

Collaborative Advocacy

Guiding Principles



Supporting the prevention and resolution of disputes through partnership and collaboration



Collaborative Advocacy is an approach to advocating for children with disabilities that utilizes collaborative problem-solving skills and relationship-strengthening strategies to resolve disagreements. This approach can be used by anyone serving as a third-party advocate to focus on improving educational and developmental outcomes for students with disabilities.

Individuals who practice **Collaborative Advocacy** voluntarily adhere to the following guiding principles:

- 1.) Dignity:** Recognize all people have inherent dignity and value as human beings. Promoting dignity includes:
 - a. Treating everyone with respect and civility at all times
 - b. Assuming best intentions
 - c. Recognizing the right of parents and guardians to make informed decisions about their children's educational needs
- 2.) Child-centered:** Understand that a child with a disability is at the heart of every special education decision. Child-centered decision-making includes:
 - a. Ensuring that interactions and communication with parents and educators are focused on the child's present needs
 - b. Redirecting the team to the child's needs when the conversation has lost focus
- 3.) Empowerment:** Encourage meaningful parent participation in developing the programs and plans. Empowerment can be facilitated by:
 - a. Educating parents about the special education process and procedural safeguards
 - b. Helping parents clarify, prioritize, and articulate their concerns, needs, and vision for their child's education and future to prepare parents to participate effectively in IEP/IFSP meetings
 - c. Helping ensure the parent gathers the information necessary to be fully informed and ready to participate in problem solving as an equal partner
 - d. Modeling collaborative problem-solving skills



4.) Collaboration: Practice collaborative problem-solving skills and strategies to resolve disagreements and disputes. Collaboration includes:

- a. Recognizing the value of conflict for identifying and clarifying concerns
- b. Asking questions to identify the interest underneath a position or demand
- c. Using an interest-based approach to problem solving
- d. Being open to different perspectives
- e. Listening for understanding
- f. Separating people from the problem
- g. Identifying areas of agreement
- h. Helping team members identify and evaluate potential solutions

5.) Relationship Building: Recognize the importance of team member relationships and seek to strengthen relationships through effective communication and collaborative problem-solving skills. Relationship-building includes:

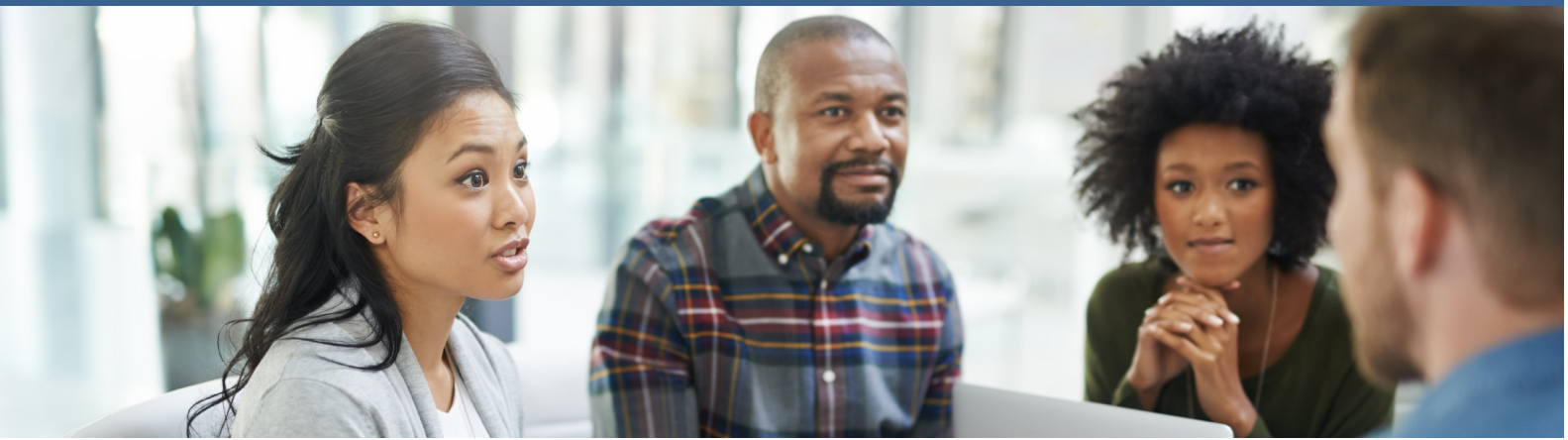
- a. Modeling effective and respectful communication skills
- b. Encouraging and empowering parents to participate meaningfully in conversations about their child
- c. Refraining from conduct that would harm the relationship, such as: making disparaging comments to and about others; interfering with or discouraging communication between the family and the school or early intervention provider; encouraging parents to withhold relevant information; or knowingly misleading or misinforming parents or others

6.) Professionalism: Remain professional at all times. Professionalism includes:

- a. Maintaining regular contact with parents
- b. Responding to questions and concerns in a timely manner
- c. Following through with commitments
- d. Being aware of personal biases from past experiences, and making sure those do not negatively affect interactions

7.) Community Liaison: Connect families with local agencies, resources, and other parents, helping to build a support system within the community. Acting as a community liaison includes:

- a. Sharing knowledge of various community resources that can benefit families



- b. Referring families to other agencies to ensure whole family support is in place (e.g., mental health services, respite care, health care)
- c. Supporting families to find and organize learning opportunities and support groups

8.) Integrity: Remain honest and trustworthy. Motives are aligned with the child's needs and clearly articulated. Acting with integrity includes:

- a. Upholding commitments
- b. Sharing accurate information
- c. Disclosing conflicts of interest
- d. Keeping the child's needs as the focus

9.) Competence: Stay informed and knowledgeable about the special education and early intervention processes and regulations in the jurisdictions within which services are provided, understanding the limits of individual experiences. Competency includes:

- a. Being honest with existing and potential clients about relevant experience and expertise
- b. Informing existing and potential clients if not competent to handle a specific issue
- c. Preparing adequately and reasonably to provide the requested assistance
- d. Completing continuing education courses in special education on a consistent or annual basis to stay informed of developments and changes in the field
- e. Understanding the limits of non-attorney advocacy as defined by the jurisdiction's regulations concerning the "unauthorized practice of law"

10.) Privacy/confidentiality: Recognize sensitive information concerning a child with a disability must be protected. Protecting privacy includes:

- a. Obtaining permission before discussing matters with others, including school and early intervention personnel, in accordance with state and federal regulations
- b. Informing the parent that communications may not be protected by an advocate-client privilege and that advocates may have to comply with lawfully issued subpoenas to appear in a due process or civil court proceeding
- c. Informing parents and early intervention or school personnel that advocates do not speak for the parents