Ten Realistic Ways to Build Collaboration in Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meetings

The University of Delaware’s Conflict Resolution Program (CRP) is a resource offered by the Institute for Public Administration (IPA). CRP provides services in the educational, non-profit, public, and government sectors related to conflict resolution, mediation, and group facilitation. One such service is SPARC—the Special Education Partnership for the Amicable Resolution of Conflict.

SPARC is funded by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE). SPARC offers training, coaching, and research related to building collaboration between families and schools, particularly in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. In addition, SPARC administers the statewide special education mediation process.

CRP recently completed research on best practices for building collaboration in IEP meetings. This research was based on data collected during IEP observations in participating school districts including Appoquinimink, Christina, Delmar, Lake Forest, and Laurel.

Based on this research, CRP has again partnered with DDOE to offer improved special education programs and services under the SPARC grant. These opportunities provide families and schools with realistic ways to work together collaboratively, particularly in the IEP process.

The new programs and coaching services outlined in this brochure are available through CRP on an ongoing basis to schools, districts, families, and advocates and are based on personal interests, needs, budgets, and schedules. Most programs described are designed for two-hour time blocks.

Contact us today for more information.

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Training sessions (1–9) are designed to be offered in two-hour time blocks but can be expanded and customized (e.g., multi-day, multi-session) to meet your needs.

1. Introduction to the Mediation Process
Participants will engage in a mock mediation session that introduces mediation and allows for questions and a discussion about the pros and cons of this collaborative process.

2. Facilitation 101
This session introduces participants to the fundamental principles of effective meeting facilitation.

3. Your Conflict Management Style
Understanding how you unconsciously respond to conflict provides valuable insight into your relationships with others. Participants will complete a pencil and paper Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Survey and examine how using different conflict resolution styles can help reduce conflicts and improve relationships.

4. Where Do These Parents Come From?
Paper-and-pencil self-assessments and case studies will be used to investigate the unique feelings and behaviors of parents of special-needs children. Participants will 1) leave with a better appreciation of the emotional barriers that sometimes get in the way of full parental participation in IEPs and 2) learn effective ways to recognize and respond to these barriers.

5. Resolving Difficult Dynamics and Conflict in IEPs
All groups deal with difficult dynamics at some point. IEP teams are no different. Realistic hands-on techniques that are proven to de-escalate heated conflicts and resolve difficult dynamics in IEPs will be introduced and practiced in this session.

6. Are You Hearing Me?
Though often taken for granted, active listening skills along with communication and questioning techniques are vital to building collaborative IEPs. This experiential workshop will re-introduce participants to the fundamentals of facilitating and participating in an IEP meeting using effective listening, questioning, and communication techniques.

7. Brainstorming and Problem Solving?
The IEP process typically proceeds as an open discussion between participants culminating in IEP signatures. This session introduces clear and easy ways to master brainstorming and problem solving techniques that can help to inject engaging meeting formats and creative problem solving into the IEP. Increased participation and better IEPs are the result.

No matter how good the IEP meeting, the final IEP is only as effective as the decisions made and the action plans established. Learn how to facilitate and participate in meetings that have clear decision rules and meaningful action plans for carrying out the IEP.

9. A/V and the IEP
Though widely available, audio-visual resources—including everything from newsprint to laptop computers and projection units—are seldom used in IEP meetings. This session introduces participants to a wide range of aids that meet the learning and participation styles of diverse IEP team members.

10. IEP Coaching
In addition to the following programs designed for two-hour time blocks, CRP is available to provide neutral coaching and feedback in IEP meetings. Customized trainings—tailored to meet your specific needs, interests, and time constraints—often result.

Contact CRP today to learn more about our special education services, schedule training, or invite a CRP professional to observe and coach an upcoming IEP meeting. We will be happy to discuss your individual needs and related cost estimates. SPARC programs and services are provided at a nominal fee and are subsidized by the DDOE.