

Don't Wait, Collaborate!

Practical Strategies for Creating Meaningful Family
Partnerships



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 Special Education since 1991 as a special education teacher, a consultant with the Idaho Department of Ed., and as Director of Support Services. He also served as the President of CASE from 2022 to 2024.

Learner Outcomes

1

Learn effective communication and collaboration tools to prevent conflict before it escalates.

2

Understand the practical strategies and steps to create a culture of shared problem solving and student-centered framework.

3

Develop an action plan for creating a culture of partnership that prioritizes shared decision-making, resulting in student-centered success.

What is one image that describes how you feel when conflict arises with parents?



The Impact 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).



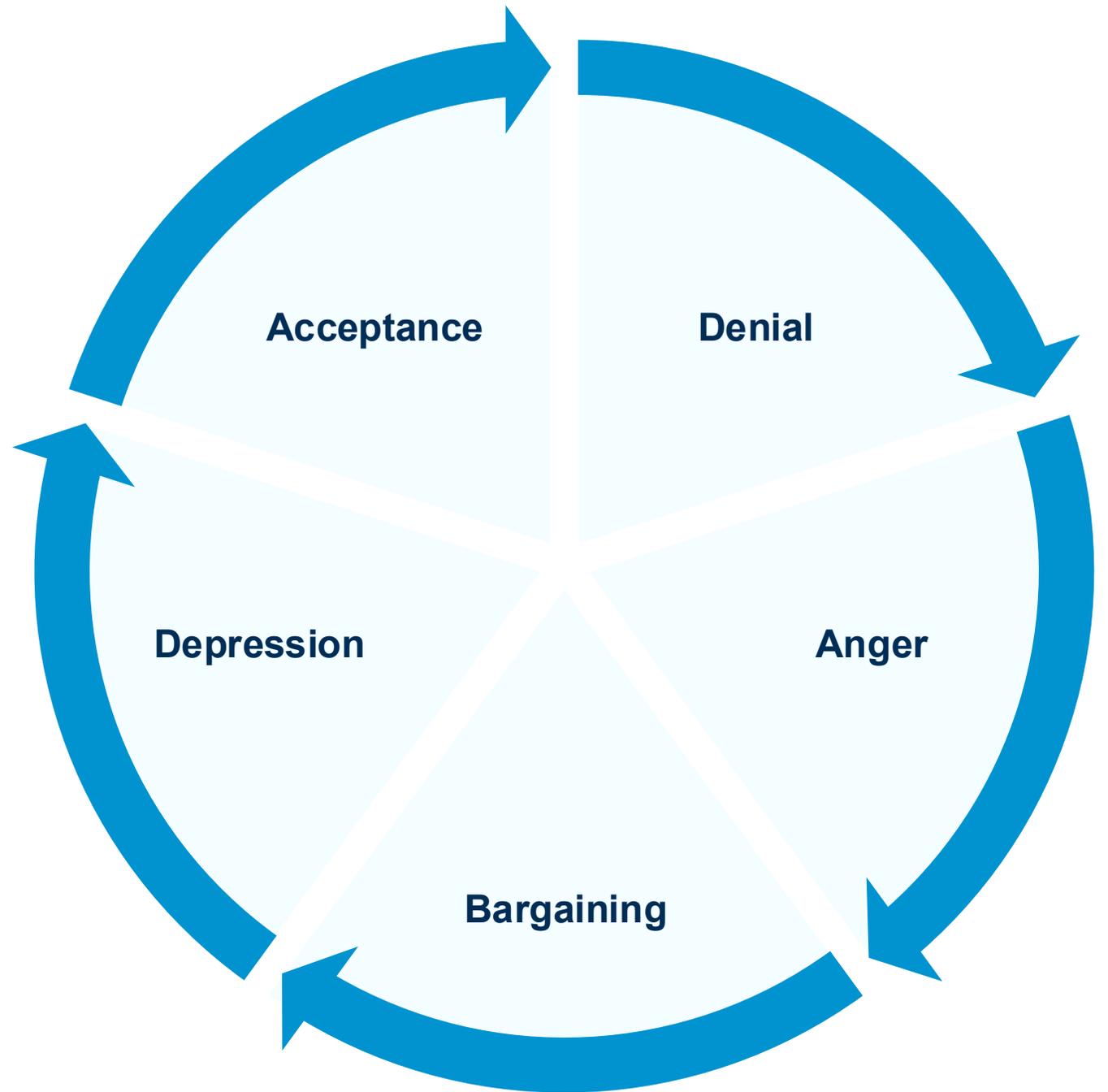


The Impact of Conflict on Families

- The emotional toll of special education disputes on families is significant. These emotional factors often prolong litigation, even when alternative resolutions are available (Salamone, 2019).



Stages of Grief



(Kubler-Ross, 1969)

Impact on Relationships

- Litigation is also costly regarding parent-educator relationships (Bailey & Zirkel, 2015).
- The antagonistic nature of the due process system often harms relationships between parents and schools, which can be detrimental to the child's education (Cope-Kasten, 2013; Decker, 2014; Feinberg et al., 2014; Puldelski, 2016; Wellner, 2012)



Common Breakdowns in Relationships



Inconsistent
Communication



Jargon



Families Don't Feel
Heard



Unaddressed Issues

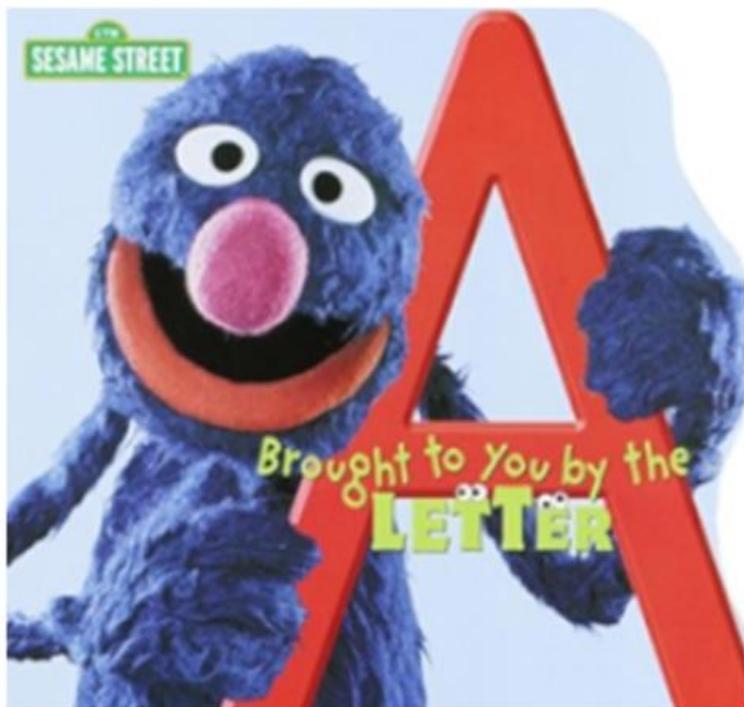
Underlying Principles of Conflict



(Overton et al., 2013)

This IEP Meeting Is Brought To You By the Letter A - Dr. Angela Balsey

- Appropriate
- Awesome
- Adequate





A is for Appropriate: The Legal Standard

- ***Rowley*** (1982)

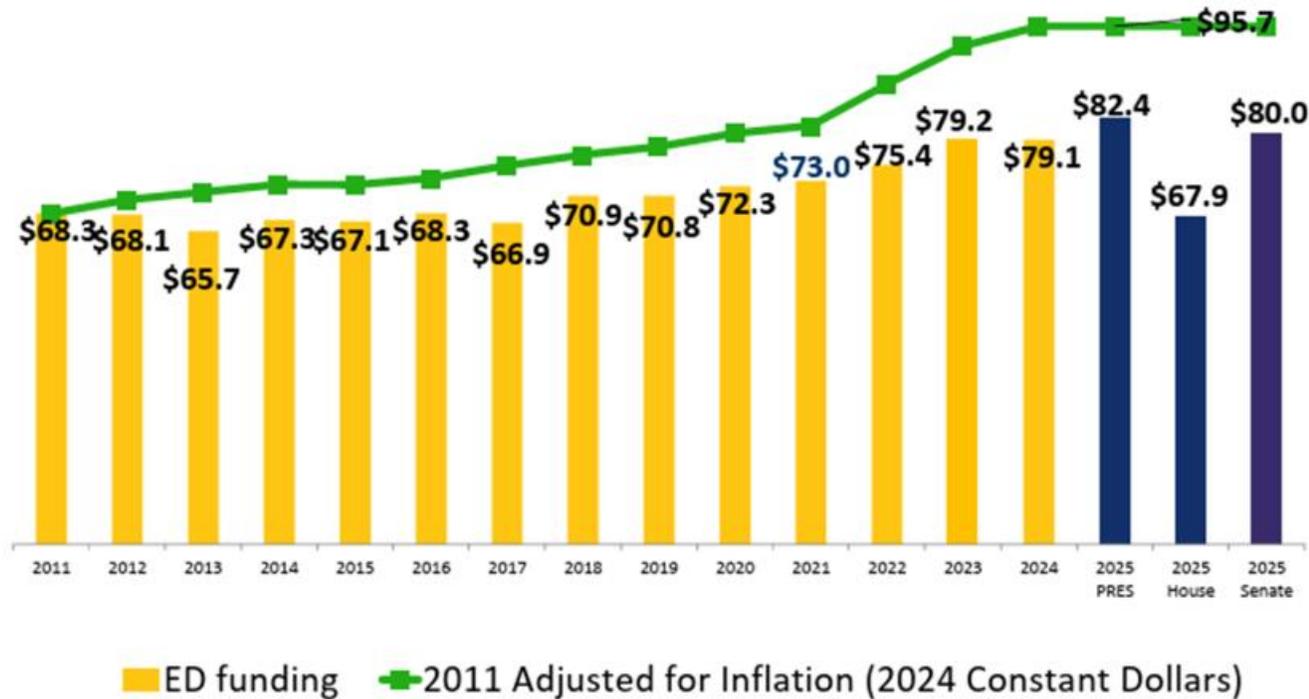
- Procedural protections
- A child's IEP must be reasonably calculated to yield educational benefit

- ***Endrew F.*** (2019)

- Reasonably calculated to make progress in light of the child's circumstances

A is for (barely) Adequate: The (lack of) Funding for Special Education

Education Funding has Failed to Keep Pace with Inflation or Need
(Department of Education Discretionary Funding in Billions of Dollars)



Interpreting the A in FAPE is Personal



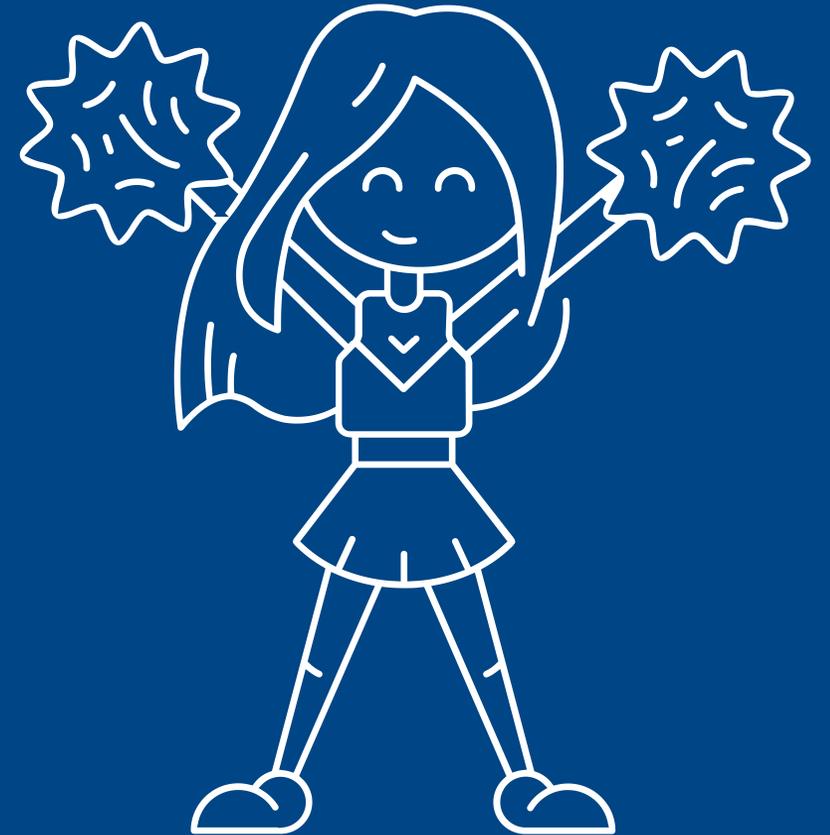
When Conflict Escalates

- Tactics go from light to heavy
- Positions become more polarized
- Issues expand
- Specific issues move to general issues
- Motivations change
 - Starts off with “doing well”
 - Becomes “I want to win!”
 - Turns into “I need to teach you a lesson!”



Family Partnerships are a Leadership Responsibility

What does your leadership communicate to families?



Reflect:
Where do families experience
frustration within our system?



Proactive Communication is Key

- Early, frequent, and open
- Timelines
- Follow-up
- Parent friendly language
- Points of contact
- Pre-meetings
- Check-ins
- Transparency
- Quick response



Communication Strategies

Utilize Active Listening

Establish Guidelines

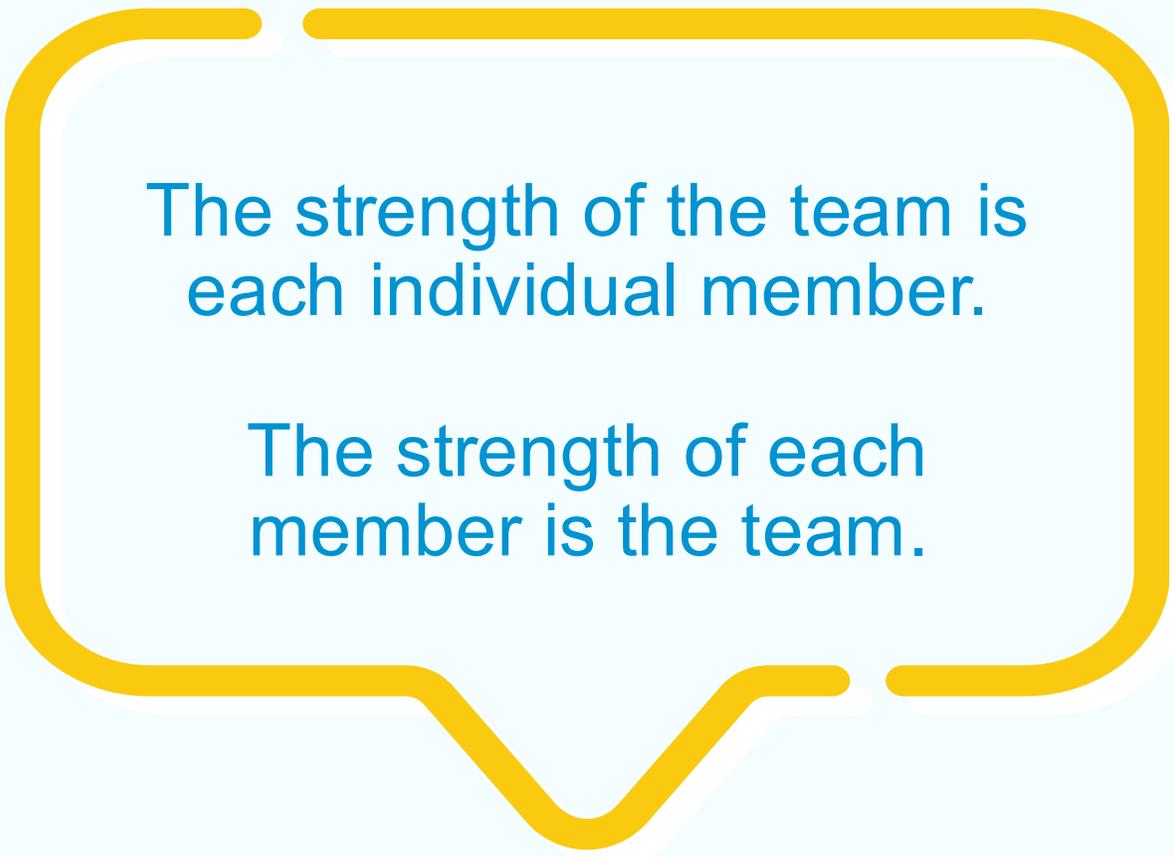
Share Information Openly

Reward Efforts

Invite Contrary Perspectives

(Hecht et al., 2023)



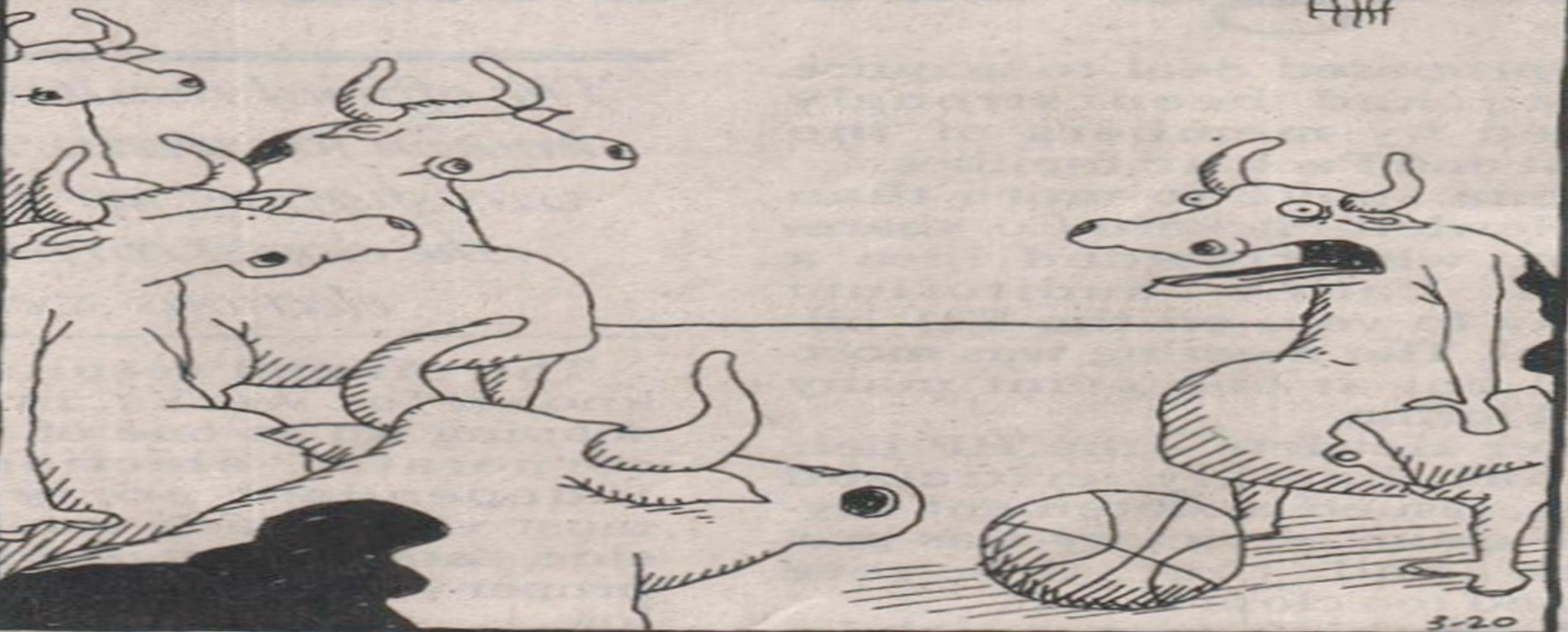


The strength of the team is
each individual member.

The strength of each
member is the team.

~ Phil Jackson

MORE



“Listen up! I want you to pass the ball, set screens, look for the open shot. Don’t be selfish. Remember, there is no ‘I’ in herd.”

Framework for Collaborative Conversations



Listening As an Ally

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

[Listening as an Ally](#)



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Our Experience: Steps for Creating a Culture of Partnership



Strategies for Improved Communication and Collaboration



(Hecht et al., 2023)

Proactive Strategies



Embed Routine Practices

Build communication procedures with families that are early, clear, and transparent.

Multiple Strategies

Collaborative problem-solving, partner with Parent Centers and advisory councils, and use facilitation.

Treat Parents as Partners

Ask parents to serve on committees and provide feedback.

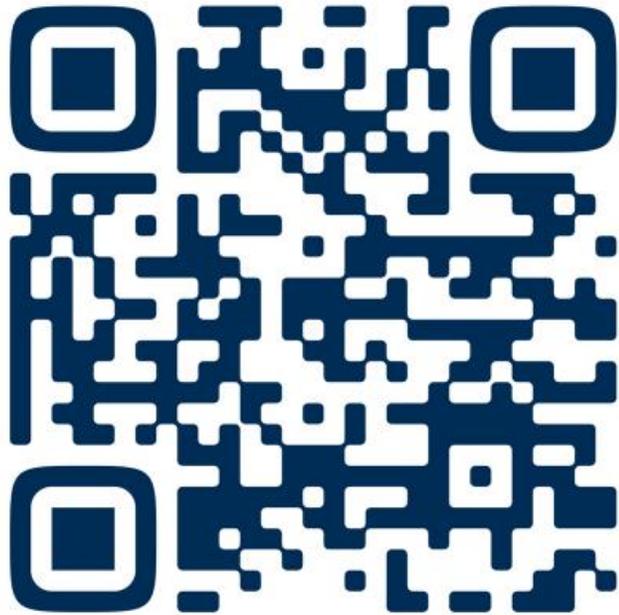
Continuous Improvement

Evaluate your programs, use feedback to make changes.

Grow Knowledge and Skills

Access systems of support and develop intentional PD for staff.

Strategies for Strengthening Teams



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Strategies for Strengthening Teams



ESTABLISH TRUST

- Lead team-building activities to strengthen collaboration and trust.
- Demonstrate vulnerability to foster psychological safety and authenticity.
- Encourage open and honest communication across all levels of the team.



FOSTER PROFESSIONAL CONFLICT

- Create mutually agreed-upon guidelines for respectful and constructive debate.
- Acknowledge efforts to resolve conflicts and contribute ideas.
- Facilitate resolution by mediating disputes and guiding productive dialogue.



DEMONSTRATE COMMITMENT

- Engage team members in the decision-making process.
- Articulate a clear vision and set aligned team goals.
- Recognize accomplishments and monitor progress consistently.



PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY

- Define clear expectations and responsibilities.
- Maintain consistency in actions and decisions.
- Establish team goals and regularly share progress updates.
- Demonstrate desired behaviors through your own actions.



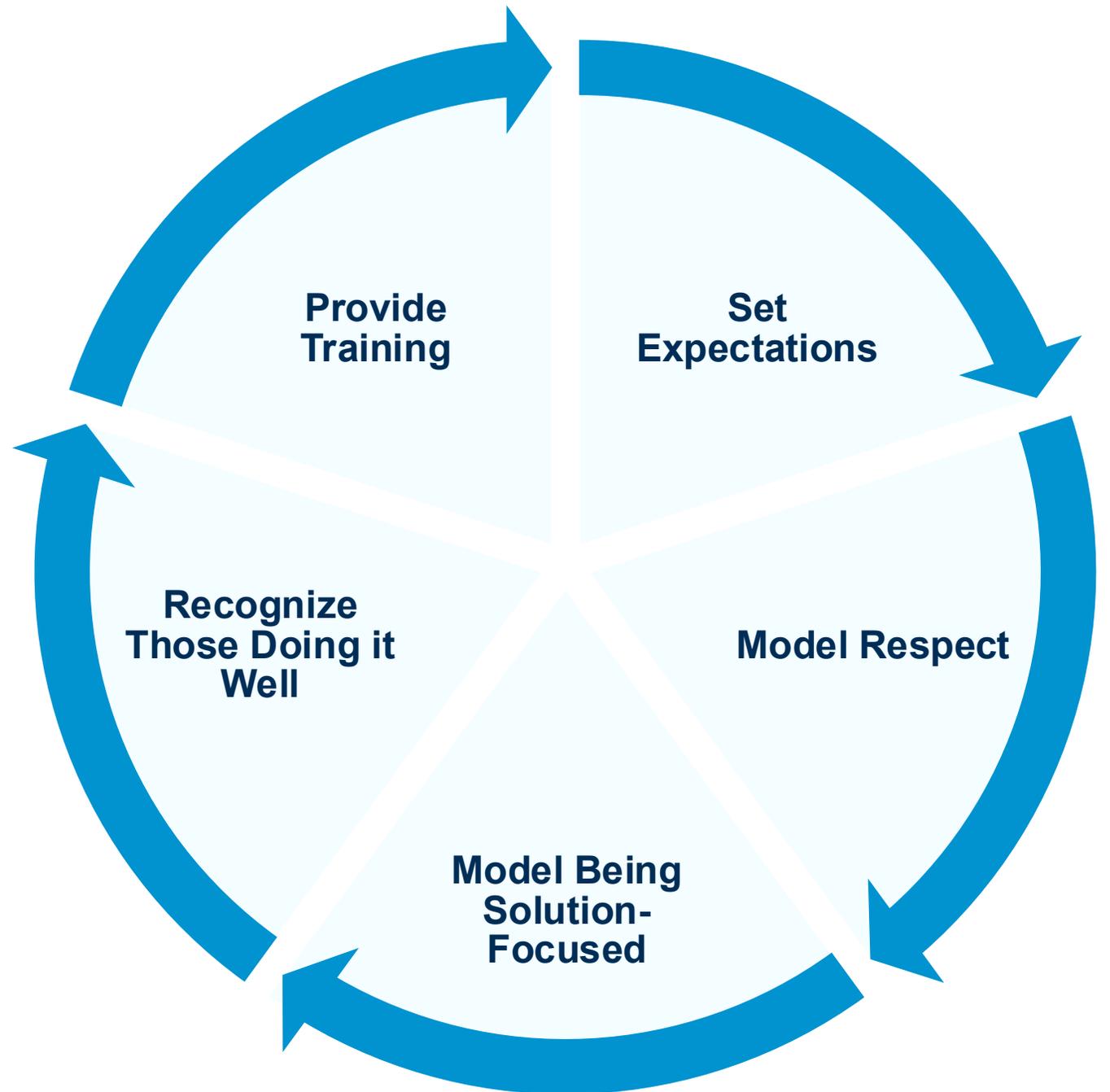
FOCUS ON RESULTS

- Establish clear and achievable team goals.
- Celebrate and reward collective achievements.
- Emphasize the value and impact of team success.

Adapted from: Lencioni, P. (2002). *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable*. Jossey-Bass.

Establishing a Culture of Communication and Collaboration: Instructional Materials to Support Professional Learning

Administrator Actions that Reinforce Collaboration



Action Planning

What is one communication practice you can implement immediately?

What is one systems level change you can work on making to strength family partnerships?

Thank you!

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Please Take a Moment Complete our Participant Survey:

Don't Wait Collaborate
Practical Strategies for Creating Meaningful Family Partnerships



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ANSWER THE POLL AT SUDO.COM

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