

# Leading with Purpose & Compassion

**Supporting Teams through  
Challenges of Dispute  
Resolution**



# About Your Presenters



Ramona Lee, B.ED., M.Ed. | Director of Special Education

Ramona is the current Special Education Director for the West Ada School District, and she serves as the Professional Development chair for CASE. Through her dual roles, she makes a meaningful impact at both the local and national levels.



Kindel Mason, Ed.S. | Special Education Advisor/Administrator

Kindel has worked in the field of Special Education since 1991 as a special education teacher, consultant, with the Idaho Department of Ed., and as a special education director. He also served as the President of CASE from 2022 to 2024

# Learner Objectives

**1**

Identify key emotional and procedural challenges that arise during special education dispute resolution and their impact on staff dynamics.

**2**

Apply strategies that promote calm, confident, and compassionate leadership when navigating conflict situations.

**3**

Create an action plan to strengthen a positive team culture that prioritizes student-centered solutions and collective growth.

# Setting the Tone

Leadership Beyond Compliance

Address Our Own Emotions & Emotions of Others

Emotionally Hard Work

Reframing Disputes

What is the first word that comes to mind when you learn you are headed to dispute resolution?





# Impact of Conflict on Educators

- Research has documented that school personnel regard the special education litigation as expensive, time-consuming, and a threat to their professionalism (Gilsbach, 2015; Decker, 2014; Mueller & Pantoni, 2013; Mueller et al., 2008).
- Educators are significantly affected by the stress of due process hearings. Legal proceedings contribute to burnout and reduced effectiveness in the classroom (Zagata et al., 2024).



# Staff Responses

1 Anxiety

2 Defensiveness

3 Failure

4 Fear

5 Burnout



# "I Didn't Sign Up for This!" Considering The Impact of Due Process On Teachers

CADRE (Zagata, Reese, Sinclair, 2024)

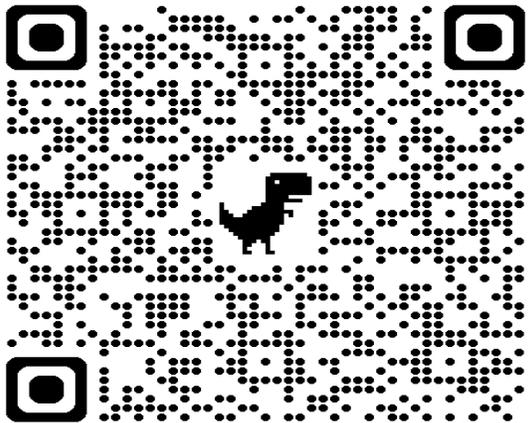
“Preparing for this process and testifying were extremely stressful. Not knowing what might be asked while testifying increased my stress level tremendously.”

“The preparation for the (case) did not allow me to complete my regular duties and I had to work weekends to catch up on my paperwork and special education responsibilities.”

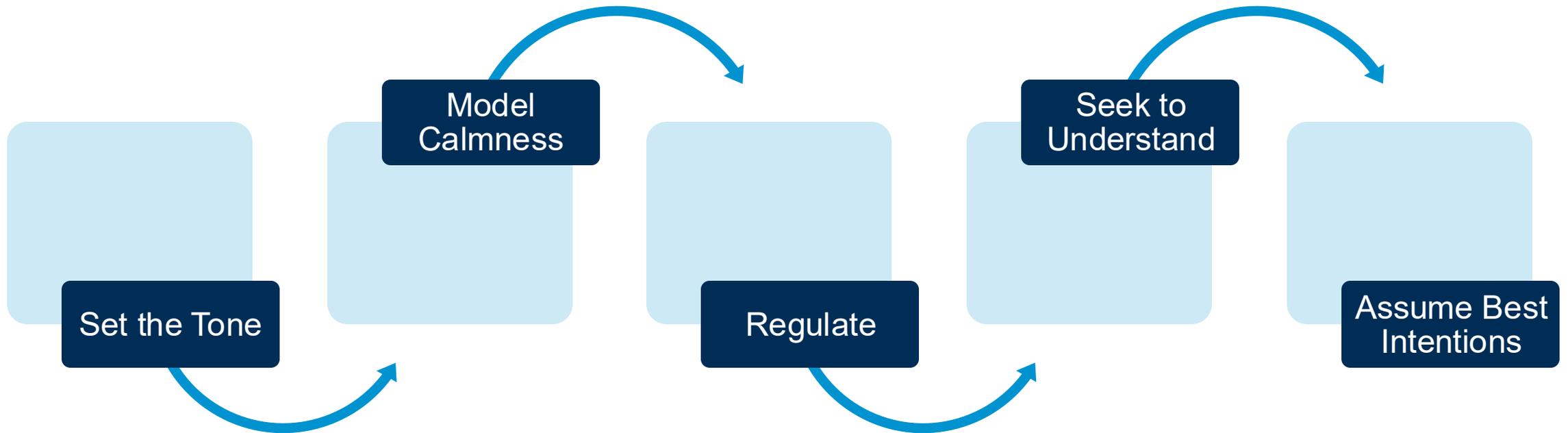
I was unable to focus on my new students and prepare adequately what I wanted to because I was reviewing hundreds of emails and other documents instead.”

I wasn't able to sleep, and my anxiety still hasn't recovered.”

“I almost left the field of special education due to this experience. I had to leave the district and start new somewhere else.”



# Leading with Calm, Confidence, Compassion



# Underlying Principles of Conflict

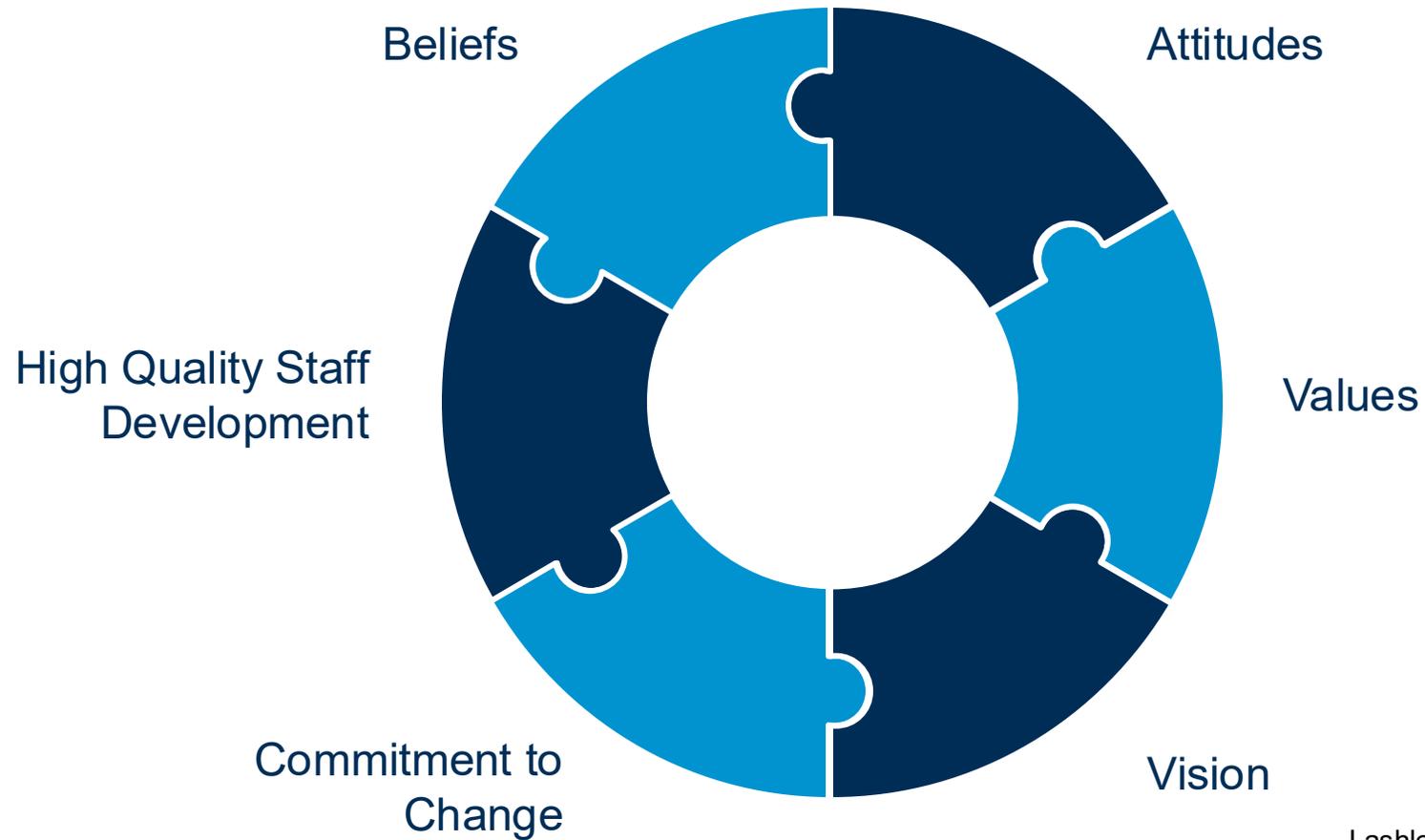


(Overton et al., 2013)

# Common Sources of Disputes

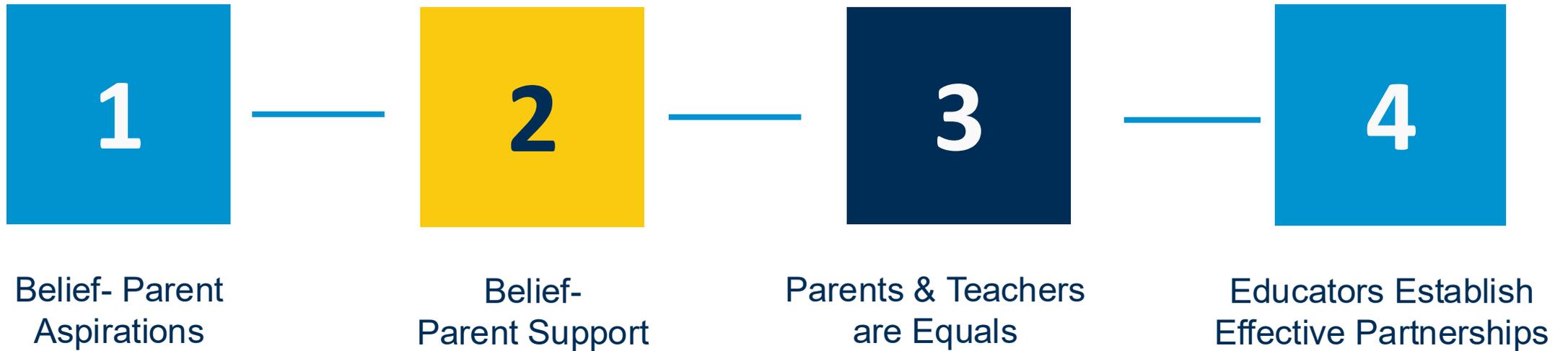
- Assuming families are knowledgeable about special education
- Procedural barriers
- Communication difficulties
- Lack of trust
- Power imbalance
- Different views of student's abilities and progress

# Effective Leaders



Council for Exceptional Children, 2022;  
Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lararowitz, 2010;  
Lashley, 2007; Thurlow, Quenemoen, and Lazarus,  
2019.

# Core Beliefs for Meaningful Partnerships



Henderson, Mapp, Johnson,  
Davies, 2007

# Anticipate Conflict and Plan for it



# Dismantle Fear

**Work to shift conflict culture to a positive one**

(Blanco, M. 2024)



# Positions vs. Interests

## Position:

The specific demand or stance someone takes



## Interests:

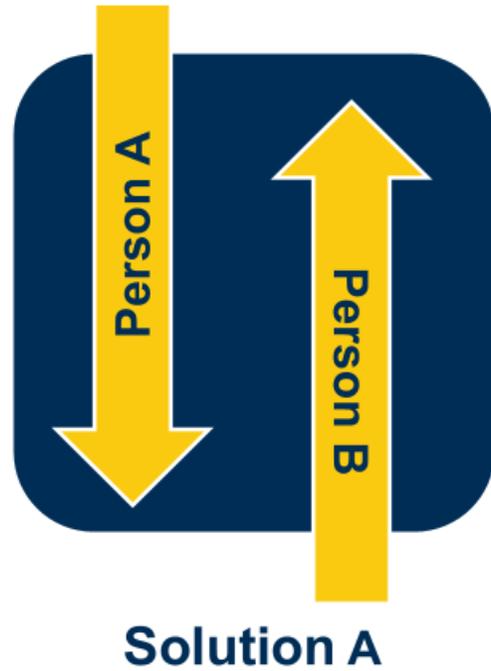
The underlying need or concern that motivates the demand

# Bringing Interests to the Surface

- What need is the position attempting to satisfy?
- What is motivating the position?
- What needs to be heard and understood?
- What is the fear if the demand is not fulfilled?



# Reframing Changes the Energy



# Listening As an Ally

- Encouraging & Clarifying
- Restating & Reflecting
- Summarizing & Validating



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# Be Proactive

- Build trust
- Set clear expectations
- Make data-based decisions
- Address concerns quickly
- Prepare teams
- Repair relationships quickly
- Stay student focused
- Document, document, and document some more
- Build a culture of problem-solving

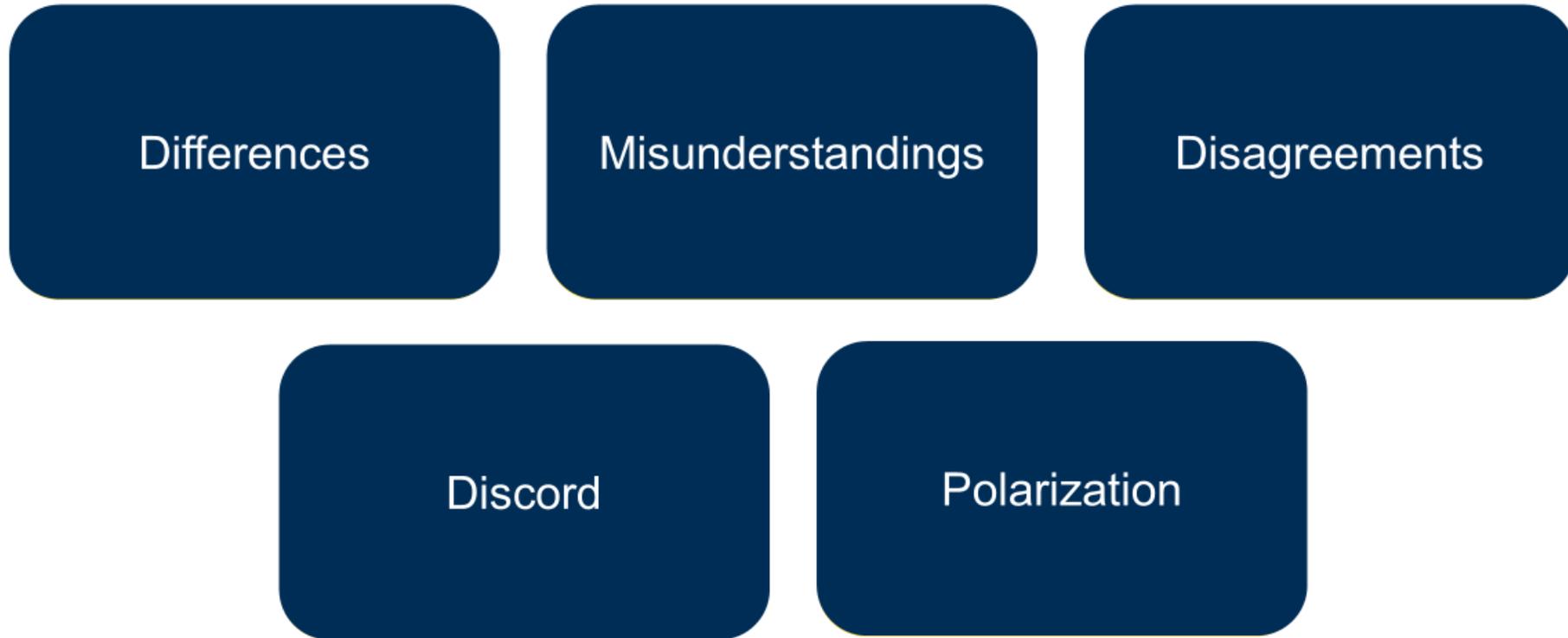
(Gershwin Muller, 2015)

# Understanding Responses to Conflict

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Avoiding	Accommodating	Competing	Compromising	Collaborating
Can serve as a temporary response when emotions are high.	While it resolves conflict, frequent use can lead to resentment and harm relationships.	It can be suitable when taking unpopular actions on important issues.	Negotiation between two parties with equivalent power.	Seeks solutions that meet everyone's needs and allows for creative problem-solving.

# When Conflict Escalates



# Responding to Escalating Conflict

Differences

In each of these situations, how do you think you would respond? How will staff respond?

Misunderstandings

At what point do you/staff start to feel uncomfortable?

Disagreements

Discord

How does that look and feel for you and the staff?

Polarization

Do you outwardly display signs of frustration or anxiety? What about staff?

# Compassion and Accountability



Alternate Route Staff



Fresh Out of College



Experienced Staff



Workload

# Prepare Teams for Dispute Resolution



**1** Set the Tone

**2** Explain the Process

**3** Clarify Roles

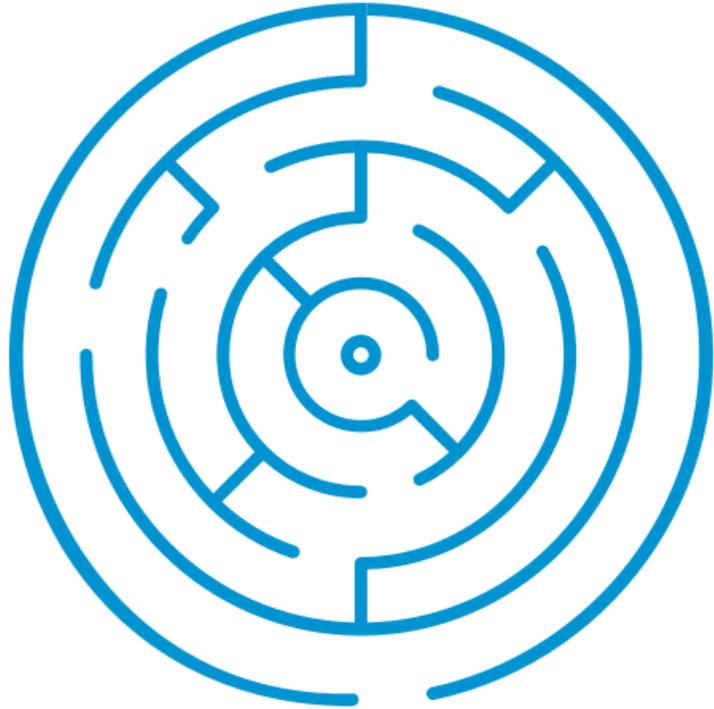
**4** Set Expectations

**5** Prepare Them Emotionally

# During the Dispute



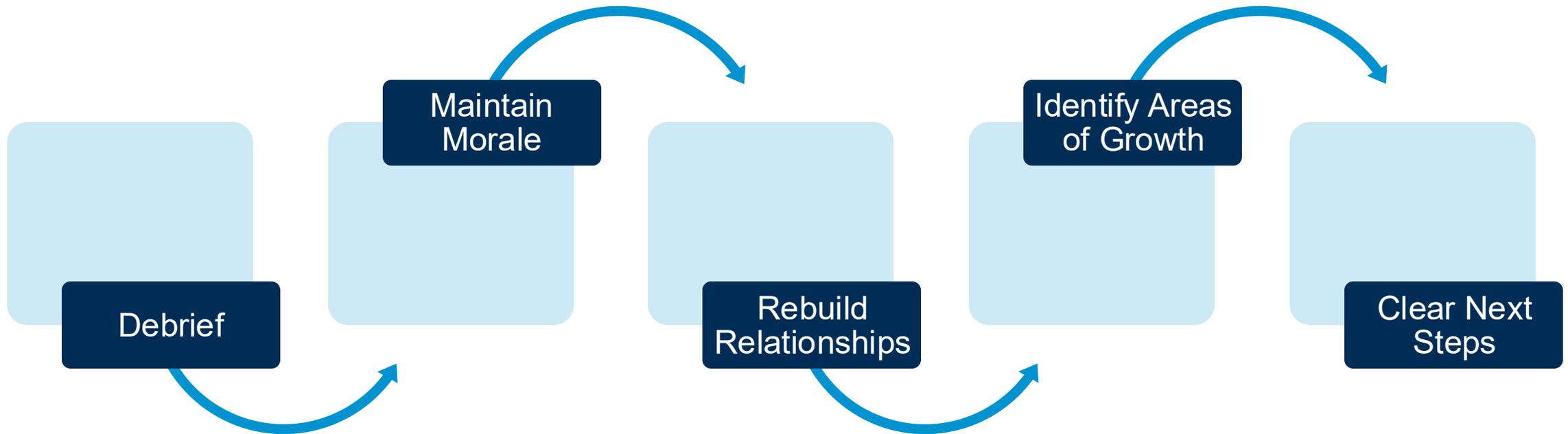
# When a Meeting is Potentially Unsafe



## Signs to Watch for:

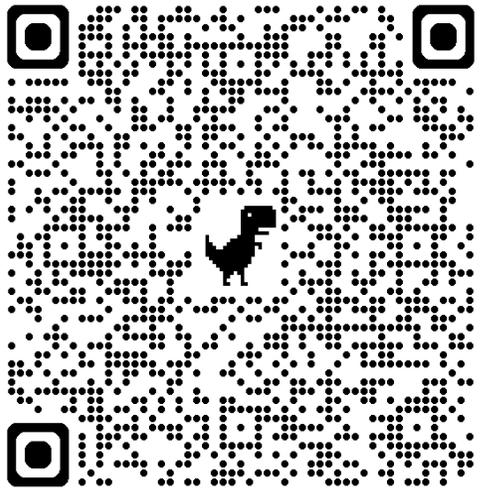
- Hostility
- Disrespect
- Overly Confrontational
- Threats

# After the Dispute



**Conflict is normal.**

When it happens, take care of yourself and your team as you navigate the process.



Leading with purpose and compassion means caring for both students and staff while maintaining parent relations.



# Leading with Purpose & Compassion

Please Take a Moment Complete our Participant Survey:



<https://form.jotform.com/242065477679167>

ANSWER THE POLAR QUIDO.COM

Thank you!

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