Creating Collaborative Standards-Based IEPs:

A Training for IEP Team Members

Session One

Welcome to Creating Collaborative Standards-Based IEPs.

This is Session One of the training. If you have not viewed the Introduction to Creating Collaborative IEPs, it is suggested that you return and begin by reviewing the Introduction.

During this session, you will be referred to activities that require handouts. You will be cued to look for an accompanying handout when you see the following symbol: 🗁. The handouts can be found in the file for the session on the website where you accessed the online training in an accompanying folder entitled **Session # Handouts**. For ease of working with this online training, it is suggested that you download the handouts for the session on which you are working and either save them to your desktop or print all of them before you actually begin the session.

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Session 1
COLLABORATION
Section 1
UNDERSTANDING THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS
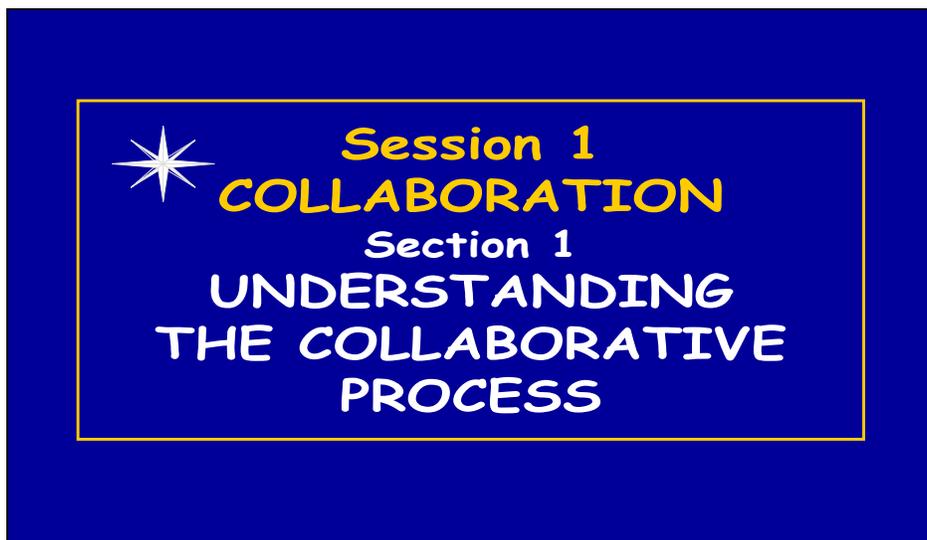
For our first session, we have chosen to begin with the concept of collaboration or teamwork. We are not the first to recognize the importance of teamwork or collaboration, nor will we be the last. Some of the more notable individuals who have gone before us have had things to say this about this topic

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision;…It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." – Andrew Carnegie

"No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it." - H.E. Luccock

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." – Helen Keller

"In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed." - Charles Darwin

Session One Training Objectives

Participants will:

- have information about what collaboration is and why it is important to the IEP process.

- have a better understanding of skills and practices that facilitate collaboration.

As a reminder, the training format is standard throughout these training sessions.

Each session is introduced by a vignette which is a description of the IEP process from the point of view of one of the team members (student, parent, special education teacher, general education teacher, administrator). We have called this section *The Way Things Are.*

🗁 This is followed by *Points to Ponder,* an activity about your current IEP process in which you are asked to consider the strengths and areas of need in your present practices. This handout can be found on the website where you accessed the online training in a folder entitled **Session # Handouts**.

The Main Idea helps you to focus on what we consider the most important points to be taken away from each of the sessions.

🗁 Finally, each Session ends with a *Lesson from Nature*, a tale or fable that we have included in the **Session # Handout** file to emphasize the important ideas in each section.

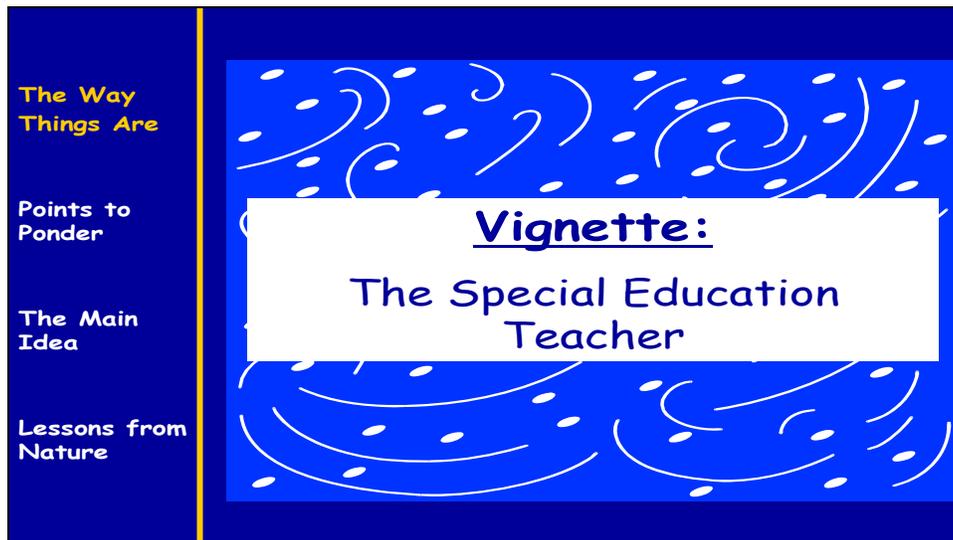Our training objectives for this session are listed on this slide.

"Cactus Flower" by Tim Moore

"Goals are dreams with a deadline"
Walt Disney

"Cactus Flower", a work of art by a student with disabilities, Tim Moore.

**The Way
Things Are**

**Points to
Ponder**

**The Main
Idea**

**Lessons from
Nature**

Vignette:

The Special Education
Teacher

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

This time of year is hard. I don't know how they expect me to teach, do on-going progress monitoring on my current students, evaluate new students being referred to Special Education, and prepare for all of these IEP meetings. This is my fifth meeting this week. My head is spinning. And with all of the people who come to these meetings now it is like managing a conference. I didn't get into special education for this. I don't know which I'm more uncomfortable with, the parents who don't show at all or the ones like the one who is coming to today's meeting. I know this parent want the best for her child, but she has a serious case of denial.

Actually, he does have some pretty good skills.   If I had a little more planning time with the general education teacher and lead time to plan for adaptations and modifications, this kid may make more progress. If this mother would just back off a bit and if the principal would give me a little more in the way of assistance and resources, I could do more. These IEP meetings are such a drain on time. Do we really get anything accomplished for the student?

And of course all the district cares about is making sure someone knows the new provisions of the law and that everyone passes the SOLs. Who is thinking about the student in all of this? That's the part of the job I signed on for; if I could just get a little support.
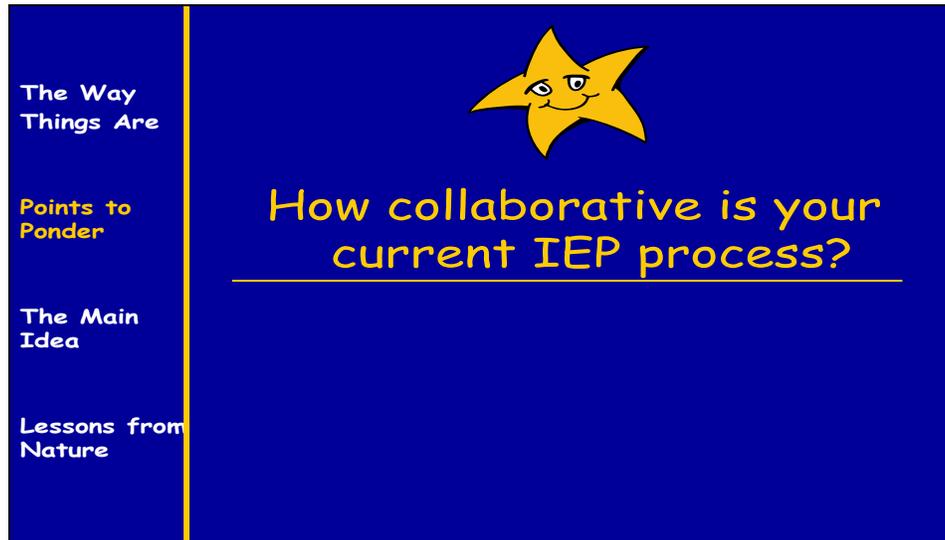
Perhaps the preceding was a point of view that rings true for you, perhaps not. The purpose of this vignette is to remind us that we each come to the IEP process with a different set of experiences, training, expectations, and etc. If we are not aware that we have unique differences, it can be more difficult for us to understand another's point of view.

Now we want to take a few minutes to reflect on the current way your school uses teams to develop IEPs.

🗁 Please review the handout for this session, entitled **Points to Ponder: Regarding The Collaborative Process.** Remember we said that Points to Ponder is the second area around which this training is organized? We will be using these "points to ponder" tools throughout the training as a way to determine what our IEP processes look like now. Take several minutes to answer the questions. After you have done this, identify the top two points that are working well with your team process and two points that you identify as needing the most improvement.

Keep these areas of strengths and needs in mind throughout the training and think about strategies that could be used by schools and IEP teams to build on the strengths in the team process and to address the needs that you have identified.

We are now at The Main Idea, the third area in this training format, where we will answer the question "why is collaboration so important"?

First, working together is required by law. IDEA calls for IEP teams that consist of members with different insights, talents and strengths. Many of us, both parents and professionals, do not have training in working collaboratively. In fact we have been trained either not at all in this area, or in some instances to operate very independently. This may lead to parents being uncertain as to what their role is on an IEP team, while related service providers and teachers may be used to working within their own sphere of expertise, conducting separate assessments, writing separate reports and IEP goals, and only recording progress on the IEP goals and objectives that they have developed.

Collaboration is not only required by law it is also thought of as effective practice. Why? Because the students with whom we work are not divided into different components (gross motor, fine motor, cognitive, social, speech, etc.) it is important that we work together to identify and meet the needs of the whole child and to use the insights of each member of the team to do that.

Family members have unique insights into the student's talents, gifts, strengths and needs. They know their child or family member better than any one else.

Most importantly, students have ideas of their own. They know what they like and don't like, what works for them and what doesn't work. Yet, often from an

early age, students are not included at the table, not supported in playing a meaningful role in the development of a plan that is all about them.

SEVERELY DYSFUNCTIONAL TEAM
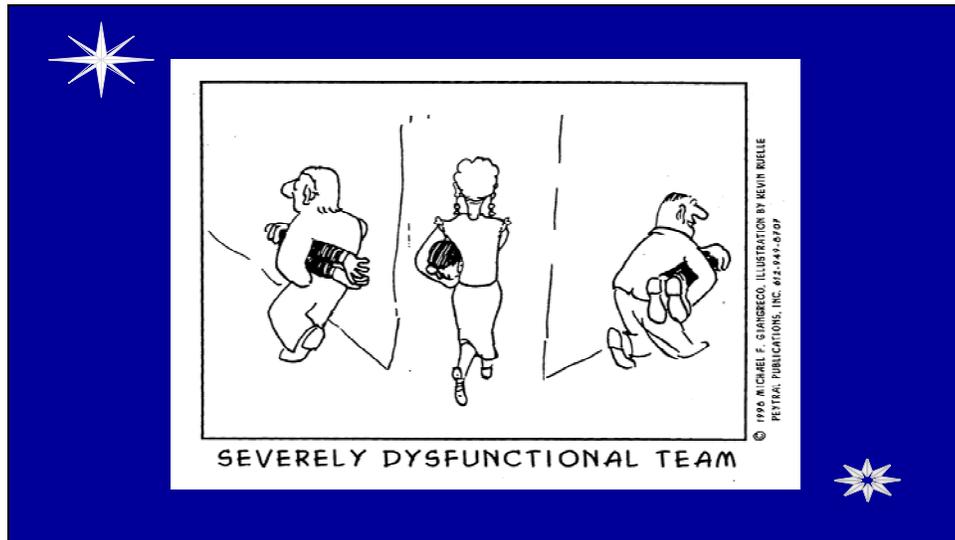
While it may not be a pleasant experience for any of us when teams do not work well together, it is the student (and his or her education) who suffers the most.
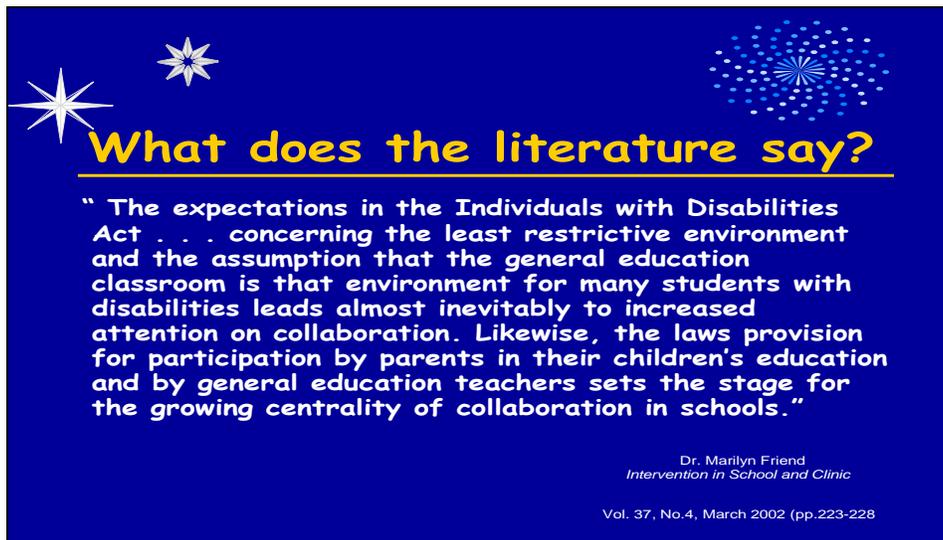
What does the literature say?

" The expectations in the Individuals with Disabilities Act . . . concerning the least restrictive environment and the assumption that the general education classroom is that environment for many students with disabilities leads almost inevitably to increased attention on collaboration. Likewise, the laws provision for participation by parents in their children's education and by general education teachers sets the stage for the growing centrality of collaboration in schools."

Dr. Marilyn Friend
Intervention in School and Clinic

Vol. 37, No.4, March 2002 (pp.223-228

As Dr. Marilyn Friend has said, " The expectations in the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 concerning the least restrictive environment and the assumption that the general education classroom is that environment for many students with disabilities leads almost inevitably to increased attention on collaboration. Likewise, the laws provision for participation by parents in their children's education and by general education teachers sets the stage for the growing centrality of collaboration in schools."

Not only is collaboration addressed in the law, but if we are going to get the job done, working together becomes a critical factor.
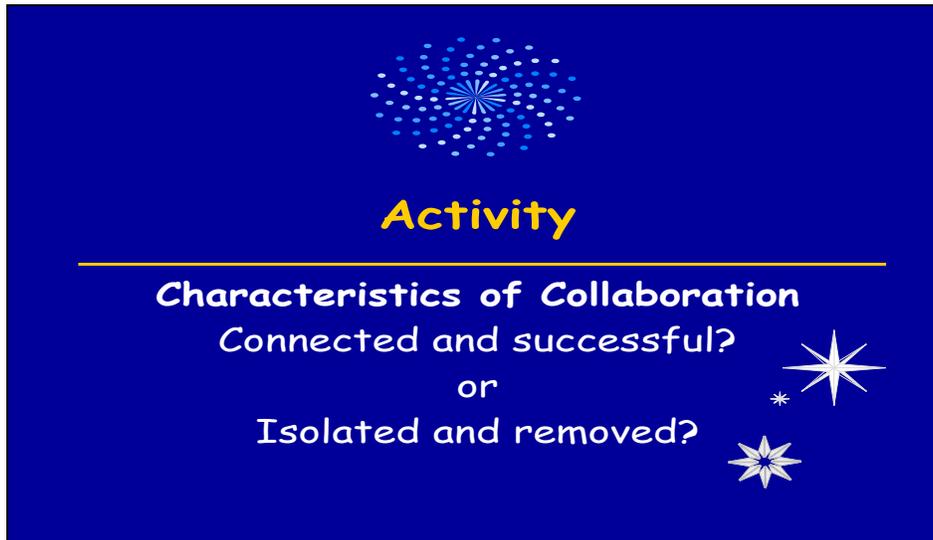
Activity

Characteristics of Collaboration
Connected and successful?
or
Isolated and removed?

Let's take a few minutes to develop the characteristics of successful collaboration using our own personal experiences. Think about what it means to be a member of a collaborative team. Take two or three minutes to recall an experience you have had in your life when you felt like you were part of a community and felt connected to others around you.

🗁 Please review the handout for this session, entitled **Characteristics of Collaboration** and write down some of the characteristics of this experience that made you feel connected and successful. Next, take two to three minutes to think about experiences when you felt isolated and not part of a community. Then jot down some of the characteristics associated with the experience that made you feel isolated.

In the following slides we are going to look at collaboration more closely. See if any of the characteristics that you noted on your list appear on ours.

Wikipedia provides a definition of Collaboration that applies well to the collaboration around IEPs.
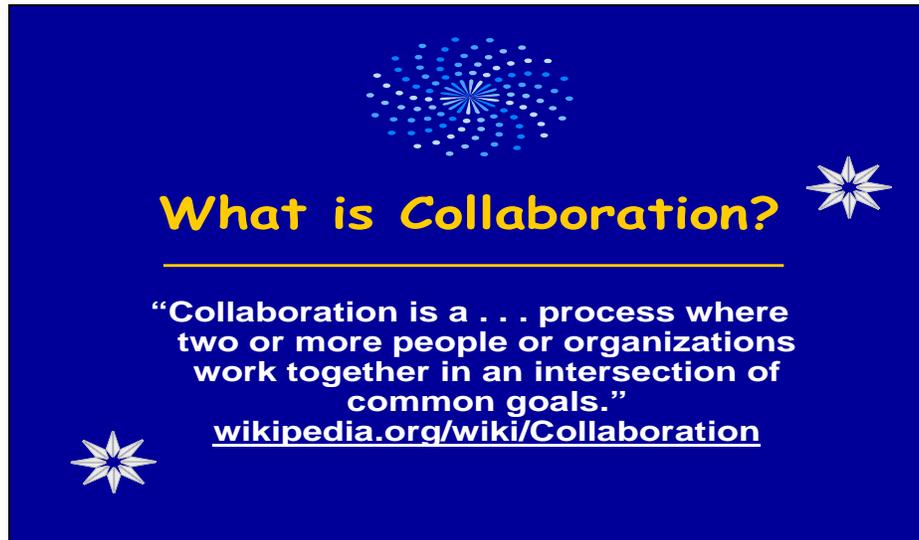
"Collaboration is a . . . process where two or more people or organizations work together in an intersection of common goals
wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaboration

A *collaborative* IEP approach provides a way for diverse team members to share their expertise to engage in a quality IEP processes leading to positive outcomes for students.

It addresses the diversity that we may find among team members; it acknowledges that everyone on the team has some expertise to share and that we can teach each other new things; and finally it points out that the enrichment that comes from sharing expertise leads to quality both in terms of the process used and the outcomes derived for students.

A collaborative approach among team members is based on mutual respect, trust, and cooperation. Each team member helps and supports the other team members.

Trust takes a while to develop among members, but by displaying trustworthy behaviors, members can facilitate the process. 🗁 Please review the handout for this session entitled **Trusting and Trustworthy Behaviors.**

In addition to these behaviors, it is important that members listen to and value other team members' contributions. Each team member should demonstrate mutual respect for the others.

Interdependence is another aspect of a collaborative team approach. Team members must feel a dependence on each other. One person cannot do all the team's work. There must be a healthy interdependence among team members.

Team members must hold each other **accountable** to tasks and duties. Everyone should pull his/her own weight and each member must remind others of their responsibilities.

Finally, **shared knowledge** is critical to successful collaboration. To be effective team members, all members of the team need to be familiar with the basic philosophy and standard provisions of IDEA. Nothing will kill collaboration faster than for one person on the team to insist that the law requires something or the law doesn't permit something, and have that turn out to be an incorrect statement.

If you do find that you have confusion on these issues, look for resources to address your concerns, perhaps training in your locale, parent resource centers, IEP Handbook, or contacting special education director, etc.
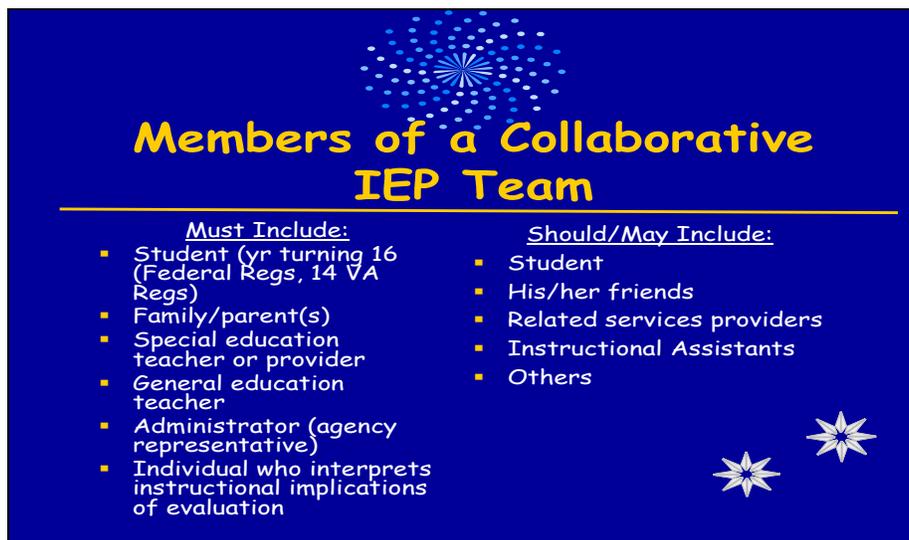
In summary, a collaborative team has

shared beliefs and goals. Remember that we began this training with a series of beliefs and values that the developers of this training share. Being explicit about what you believe and what goals you share in common is the basis for trust and mutual respect.

diverse membership. The different talents, knowledge and skills of team members add to the richness of the team and its ability to identify the student's strengths and needs. Diverse team members who work well together know that a solid identification of strengths and needs is the foundation required to develop sound strategies to meet those needs.

shared leadership. IEP planning and development is hard work. Sharing that work and the responsibility for making things happen gives all team members a sense of ownership.

skills in collaborative teaming. From time to time we all need to learn new skills, especially if they were not part of our original training. Much of the training around IEP development and implementation has to do with compliance with laws and regulations that making the time to teach the skills needed for effective practices are overlooked. In Section 2 of this Session, we will be looking at some of those skills.

Members of a Collaborative IEP Team

Must Include:
- Student (yr turning 16 (Federal Regs, 14 VA Regs)
- Family/parent(s)
- Special education teacher or provider
- General education teacher
- Administrator (agency representative)
- Individual who interprets instructional implications of evaluation

Should/May Include:
- Student
- His/her friends
- Related services providers
- Instructional Assistants
- Others

You recall when we shared the definition of a collaborative team that we discussed how diversity is one element in team membership. An IEP team is usually composed of a number of individuals who provide support services to a student and who are involved in a student's life. According to the law, at the very minimum, the IEP team must include the student (in the school year that he or she turns 16, according to Federal IDEA Regulations, and age 14 according to Virginia Regulations), family, not less than one special education teacher, an administrator, not less than one general education teacher, and an individual who interprets instructional implications of evaluation. Other team members should or may include the student, his/her friends, related service providers, instructional assistants, etc.

A special note about students as members of their own IEP teams. A student must be included for transition planning purposes in the year that he or she turns 16 – and can be included prior to this age. Coming together as a team and thinking about how to best support the student's participation in his or her IEP development is an important step for any collaborative team. Perhaps young students can not attend the entire meeting but have a specific place early on in the agenda for sharing their input that an adult member of the IEP team has supported them in developing.

If transition age students are to be able to meaningful (and willingly) participate in their IEP development, early involvement and a meaningful leadership role can provide the groundwork.

Session 1
COLLABORATION
Section 2
COLLABORATIVE TEAMS:
SKILLS AND PROCESS
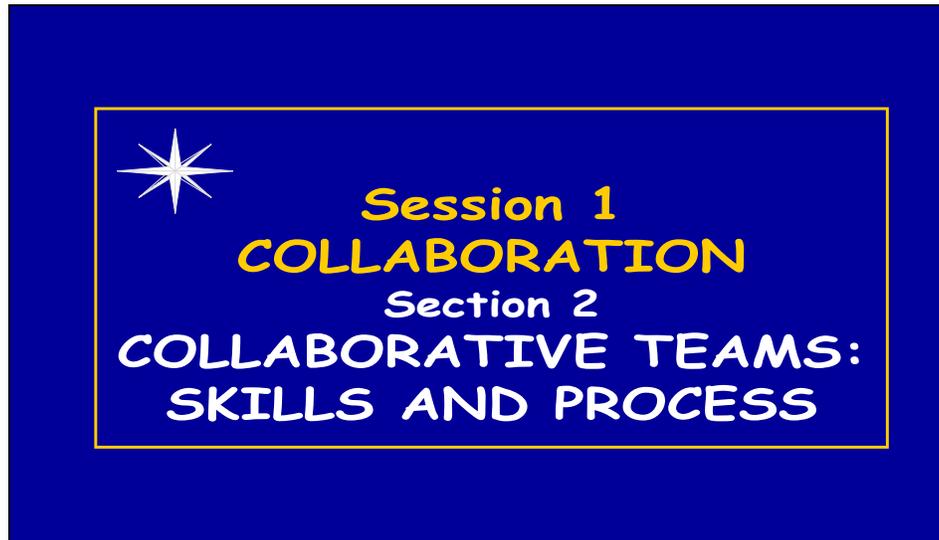
In the second section of Session One, we will repeat the same format used for section 1. Let's begin with "The Way Things Are."
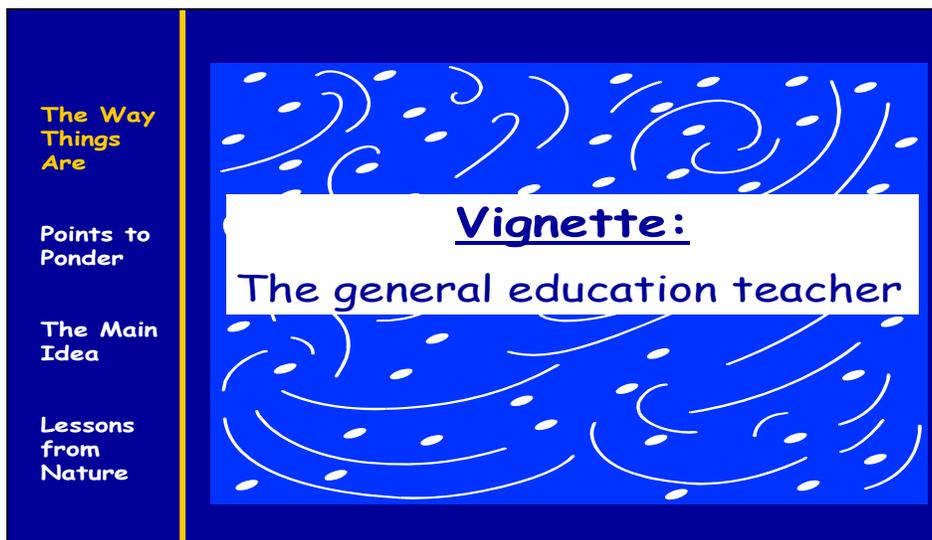
THE GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER

As if I don't have enough to do. Does any one realize that I have 25 kids in my class that I am trying to plan for daily? I wouldn't even mind doing this if someone told me what my role was and what they expected from me at these IEP meetings. I've had kids with disabilities in my class for years now. For the first several years I didn't even see the IEPs until November. Now they have me attending these long meetings where everything seems to be pre-decided anyway. Of course, no one checks with me to see how any of these IEP goals fit in with what the class is doing or if the pullout schedules work with my class schedule. I'm just supposed to accommodate and make do.

Sometimes I feel this is a real disservice to all the students in my class, both with and without disabilities. Hey guys, a little training would help, a little support would be nice too. How about an extra set of adult hands? How about planning time that actually lines up with the special ed teacher's?

I really see the benefit of having kids with disabilities in my class since all of my students with and without IEPs have different instruction needs anyway, but I need HELP. And now with the statewide assessment hysteria, and several of my students are included with the VGLA, well, I am not Wonder Woman.

These meetings are hard. I never know what to say. Best to keep quiet, I guess.

Now we want to take a few minutes to reflect on the current way your school uses teams to develop IEPs.

📂 Please review the handout for this session, entitled **Points to Ponder: Regarding IEP Teaming Skills and Process** and respond to the questions addressing your present practices. After you have completed this handout, identify two things that are working well with your team process and two things that you identify as needing improvement.
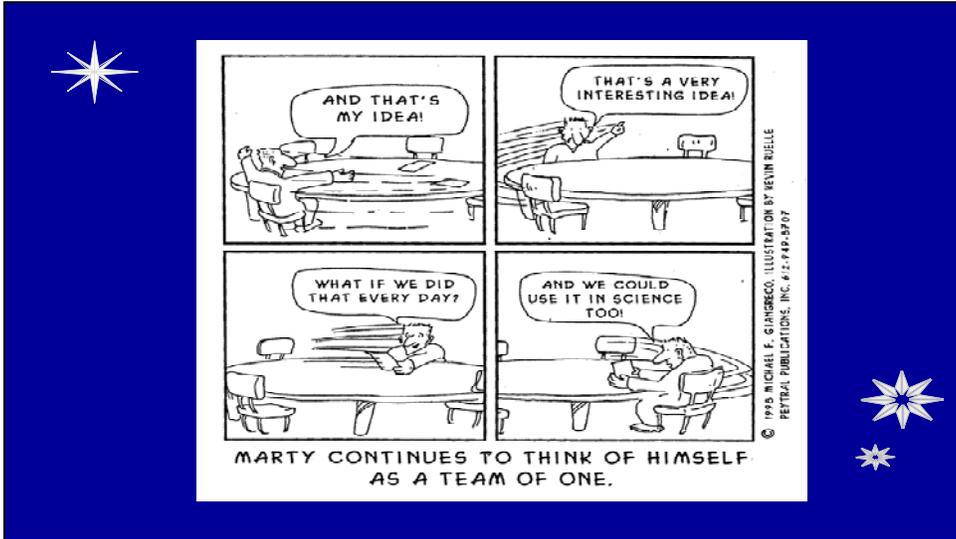
Not only does this not work…it is exhausting!

The main idea will help us learn more about the collaborative process. It is the answer to the question: "What skills support the success of collaborative teams?"

Then we'll look at a structured team meeting process that can be used to facilitate the success of a collaborative team.

Success Is Supported By:

- Releasing roles
- Communicating effectively
- Teaching one another
- Making decisions by consensus
- Dealing with conflict

In order to be collaborative, one must learn and practice collaborative team skills. These include:

Releasing roles

Communicating effectively

Teaching one another

Making decisions by consensus, and

Dealing with conflict

We will discuss each skill and then take a few minutes to describe activities that you and your IEP team can use to practice each skill.

Releasing Roles

Many of us have titles before or after our names that require us to perform certain duties and assume roles within our schools and teams. We all have experienced these spoken and unspoken rules. We also know that schools are very hierarchical in nature. There is a definite "chain of authority": school board members, superintendents, principals, lead teachers, etc. Traditionally we adhere to this structure. In addition, our training places us in certain roles. For example, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, and Speech and Language Therapists are often trained in a medical model. Remember when the OT's role was to work with the student's upper body and/or hands? The PT, you may recall, was supposed to work with the student's lower body, walking and gait problems. The teacher's role is to deal with the student's cognitive abilities (or deficits, depending upon the model). The administrator was, and still is, the boss. And other specialists address specific disabilities from hearing, to vision, to speech, and beyond.

In order to become effective collaborative team members, we must release these roles and focus on our students and their individualized programs. We must visualize opportunities from other perspectives or ways of being trained. The collaborative team must be able to make decisions; decisions must not only be in the hands of the administrators. Not only is this the law, it is also the best way to empower teams. We are much more likely to contribute and participate if we have a hand in making the decisions. The goal in role release is to be able to see various combinations of points of view based on different team members' perspectives that combine to create a new and dynamic whole.

You and your IEP team can practice this skill using the **Hidden Square** activity that follows
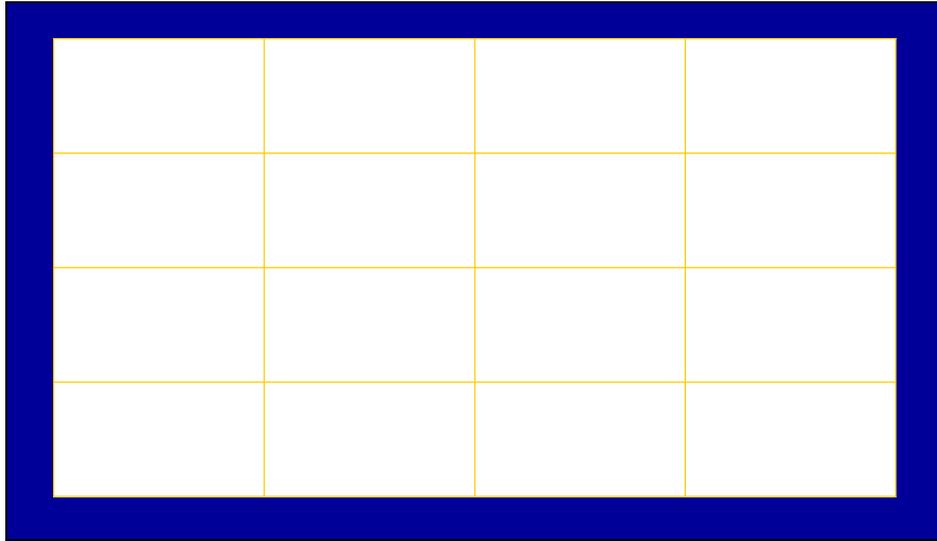
This activity requires us to look at the image and determine the total number of squares that we see. How many do you count? Show it to a friend or a member of your family. Do they see a different number than you do?

There are 30 squares in total (1 whole, 16 individual, 9 squares of 4 each, 4 squares of 9 units each).

If you didn't get the right answer on your own, what factors prevented you from easily obtaining the right answer?

We often stop at the first answer, work too fast, and/or **are limited by our own perceptions.** Whereas, if we work with others, and they may have different perspectives and offer options or solutions that we did not think of on our own. We may be encouraged to take a closer look, take another look, and talk about more possibilities than we had originally considered.

Another skill, with which we often have difficulty and that involves roles, is two-way communication. How many times have you felt that you understood what someone said only to find out that you were using one-way communication and not really listening to what was being said or intended?

Activity

One-Way Communication

This activity will illustrate the many problems and misunderstandings that occur in one-way communication.

Ask a friend or family member to do this activity with you or do it with your IEP team. Using the diagram provided here, give them directions as to how to draw this chart. In giving the directions, do not make eye contact, use any hand gestures or repeat the directions. The person who is drawing may not ask you any questions.
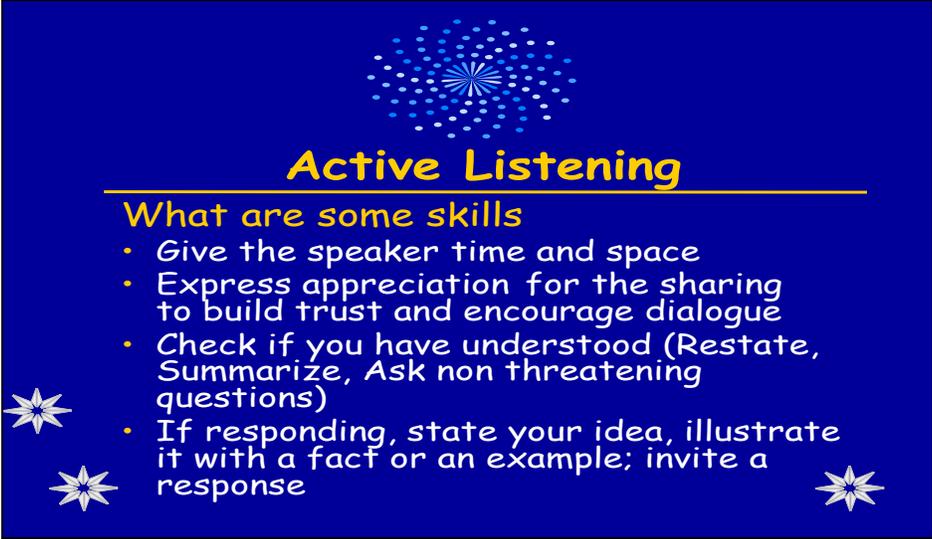
Active Listening

What are some of the barriers?
- Mentally preparing our own comments
- Preconceived ideas
- Wandering minds
- Hearing through our own perspectives

When we are in the midst of serious discussions that require our full attention, many things can interfere. These include such barriers as:

1) Mentally preparing our own comments, either as rebuttal to the person speaking or because we know our turn is coming up,

2) Believing that we know what the other person is going to say before they say it,

3) Being present in meetings when we have too many other things on our mind, or

4) Letting our own experiences color what someone else is saying.

Any one of these alone can cause us to lose focus and to miss understanding fully other people's points of view.

Active Listening

What are some skills
- Give the speaker time and space
- Express appreciation for the sharing to build trust and encourage dialogue
- Check if you have understood (Restate, Summarize, Ask non threatening questions)
- If responding, state your idea, illustrate it with a fact or an example; invite a response

Giving the speaker time and space is a form of courtesy that each of us would appreciate having given to us. And since active listening requires that we not be forming a rebuttal in our minds as the other person is speaking, we can use the time and space we give the speaker to form a response to the speaker's comments or questions.

Acknowledging that someone has shared information, a point of view, or an idea with the team with some expression of appreciation is a way to open up the dialogue rather than racing to rebut and possibly shutting down the discussion by polarizing sides.

When you are listening, after the person speaking has finished, it is a good skill to **repeat back to the person in your own words what you think you have heard them say** and ask for confirmation.

Finally, **sharing your own ideas as plainly and simply as possible** helps others to understand your point of view.
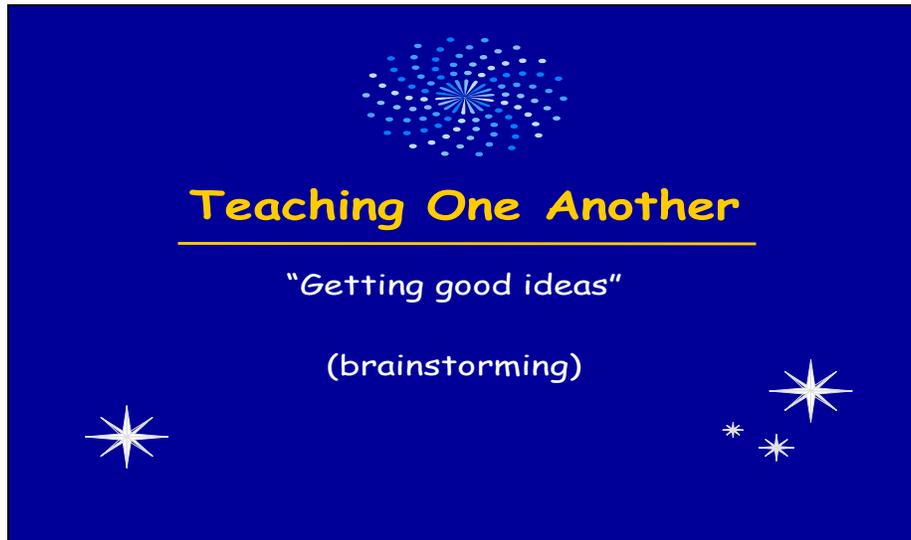
Teaching One Another

"Getting good ideas"

(brainstorming)

Another skill that is important in collaboration is brainstorming. Brainstorming requires team members to see each problem as a barrier that has a solution. Each team member can offer solutions to problems in a systematic way. The idea in brainstorming is to consider as many solutions as possible. Limit the amount of time (usually the best ideas come in the first 3 to 5 minutes). Remember there is no right or wrong. In brainstorming we are looking for quantity over quality.
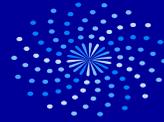
Brainstorming Ground Rules

- No critical judgment is permitted
- Free-wheeling is welcome (the wilder the idea, the better)
- Quantity, not quality, is desired
- Each person shares an idea (round robin)
- Set a short time limit
- Record key words or phrases only

These are the brainstorming ground rules. While they are all important, perhaps the first one, no critical judgment is the most important. When we are trying to get good ideas out on the table we do not want to shut people down by being critical of their ideas.

Suggest to you fellow IEP team members that you use this brainstorming technique the next time you get stuck at an IEP meeting about how to move forward or address a specific issue.

In a good brain storming session you may be surprised by the people who come up with ideas completely outside of their area of expertise. That is, of course, the beauty of brainstorming, it gives people permission to think outside the box!
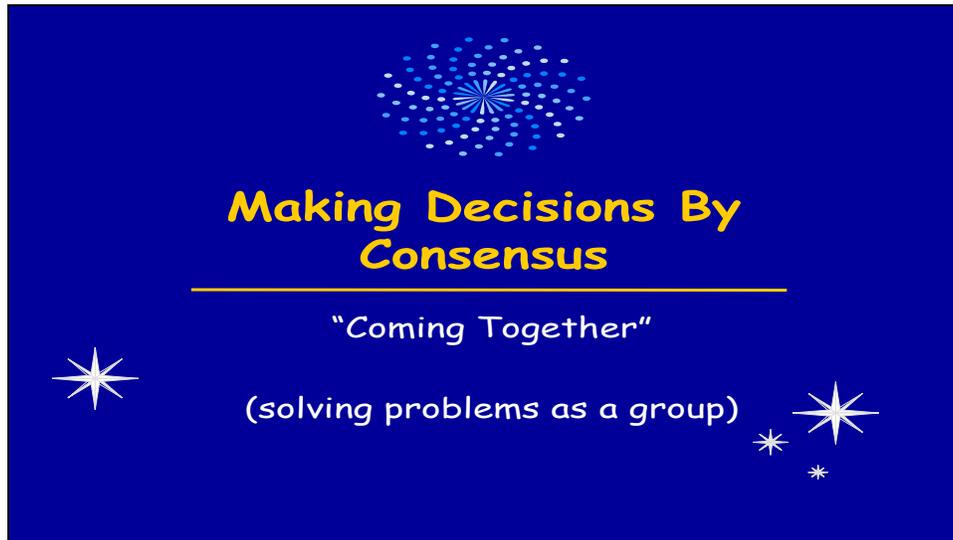
Making Decisions By Consensus

"Coming Together"

(solving problems as a group)

Still another skill vital to collaboration is reaching consensus. Sometimes we think of consensus as a majority vote, when in fact it is not. When we truly reach consensus we are in a win - win situation. Voting and majority rules end up with someone losing and someone winning; often someone is unhappy.
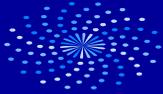
Consensus Ground Rules

- Present your position clearly, logically and respectfully; also listen to each team member's reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point
- Support only those solutions with which you are at least somewhat able to agree
- Seek out differences of opinion
- Involve everyone in the decision process
- Look for the next most acceptable alternative for all members when the team reaches a stalemate

In order to reach consensus it is important to follow these rules. When you review the list on this slide you will see that they include things like being respectful in how you share your ideas, inclusive of everyone around the table and unafraid of asking for people to explain clearly why they disagree or agree with an idea.

The difference between consensus and majority rules (or taking a vote on an issue) is that when majority rules those in the minority feel that they have lost. If they feel strongly that the solution chosen is not a correct one they will have a hard time getting behind it and supporting it.

Finding a solution that everyone can live with will provide better team buy-in.

Try this approach the next time you get stuck at an IEP meeting. Explain clearly why you do not feel comfortable with a team vote and majority rule.

Dealing With Conflict

"A Higher Level of Understanding"

Sometimes before we reach consensus we go through a period of conflict. There is always the possibility of conflict when human beings work together. Instead of thinking of it as conflict, think of it as reaching a higher level of understanding. The key is to have a plan as to how the team will deal with conflict among members. What will we do when there are miscommunications, when someone feels excluded or not valued, or believes strongly that the course of action under discussion is not the right one?

Some conflict may affect the entire team and some may affect only two individuals. If you have a conflict that relates to the entire team, bring it up with the team and put it on the agenda. When it is primarily between two people, the conflict can best be resolved directly between the two people. Whether it is a team level or individual level conflict, it is important to address it in a positive way. There is a first step – acknowledge the conflict. We have given you an example of a plan for team conflict resolution.

Confronting Perceived Conflict

Skill components:
* Eye contact
* "I" statements
* Calm voice
* Invitation to meet
* Relaxed body

Individual conflict resolution is similar to team conflict resolution.

Here is the scenario:

Special education teacher, pushed for time, has independently developed goals and objectives for the student. You, as the general education teacher, are concerned as to how this will be implemented through the class lesson plans. How do we address the potential conflict here?

Here is one way to acknowledge the concern:

Identify the conflict: "_____ , I am feeling uncomfortable with _____. This may be a problem for you too. It would help me if we could set a time when we can meet and discuss this."

This technique allows us to raise our conflicts in a non-confrontational manner.
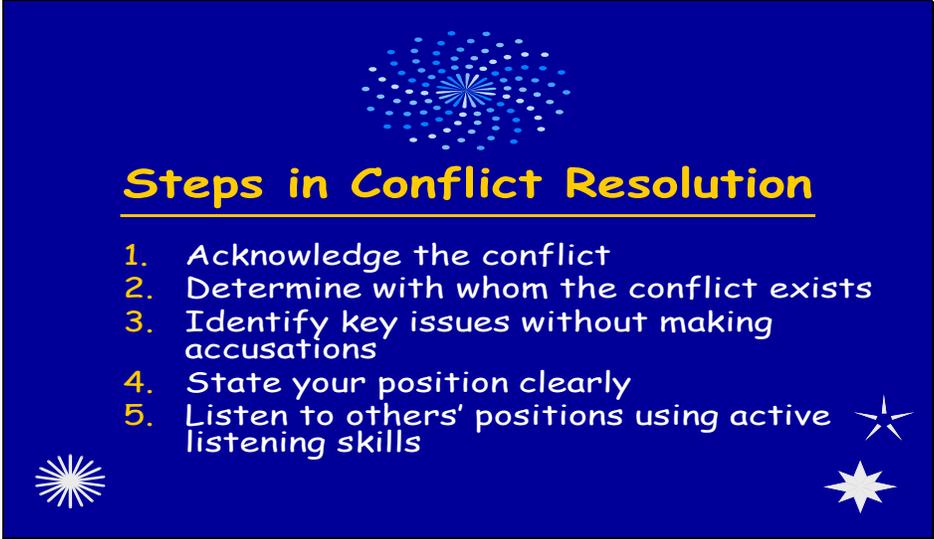
Steps in Conflict Resolution

1. Acknowledge the conflict
2. Determine with whom the conflict exists
3. Identify key issues without making accusations
4. State your position clearly
5. Listen to others' positions using active listening skills

The steps in conflict resolution are outlined on this and the next slide. By following the steps you will

clearly define what the conflict is about, who the conflict is with, and work with that person or as a team to come up with a solution with which you both or the team can live.
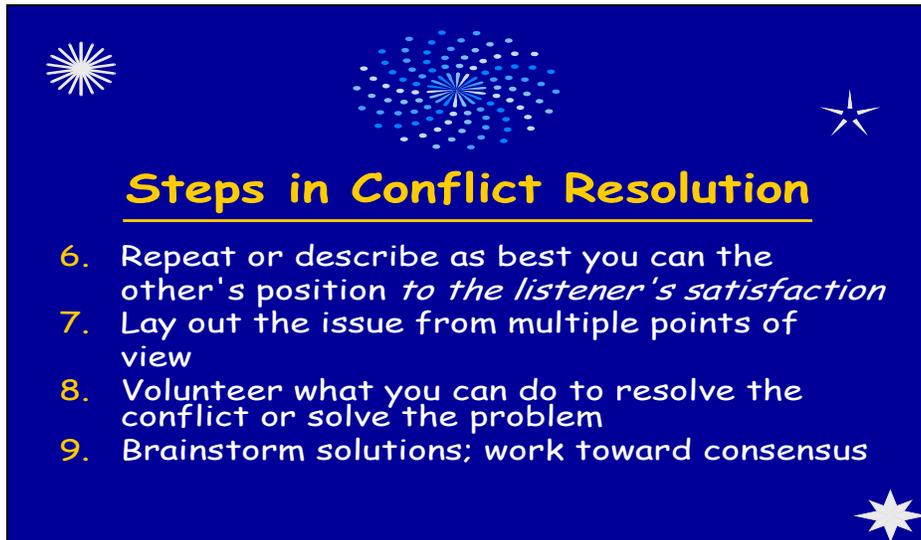
Steps in Conflict Resolution

6. Repeat or describe as best you can the other's position *to the listener's satisfaction*
7. Lay out the issue from multiple points of view
8. Volunteer what you can do to resolve the conflict or solve the problem
9. Brainstorm solutions; work toward consensus

The skills of collaboration come heavily into play when trying to resolve conflicts.

~ active listening

~ releasing roles

~ brainstorming and consensus building

These skills must be intentionally applied in order to reach that higher level of understanding.

Here is a summary of skills for teams to remember when working together.

Remember to:

       Release roles

       Communicate effectively

       Teach one another

       Make decisions by consensus

       Deal with conflict

Collaborative Team Meeting Process

Step One
Assign Team Member Roles

| ❑ Facilitator	❑ Timekeeper
❑ Recorder	❑ Agenda Keeper
❑ Encourager	❑ Jargon Buster

Now let's talk about a tool that can be used to help team meetings be successful. It also helps remind us of the roles of the team members.

COLLABORATIVE TEAM MEETING PROCESS

How many times have you attended a meeting where you felt nothing was accomplished? No resolutions were made and no one could recount what was discussed or what decisions were made. Most of us have attended this type of meeting at least once and walked away feeling frustrated and that our time had not been well used.

Let's take a moment to look at one structured team meeting process. This is just one of many that you may choose to use. The benefits of using a structured meeting process are efficiency and effectiveness.

🗁 Please look at the handout for this session entitled **Team Meeting Worksheet**. In this process, roles are determined. Necessary for all meetings are a facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper. There are other roles that may be assigned as well. The facilitator directs team members through each agenda item, the recorder keep a record of what is discussed, decided and actions to be taken, and the timekeeper let's the team know when time has run out for each agenda item so that the meeting moves along and all agenda items can be covered.
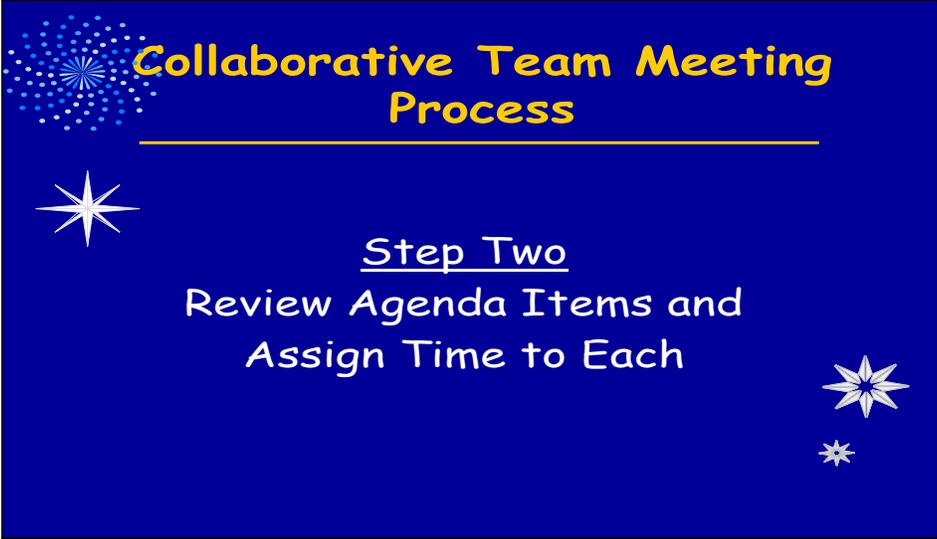
Collaborative Team Meeting Process

Step Two
Review Agenda Items and
Assign Time to Each

The next step is a practical one of reviewing the agenda to see that all issues have been listed. If team members raise issues that are not on the agenda the team needs to decide if they will be covered at this meeting. The team should also estimate how much time should be allotted to each issue or agenda item. The time keeper is then responsible to help the team follow the times set.

Collaborative Team Meeting Process

<u>Step Three</u>
Conduct Team Meeting

- Celebrate

- List issues

- Brainstorm and reach decisions by consensus

At the beginning of any collaborative team meeting it is a good idea for team members to share celebrations. This provides an opportunity for meetings to begin on a positive note and for team members to get to know each other a little better. Remember, it is by getting to know each other that trust is built on a collaborative team.

As each item is discussed, the team decides if brainstorming is needed. In order to keep all team members invested in decisions made by the team, a process for reaching consensus is used.

Collaborative IEP Team Process and Skills: in Summary

- Collaborative IEP teams include all team members as equal participants in the IEP process and the development of the IEP.

- Collaborative IEP teams learn about, practice and use collaborative skills.

- Collaborative IEP teams may use a team meeting process to keep meetings focused, productive and successful.

The Way
Things Are

Points to
Ponder

The Main
Idea

Lessons
from Nature

Lessons From
Nature
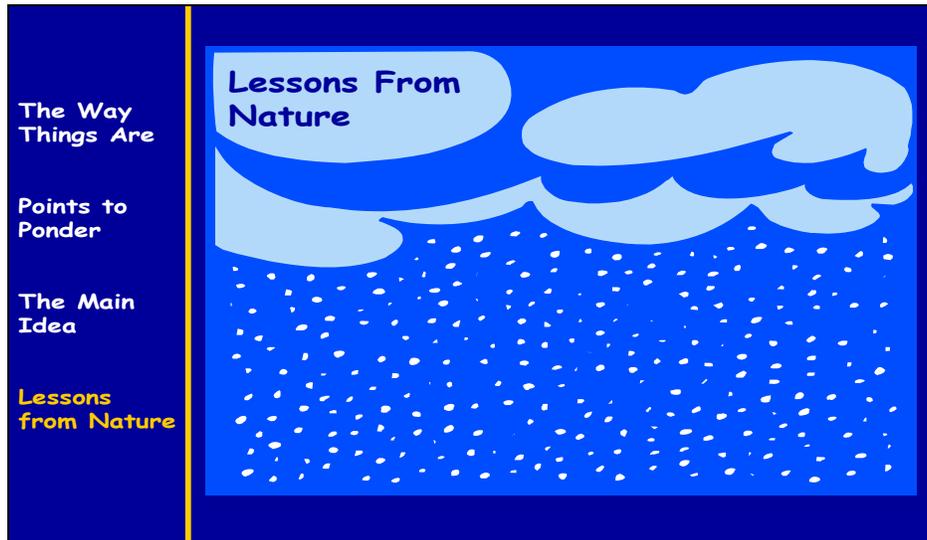
LESSONS FROM NATURE

🗁 Please review the story for this session, entitled "A Flock of Birds," from Wisdom Tales from Around the World, collected by Heather Forest.