

# Working with Challenging Parents, Advocates and Attorneys

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Conflict is an inevitable part of the  
work





# The 5 Proactive P's of Managing Conflict in Special Education

1. PARENTS
2. PARTNERSHIPS
3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
4. PREPARATION
5. PROCESS

# PARENTS





# Parents: Intentionally Build Relationships with Parents

- ▶ Parental Engagement is legally required/well researched
- ▶ Being proactive buys good will
- ▶ Parental affect has a strong influence on conflict management
- ▶ Parental perception has a strong influence on conflict process
- ▶ WHAT are some actions you can take in your building/department/district to engage parents positively ?

# PARTNERSHIPS





# Partnerships: Intentionally build relationships with Community

- ▶ Structure opportunities to create relationships with influential community members and organizations
- ▶ Examples: FACT, County Mental Health, Developmental Disability Services, Oregon Department of Education, your ESD, your legal council, local legislators, other Directors, local businesses
- ▶ The more you understand about each of these organizations, the better you will be able to solve problems and understand why decisions are made and what potential problems may arise



# Partnerships: Be sure to build relationships within your district

- ▶ Don't silo yourself!
- ▶ Know who your colleagues are and know what they do!
- ▶ Ask how you can support
- ▶ Explain how your department can support their goals
- ▶ Get to know your building Principals
- ▶ Get out of the "ivory tower" and into classrooms



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



# Professional Development: Principals, Staff and your Bosses

- ▶ Teach the powers that be what you do!
- ▶ Offer support! Explain why they should care about special education.
- ▶ Know who your allies are/learn who is an influencer and where
- ▶ Teach. Discipline, IEP process, etc. What can you do to reduce the traditional silos between general and special education?
- ▶ Engage in district equity work: How is SPED work part of the district's overall focus on equity?



# Prepare



"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

*-Benjamin Franklin*

# BEFORE A DIFFICULT MEETING.....

- ▶ Communication, communication, communication
- ▶ Know who you are working with
- ▶ Ask: Do I need a conversation or IEP meeting?
- ▶ Are you the right person to lead the meeting or conversation?
- ▶ Do your homework
- ▶ Keep the Principal/Case Manager/boss in the loop
- ▶ Understand cultural/linguistic needs in your meeting
- ▶ Know your district/board recording policy



# BEFORE A CHALLENGING IEP MEETING ALSO .....

- ▶ Investigate talking with a student's legal representation in advance
- ▶ Hold a staffing prior to the IEP
- ▶ Build and communicate an agenda in advance
- ▶ Decide how the team will communicate and with whom
- ▶ Most of the time, it's better to opt for mediation instead of due process if there is a choice

# During Your Meeting: Poise, Process and Post meeting plan





# Stay Poised

- ▶ Greet the parties you are working with warmly. Set up a welcoming environment
- ▶ Run a positive meeting – tell parents you appreciate their advocacy, even if you disagree with them
- ▶ Seek first to understand: Listen, Listen and then listen more
- ▶ Focus on problem solving, not personalities

# Stay Poised (continued)...

- ▶ Ask questions!
- ▶ Be practical and authentic with parents
- ▶ Avoid defensive behavior and emotionally regulate
- ▶ Summarize content at the end of the meeting for all



# Process: Stay in the IEP process

- ▶ For especially difficult meetings, have someone manage the facilitation and someone manage the IEP
- ▶ Cover all required elements of an IEP meeting
- ▶ Review rules of conduct at start
- ▶ If the dispute is over placement, remember the IEP drives the placement- avoid “putting the cart before the horse”

# More Process.....

- ▶ Have data ready that is easy to read and explain. The team with the best data usually wins legal cases!
- ▶ Keep the meeting as close to an hour as possible
- ▶ Take good notes
- ▶ Have a plan if things go south



# After an IEP Meeting is Done.....

- ▶ Wait until other meeting participants have left the building
- ▶ Debrief with your team
- ▶ Check in with staff and assess their perceptions/feelings
- ▶ Review team member follow up responsibilities
- ▶ Hold team members accountable

# 16 More Pieces of Unsolicited Advice!





# 16 Concepts to think about ....

## #1-#5

1. Keep kids at the center
2. Build a working relationship with your attorney and opposing attorneys/advocates
3. Use your attorney to guide and provide legal feedback, but not as the ultimate decision maker
4. Remember conflict is not all about you
5. Practice reflective thinking

# Concepts #6- #10

- 6. Leave your cape at home!
- 7. Use staff (and your own) mistakes as a teaching platform, not a blaming or evaluation platform
- 8. Buffer your staff
- 9. Know your skill set
- 10. Know your resources for support

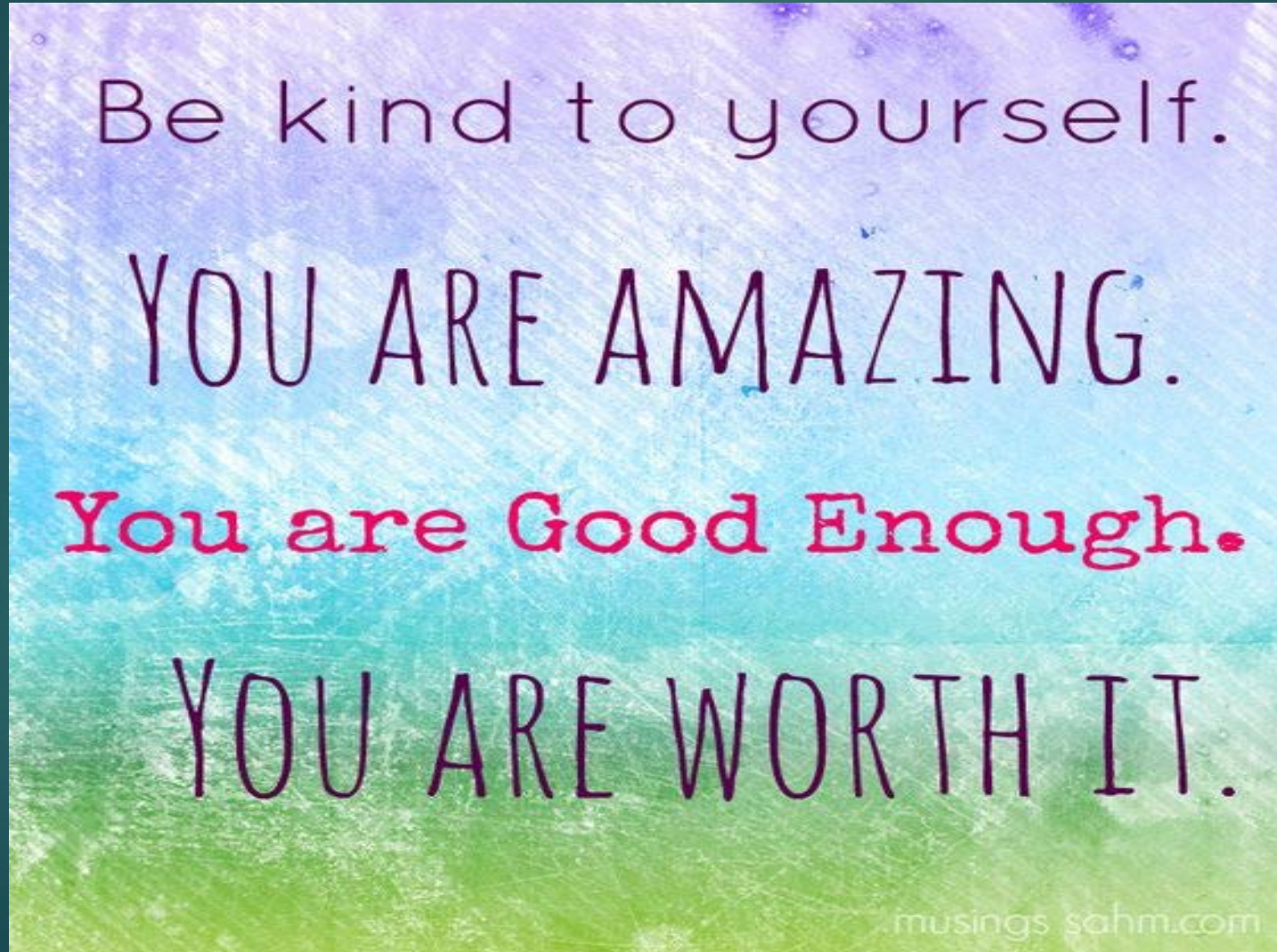


# Concepts #11- #15

- 11. Avoid making big decisions in isolation
- 12. Trust your gut
- 13. It's OK not to know the answers!
- 14. Act swiftly but thoughtfully
- 15. Know and honor your district/community values



# #16: GIVE YOURSELF GRACE





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