated.

(Also see number 5 below.)

2. Show that you care about them and their child. Note: It is also important that parents know you understand how much they care about their child. You *all* want what is best for the student.

- a. Welcome them with friendly eye contact, a smile, and a handshake if appropriate.
- b. Gently invite them (with a gesture, not words) to sit down.
- c. If they are upset, listen quietly to their full story without interrupting. As they talk, slowly nod your head and think about what they are saying so they GET it that you are really interested in what they are saying.

3. Share the facts, and do so in written form with everybody looking at the paper.

- a. Sit at 90°, with you being at the short end of a rectangle table or side by side at a round table. Place the paper(s) in front to them so they can see the information better. Have duplicate copies, if needed.
- b. While looking at the paper, and using very few words, explain the volatile information in a calm and business-like tone of voice.
- c. Give them time to think about it, while you SILENTLY keep looking at the paper. If the information is new or unsettling, they may need calm time to process.
- d. Answer their questions without blaming. Do **not** say, “Your child did this.” Instead, say something more neutral and impersonal such as, “*This* is what happened on *this date*.” Continue to speak in a calm, business-like voice.

4. Person-to-person, in a “we’re-in-this-together” style, consider solutions.

- a. An emotional parent, who has calmed down, is ready to be cooperative. Set the paper(s) with the volatile information off to the side. Shift your posture so you are looking at them, and in a friendly voice talk about *best ways* to help the child.
- b. Discuss the possible solutions, write down what is agreed to and when to check back. Use a different piece of paper and a different location on the table from the volatile paper(s). Keep the solution paper(s) separate from the problem issues(s) paper(s).
- c. Thank them sincerely for coming to the conference and walk them to the door.

5. If this is not enough, you may be dealing with “a big cat.”

- a. For instance, if they are yelling at you, quietly and slowly nod your head while you keep looking at the paper. If their language becomes abusive, calmly and firmly stop the conference by standing up and slowly walking to the door. Do this while looking down. Say something like, “We need to have someone else present.”
- b. If issues can’t be resolved, reschedule the conference and arrange for the principal or other resources to be there at the next meeting.
- c. To prepare for this, see *Avoiding a Cat Fight* ([www. michaelgrinder.com](http://www.michaelgrinder.com)).