

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/departments/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
- ▶ Clarify staff roles and information shared in meeting
- ▶ Establish norms/timelines when needed
- ▶ Be ready for parents to record- what's your board policy – print out and be ready to share

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. Listening is your best tool.
- ▶ Focus on problem solving, not personalities.
- ▶ Start with the positives! There are always some on which you can focus.

Stay Poised (continued)...

- ▶ Ask questions! Parents don't come to an IEP to be lectured. They come to have a conversation. We should come to learn.
- ▶ Be practical and authentic with parents
- ▶ Avoid defensive behavior and emotionally regulate, even when others do not.
- ▶ 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 – especially be mindful of procedural safeguards being shared and verified in notes.
- ▶ Have a plan if things go south – break room?
Reschedule?

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 – write them down
- ▶ Hold team members accountable : Document who's doing what and by when

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

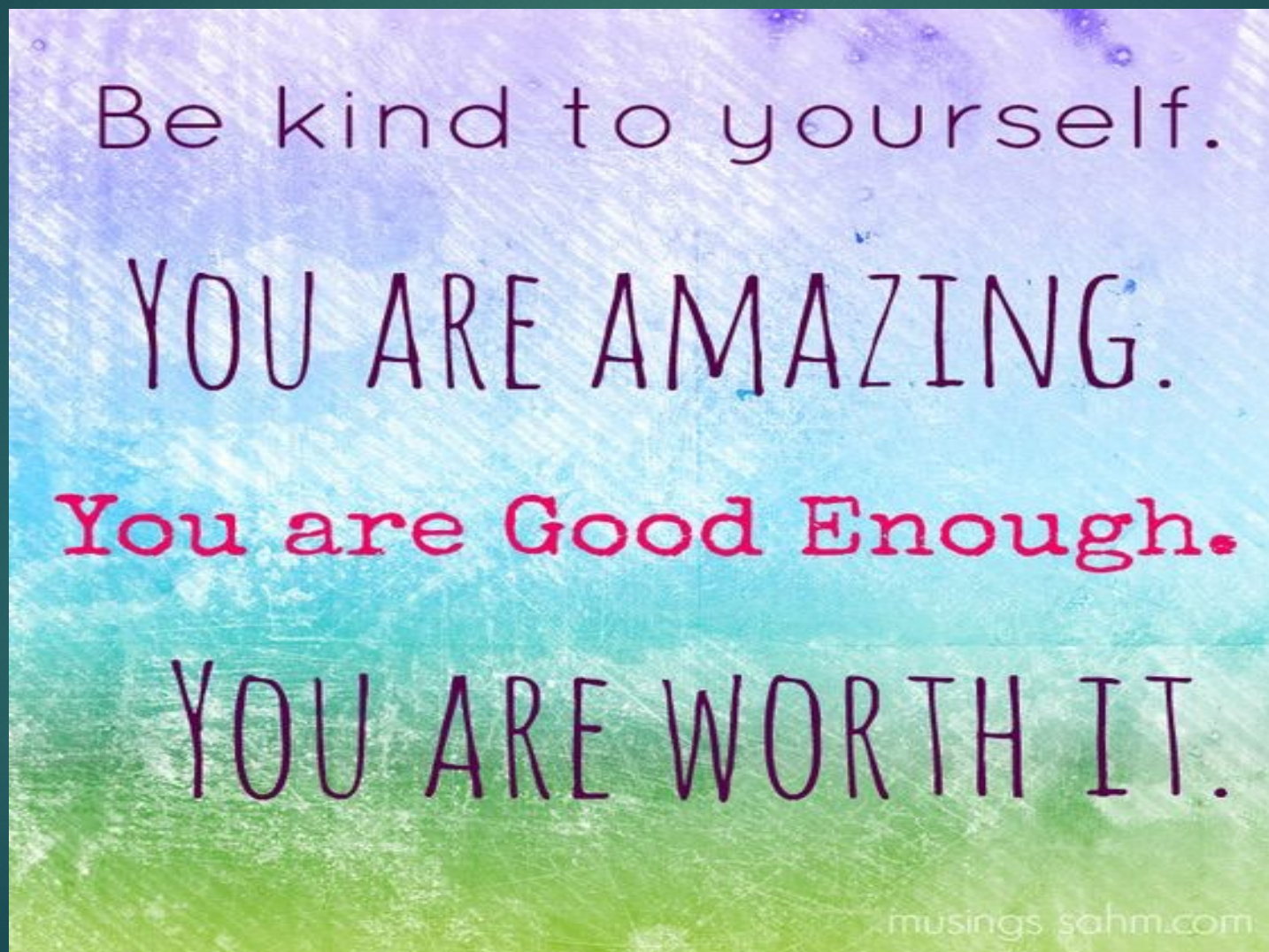
Concepts #6- #10

- 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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