

Resolving Differences through Collaboration



Because teachers and parents are individuals, there will be times when there are differences of opinion.



- Differences of opinion, or even conflict, are not in themselves a problem. What is important is how it is handled.
- Genuine interest in finding out about the parents' view of the child's needs is important.
- Sometimes there are constraints in what a school can offer, particularly in the area of resources — people, materials, or time.
- Conflict can be an opportunity for true solution-based collaboration, as parents and teachers brainstorm possibilities: (e.g. peer support, volunteer time, donated materials, or fund-raising for specialized equipment).
- When differences of opinion do arise, it is important to listen to concerns, explore common interests, focus on strengths, and seek solutions.
- Some strategies that may be helpful include:

- See each child as an individual – Children, including children with disabilities, are all different. Be careful not to view a child with a disability as “one of a group” of a certain disability. It may not be an accurate view.
- Pay attention to the long and short-term goals and dreams parents have for their child – Parents will have their child for a life-time; a teacher has the child for five hours a day for a year. As much as possible, look for ways to address the parents' goals through the curriculum.
- Look at the whole child – A strength-based approach allows parents and teachers to see the whole child, with his or her unique gifts.
- Share knowledge – Parents need to feel that they know enough about what and how their child is learning that they can feel confident that their child is receiving an appropriate education.
- Talk about things proactively – Knowing what is coming gives parents an opportunity to ask questions or discuss their concerns. It also is a strong indicator of the teacher's planning for their child.
- Present available options – When there are different viable options for learning, make parents aware of these. Choice is important in helping people feel a sense of ownership.
- Regular commitment with home can support positive relationships.

- To help resolve differences through collaboration other key skills include: communication skills, problem-solving or solution-finding skills, and negotiation skills.
- We can develop skills to minimize the occurrence of conflict by building relationships, developing trust and collaborating with others. When issues do arise, we can also use our skills to actively listen to concerns, explore common ground, focus on strengths and seek collaborative solutions.

