# Effective Communication To Avoid Conflict in Special Education

Presented by: **Kristin Patterson-Maas and Joy E. Durham**

Purpose of Today's Session

- Define communication.
- List the three components of communication.
- Examine the skills and abilities needed for sending and receiving messages effectively throughout the IEP process.
- Define effective communication and how it relates to preventing conflict.
- Identify factors that contribute to conflict.
- List specific warning signs related to the special education process.
- List principles of successful conflict prevention and resolution.
- Examine styles of conflict resolution and identify the style needed to address specific scenarios about conflict in the special education process.
- Provide strategies on how to prevent conflict with parents during the IEP process.

Let's Watch…
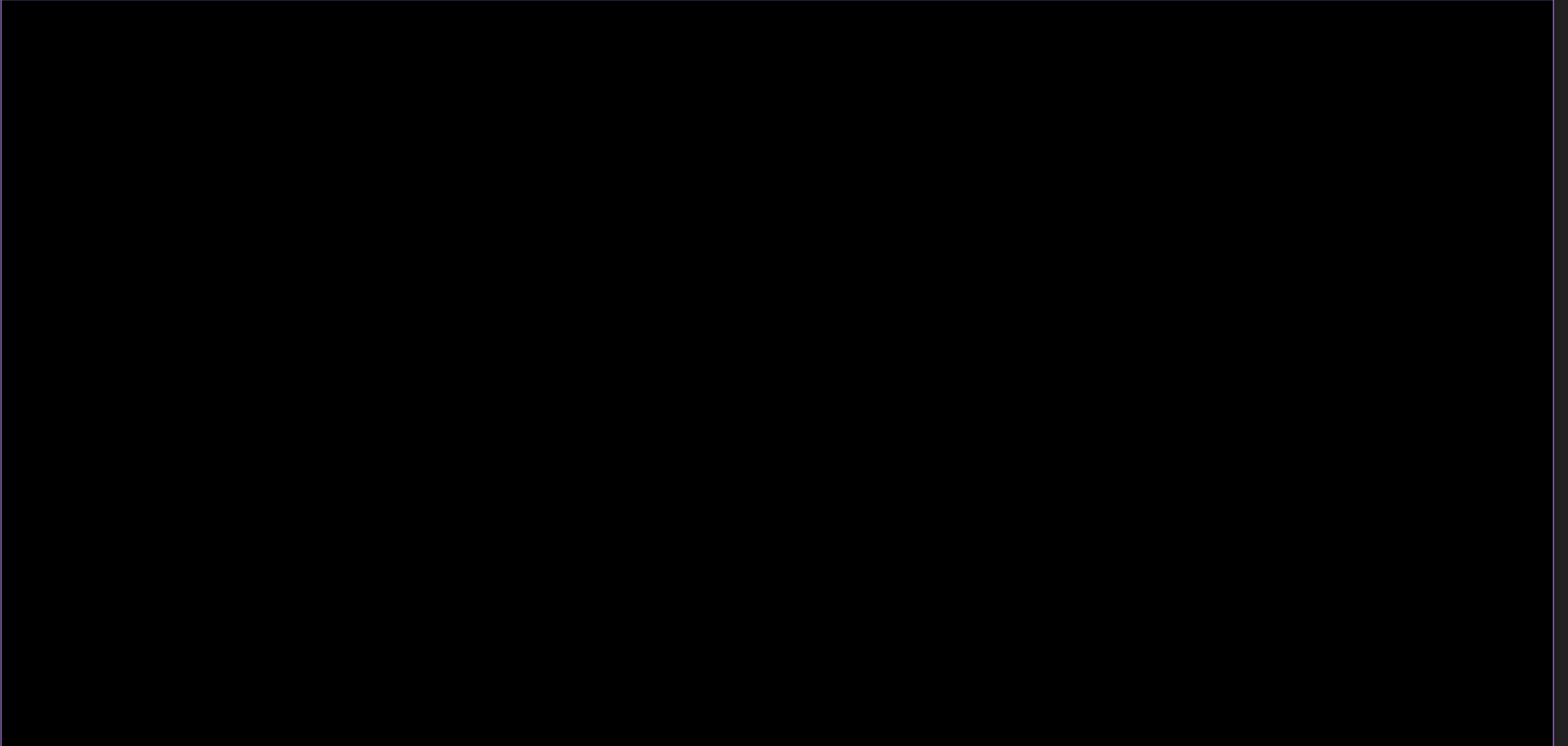
What is Communication?

Communication is a process which involves sharing of information between people through a continuous activity of speaking, listening and understanding. It involves giving, receiving or exchanging information, opinions or ideas so that material communicated is completely understood by everyone concerned.
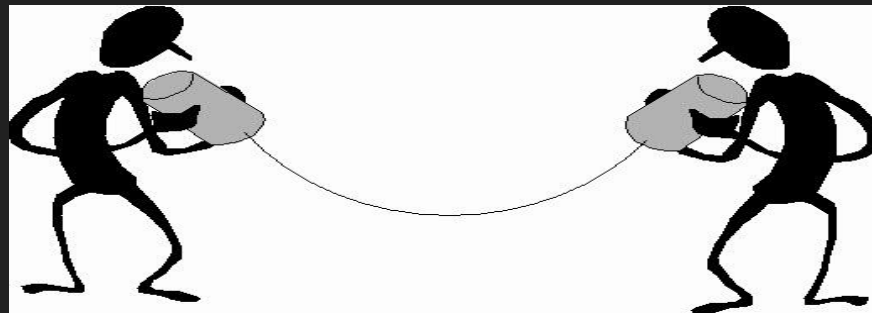
Three Components of Communication

- Sending messages
- Receiving messages
- Feedback

First Component of Communication (Sending Messages)

Verbal messages (The words we choose)

- Brief, succinct and organized
- Free from jargon
- Do not create resistance in the listener

Nonverbal messages (Our body language)

- Posture, gestures, facial expressions and spatial distance
- Accounts for 55% of what is perceived and understood by others
- Primary way to communicate emotions

## Paraverbal messages (How we say words)

- Tone, pacing and volume of voice
- Accounts for 38% of what is perceived and understood by others

Example- Verbal Message

Ms. Davis,

When you submitted a referral to the **CST**, based on Johnny's **ADHD**, an identification meeting was held. You informed us that Johnny had an **IFSP** and early intervention services when he was 3 and experienced a **TBI** when he was 5. The **CST** team did not suspect a disability under **Part B of the IDEA** and referred Johnny to **I&RS**. The **I&RS** team met and considered ordering a **FBA** to create a **BIP** but instead created a **504** plan to provide Johnny with accommodations. Accommodations were provided but Johnny is not progressing and is unable to access the general education curriculum and today is his **IEP** meeting. The **LDTC** will explain the **WISC-V** and **FBA** that were administered and we will determine if Johnny qualifies under the disability category, **OHI**, based on his **ADHD**. We will also consider creating a **BIP**. If he qualifies, we will provide a **FAPE** and ensure he is educated in his **LRE**. **PWN** will be provided to you before services are provided.

Example-Nonverbal Messages

THE CLOSE TALKER
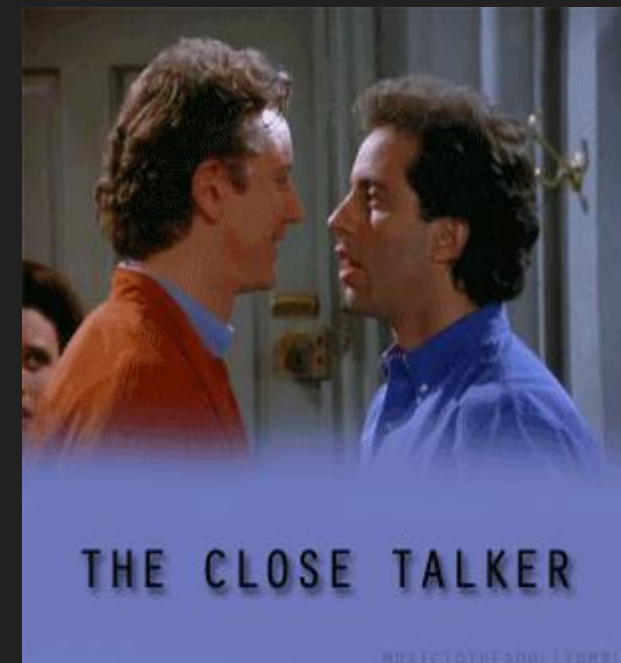
Example- Paraverbal Messages

- ✓ "I didn't **SAY** you were wrong."

- ✓ "I didn't say **YOU** were wrong."

- ✓ "I didn't say you were **WRONG**."

- ✓ "**I** didn't say you were wrong."

Second Component of Communication (Receiving Messages)

❖ The listener is the individual who is receiving the message.

❖ The listener's comprehension of the message is impacted by many factors, including:

1. How much the individuals in the conversation know about the topic being discussed;

2. How receptive the listener is to the message;

3. The relationship and trust that exits between the individuals having the conversation;

4. Past experiences, attitude, knowledge, skills, perceptions and culture.

Active Listening (Receiving Messages)

Listening is a combination of hearing what another person says and psychological involvement with the person who is talking.

1. Requires attention, interpretation and understanding of another person's perceptions, emotions and attitudes;

2. Requires that we set aside our own thoughts and suspend judgment; and

3. Involves a conscious, active process of eliciting information, ideas, attitudes and emotions.

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood"

Strategies for Active Listening

❑ Give full attention to the speaker.

❑ Face and make eye contact with the speaker.

❑ Lean gently towards the speaker.

❑ Maintain open posture with arms and legs uncrossed.

❑ Move your body in response to the speaker (i.e.- head nodding and facial expressions)

❑ Use reflective listing tools such as paraphrasing, reflecting, summarizing and questioning to increase understanding of the message.

Third Component of Communication (Feedback)

Feedback is

- the part of the receiver's response communicated back to the sender.

- the amount of response of the receiver that reaches the sender.

Questions to consider:

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your messages to parents at the IEP table?

How do you know if they have received the message you intended to send?

What is EFFECTIVE Communication?

It is two way.

It involves active listening.

It reflects the accountability of speaker and listener.

It utilizes feedback.

It is clear and free of stress.

Barriers to Effective Communication

- Miscommunication
- Over Communication
- Conflicting information
- Expectations
- Past baggage or experiences
- Language differences
- Prejudice
- Different interests and attitudes
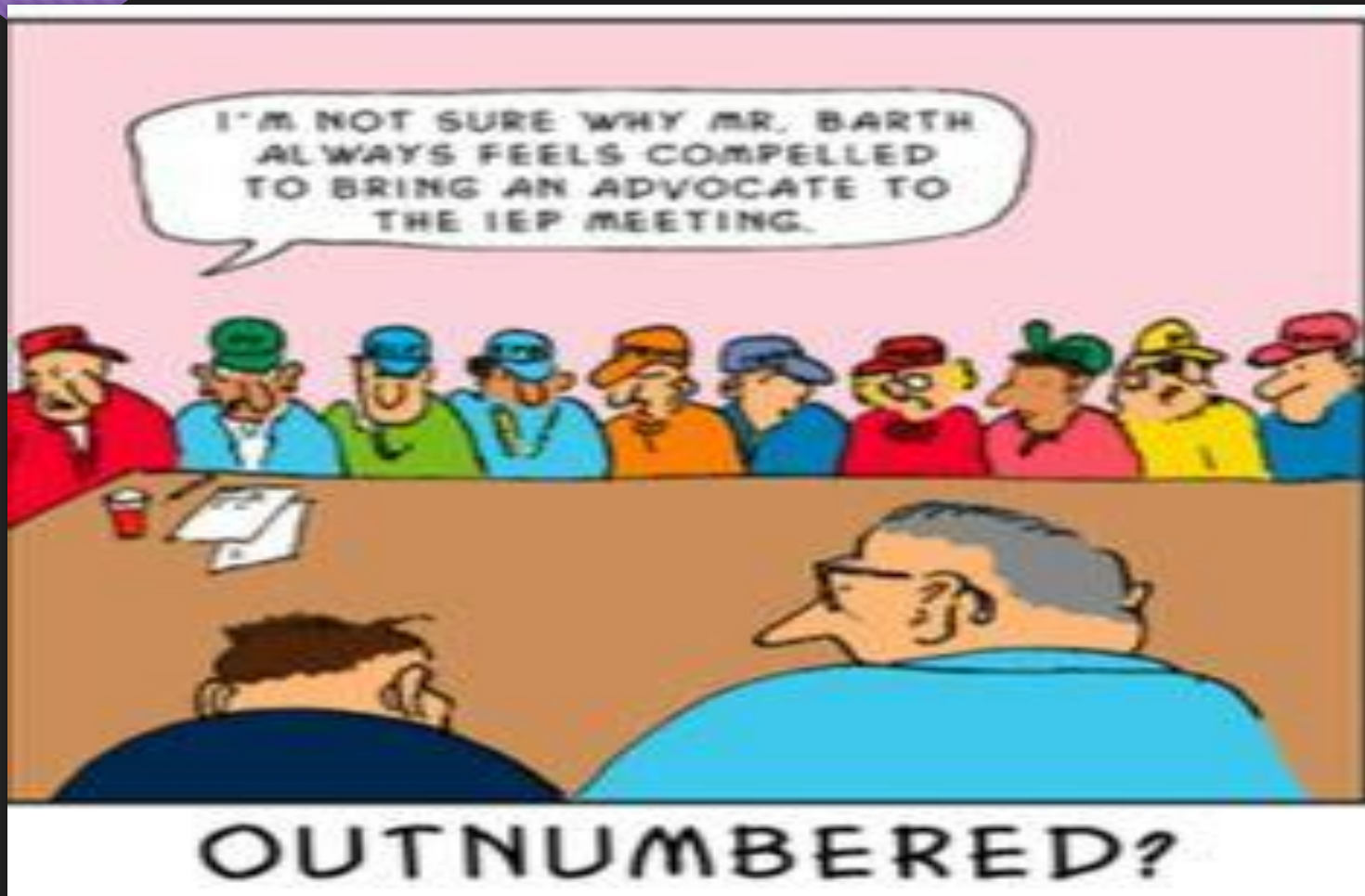- Different status, position and self-expression
- Pre-judgment

The single biggest problem
in communication
is the illusion
that it has taken place.

George Bernard Shaw

Activity

Role Play Activity!

Put Yourself in the Parents' Shoes

Consider the Parent's Perspective

○ For some parents, acknowledgment of their child's special learning needs can be traumatic.

○ Parents may need time to process all of the information the IEP team is discussing about their child.

○ Parents may have gone through the special education process themselves or had another child go through the process, which can impact how actively they are listening to what is being shared at the IEP table.

Research on Parents and the IEP Meeting

In a study on the perception of parents of students who receive special education services (Fish, 2008), parents provided the following suggestions on how to improve IEP meetings:

1. Allowing sufficient time for the meetings;
2. Creating a welcoming atmosphere;
3. Encouraging parents to bring an advocate familiar with the IEP process;
4. Using common terms instead of jargon to lessen confusion;
5. Refraining from completing IEP forms in advance of parental input;
6. Involving parents in the writing of goals and objectives; and
7. Providing parents with a copy of the IEP objectives a few weeks before the meeting to allow time for review and preparation of questions.

Let's Watch…
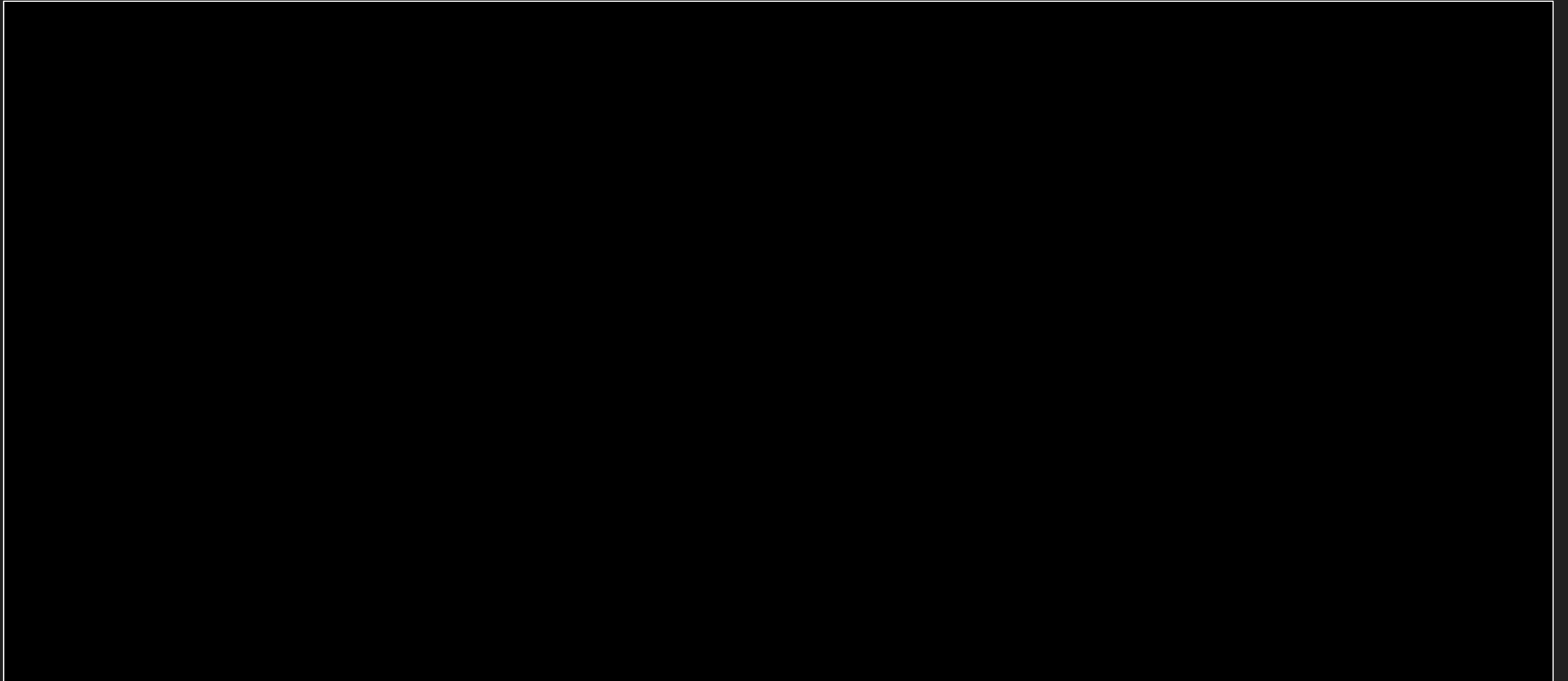
Conflict

- Expressed struggle
- Two or more people
- Interdependent
- Strong emotion
- Perceived blockage

"Real or perceived differences that arise from specific educational circumstances that engender negative emotions as a consequence." (Deutsh, 1873)

Think About This…

"Conflict flows from life. Rather than seeing conflict as a threat, we can understand it as providing opportunities to grow and to increase our understanding of ourselves, of others, of our social structures. Conflicts in relationships at all levels are the way life helps us to stop, assess and take notice. One way to truly know our humanness is to recognize the gift of conflict in our lives."

John Paul Lederach

The Match Game

What factors are you aware of that contribute to conflict?

Factors that Contribute to Conflict in Special Education

- Insufficient, wrong or misunderstood information
- Miscommunication
- Differing values
- Concerns about resource allocation
- Historical factors
- Structural factors
- Personal/emotional factors
- Interpersonal factors
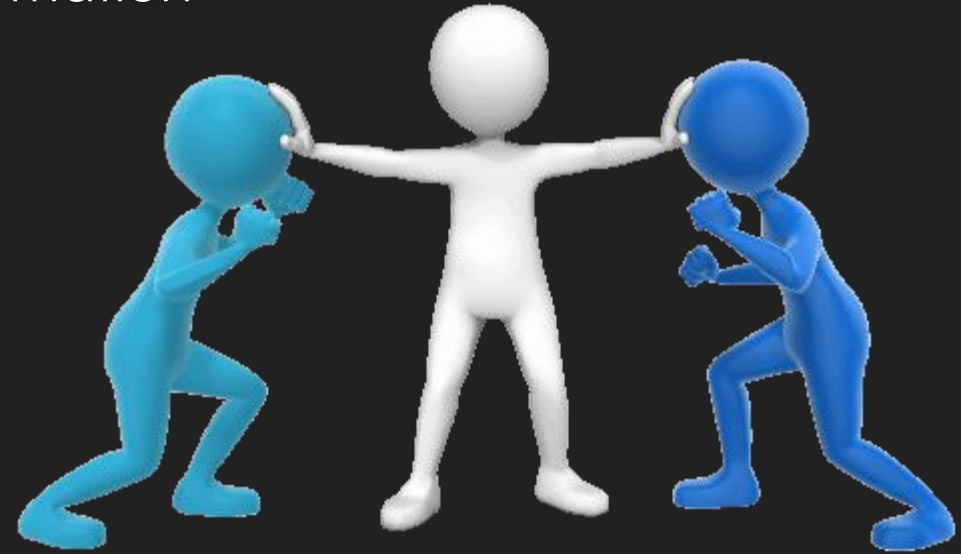
Common Practices that Lead to Conflict

- Not providing services as described in IEP;
- Not reviewing and revising IEP goals based on progress;
- Not complying with evaluation timelines;
- Not responding to requests for an IEP meeting;
- Not complying with legal requirements;
- Not providing Prior Written Notice to parents before services are provided.

Recognizing Warning Signs

- History of conflict;

- Tension-filled phone call, email or in person communication;

- Avoidance of phone, email or in person communication;

- Questioning of the expertise and/or integrity of IEP team member(s);

- A verbal attack by a parent against an educator or IEP team member;

- Repeated questions about how a program is being implemented;

- Poor follow through on agreements.

We ALL have a piece of the puzzle…

Principles of Successful Conflict Prevention and Resolution

○ Focus on the student

○ Mutual respect

○ Accessibility

○ Respect for diversity

Focus on the student

- The student's academic, social/emotional, and behavioral goals and progress should be the focal point of every meeting.

- As adults, sometimes we need to get out of our own way in order to move the IEP team forward.

Mutual Respect

- **The Golden Rule- Treat others as you would like to be treated.**

- **Even if a parent or staff member is not showing you respect, do your best to model the behavior you want to see in others.**

Accessibility

- **Establish transparent and user-friendly protocols and procedures for parents to obtain information.**

- Provide translation services and interpreters when needed in order for parents to actively participate in the special education process.

Respect for Diversity

- **Refrain from making judgments about others based on their race, social/economic background, religion or gender.**

- **Challenge your own preconceived notions about others and appreciate the opportunity that diversity brings.**

Styles of Conflict Resolution

- ✓ Accommodating
- ✓ Avoiding
- ✓ Collaborating
- ✓ Competing
- ✓ Compromising

What is My Conflict Resolution Style?

1) Take a few minutes to answer the Conflict Resolution Styles Assessment questions.

2) Once complete, score the assessment and circle your Conflict Resolution Style.

Conflict Resolution Style- ACCOMMODATING

- Set aside your own personal needs in order to please others to keep the peace;

- Emphasis is on preserving the relationship;

- Smoothing things over can result in a false solution to a problem;

- Allow the needs of the group to overwhelm their own (which may not ever be stated);

- "I lose, you win."

Accommodating- When to Use

Accommodating is the right strategy when:

1) An issue is not as important to you as it is to the other person;

2) You realize you are wrong;

3) The time is not right to resolve the issue and you would prefer to simply build credit for the future; and

4) Harmony in the relationship is extremely important.

Conflict Resolution Style- AVOIDING

- Deliberately ignoring or withdrawing from conflict;
- Needs and concerns go unexpressed;
- Can lead to confusion and "simmering" of problems;
- "I lose, you lose".

Avoiding- When to Use

Avoiding is the right strategy when:

1) The conflict is small and relationships are at stake;

2) You are upset and need time to cool off;

3) There are more important issues to deal with;

4) You have no power and you see no chance of getting your concerns met;

5) You are too emotionally involved and others around you can solve the conflict more successfully.

Conflict Resolution Style- COLLABORATING

- Views conflicts as problems to be solved and strives to satisfy all parties' concerns;

- Requires assertive communication and cooperation;

- Offers a chance for consensus and integration of needs;

- "I win, you win"

Collaborating- When to Use

Collaborating is the right strategy when:

1) The parties trust each other;

2) It is important for all sides to buy into the outcome;

3) The people involved are willing to change their thinking as more information is found and new options are suggested; and

4) The parties need to work through animosity and hard feelings.

Conflict Resolution Style- COMPETING

- Relies on an aggressive style of communication;
- Low regard for future relationships;
- Tends to seek control over discussions;
- Fear that loss of control will result in solutions that fail to meet their needs;
- One's own needs are advocated over the needs of others.
- "I win, you lose"

Competing- When to Use

Competing is the right strategy when:

1) You know you are right;
2) Time is short and a quick decision is needed; and
3) You need to stand up for your rights.

Conflict Resolution Style- COMPROMISING

- Demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice some of your goals while persuading others to give up a part of theirs;

- Maintains the relationship and can take less time than collaboration;

- Seeks a middle ground position;

- "Give a little, get a little."

- "I win some, you win some."

Compromising- When to Use

Compromising is the right strategy when:

1) People of relatively equal power are equally committed to goals;

2) You can save time by reaching intermediate resolution of parts of complex issues;

3) The goals are moderately important.

How Do you Respond to Conflict During IEP Meetings?

1. Read scenario
2. Note how you would respond
3. Ask yourself: "Is that approach/style the best one to use right now in order to reach a successful outcome to the problem?"

Let's Discuss Strategies…

➢ Briefly meet with other CST members before meetings to make sure you are on the same page.

➢ Be prepared for meetings and ensure that you can give specific examples about how the student's IEP is being implemented and how student is progressing academically and on IEP goals.

➢ Ensure that proper meeting notice has been sent to the parent and confirm parent's attendance.

➢ If there is a conflict with another CST member, discuss it before or after the IEP meeting (it is so important not to show discord between CST members in front of a parent).

➢ Remember- the relationships at the IEP table are not oppositional. We are the SAME TEAM with the SAME GOALS.