

# Parent/teacher conference

I'd been to dozens of parent/teacher conferences over the past eight years, but this one was different. This time I was the parent.

Patrick and I nervously sat down in tiny primary colored chairs at a table right out of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. We were bombarded from all sides with colorful posters advertising vowel sounds (long and short), Spanish words for everyday things (prima/o means cousin), and class rules (never let your voice get to Rock Star level!). The lights were dimmed, except for the bright one from the reptile or amphibian tank (I was too intimidated to look).

Across from us sat Collin's teacher, Ms. Andrews, whose mannerisms resemble the "Julie" of the same last name. She had a stack of papers all bearing Collin's name with a little smiley face after it.

"So do you have any concerns?" she asked.

He'd had a bad day at school the day before, blowing raspberries when addressed and answering "No!" when directed or questioned. Ms. Andrews had already spoken with me about it, chalking it up to "we all have our days." Still, I was concerned.

"His attitude!" I exclaimed. "He's bossy and he says the meanest things to us, like 'I don't like your life,' or 'I'm never going to see you again.'"

"Really?" she responded, shocked. "That's not like him. It was really only yesterday that his behavior was off."

"We just don't want him being mean to his friends," Patrick interjected.

"Collin? He gets along with everyone. Especially the girls. One of them was even drawing pictures for him."

We smiled.

"When we've seen him around other kids, he just seems so bossy."

“Not at all,” she said.

Then, Ms. Andrews began to share his school work with us. Graphs, letter-writing practice, self-portraits, and even a family portrait from September which showed a little tiny Leo in my belly.



“He’s right on track,” Ms. Andrews said, handing us a checklist for Kindergarten readiness.

Only one question remained: what could we do about sight words, the only category in which he performed poorly on his report card.

“Don’t stress too much about sight words. They will work on them in kindergarten. But, if you want to keep exposing Collin to them, there are games you can play, like spelling them out with food – there are cheese crackers with letters on them. Or you can write letters on water bottle tops, put them in a tub of water so they can float, and have him “catch” them and spell words with the letters.”

She handed us an entire packet of sight word games, and asked if we had any more questions. We didn’t, but we chatted for a little while, exchanging funny Collin stories.

I left feeling much lighter. Though I’d already learned it during my years on the other side of the conference table, I discovered that Collin behaves much better at school than he does at home. I also got a peek at the life he has outside of our family by hearing a narrative of his days between 9 and 1 while spending some time in his home away from home.

Above all, I considered this conference to be a “check-up” for me as a parent. I was relieved to be assured I wasn’t a failure, but still found some ways I can improve. I hope to continue to keep in close communication with Ms. Andrews and Collin’s future teachers so that we can act as partners in shaping Collin into a kind and

intelligent young man.