

# Effective Partnership in Special Education Advocating in Harmony



Effective Partnership 10-07

**This training was developed in partnership with the  
Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services  
and the Parents' Place of Maryland**

With contribution by the Partners for Success Resource Center,  
Anne Arundel County Public Schools



## **Participant Outcomes**

Participants will understand the importance of partnership and advocacy.

Participants will understand the steps to effective partnership which include:

- Effective communication;
- Effective organization and preparation; and
- Effective participation in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process.

# Partnership

Two or more individuals in a relationship working towards a common goal



# Advocacy

Webster's definition:

1. To plead another's cause
2. To be in support of something
3. To speak or write in support of



# Why Partnership and Advocacy Are So Important

Parent involvement is more important to student success, *at every grade level*, than family income or education.

IDEA promotes and is based upon the concept that “teams” make decisions for the student, and that parents are partners on the team.



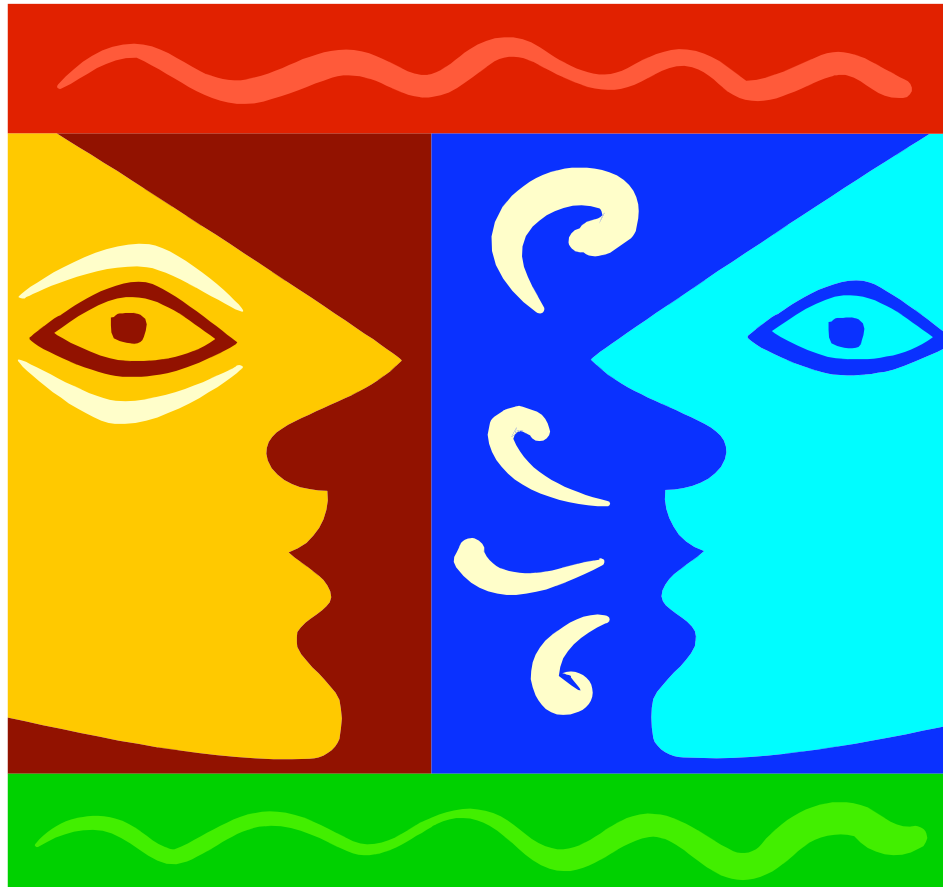
# The Steps To Effective Partnership

## Advocating in Harmony

1. Effective Communication
2. Effective Organization and Preparation
3. Effective Participation in the IEP Process



# Effective Communication



# Components of Effective Communication



Expressing your thoughts and feelings

Tuning into body language — non-verbal messages

Listening for the words and feelings

Understanding the role and perspective of the other members

Using assertive communication techniques without being adversarial

Being able to clarify the message or intent of communication



# Assertiveness is...

- A positive way of communicating your needs and feelings
- Identifying what you think your child needs, communicating those needs to the team, with information or observations to support your decision
- The recognition that each individual has rights
- Not being intimidated
- Not aggressiveness
- At the heart of effective advocacy



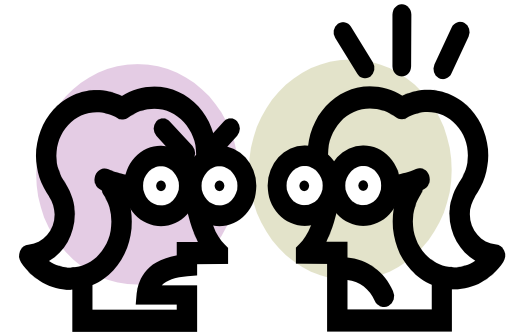
# Characteristics of an Assertive Person



- Willing to disagree in order to express his/her point of view
- Feels free to make choices
- Takes responsibility for getting his/ her needs met
- Asks questions without fear
- Uses direct eye contact
- Wants to be heard... and is willing to listen
- Able to ask for help without feeling dependent
- Communicates a positive self-image
- Does not allow status to intimidate him/ her
- Maintains a strong sense of self-worth and self-respect

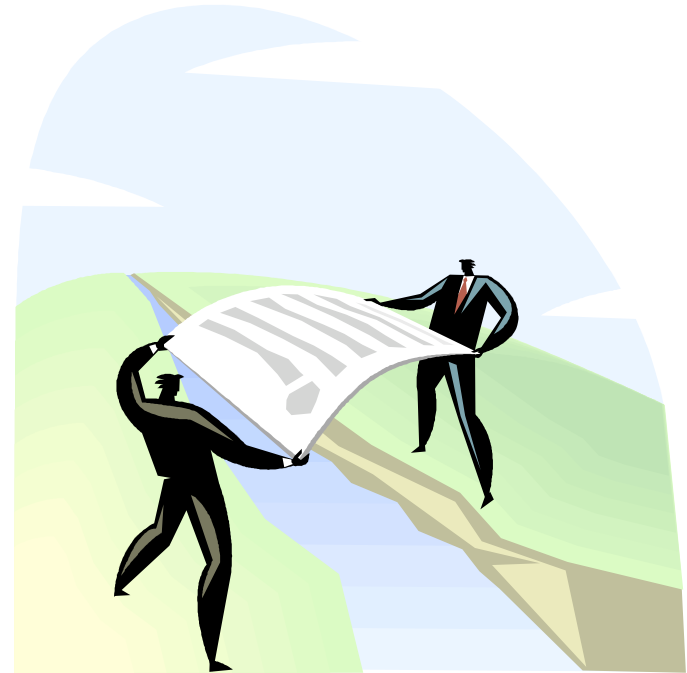
# ***Barriers that Create Adversarial Communication***

- Using sarcasm
- Criticizing and finding fault
- Blaming and shaming others
- Bullying and patronizing team members
- Being unwilling to listen to the opinions expressed by others
- Not speaking up or participating in the meeting



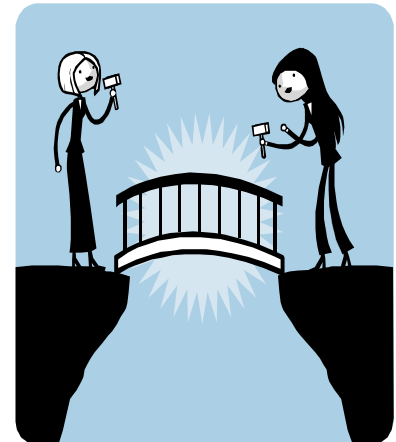
# Bridges to Communication

Communication bridges are positive exchanges between parents, teachers and everyone involved in the education process.



# Bridges to Improve Communication

- Understanding each other's roles and responsibilities and who to communicate to
- Respecting each other's time and responsibilities
- Setting boundaries of how and when to exchange information, and maintain contact via phone, notes, emails and meetings
- Exchanging information in a positive way
- A mutual desire to inform, discuss, and solve problems - **all focused upon the student's growth and development**



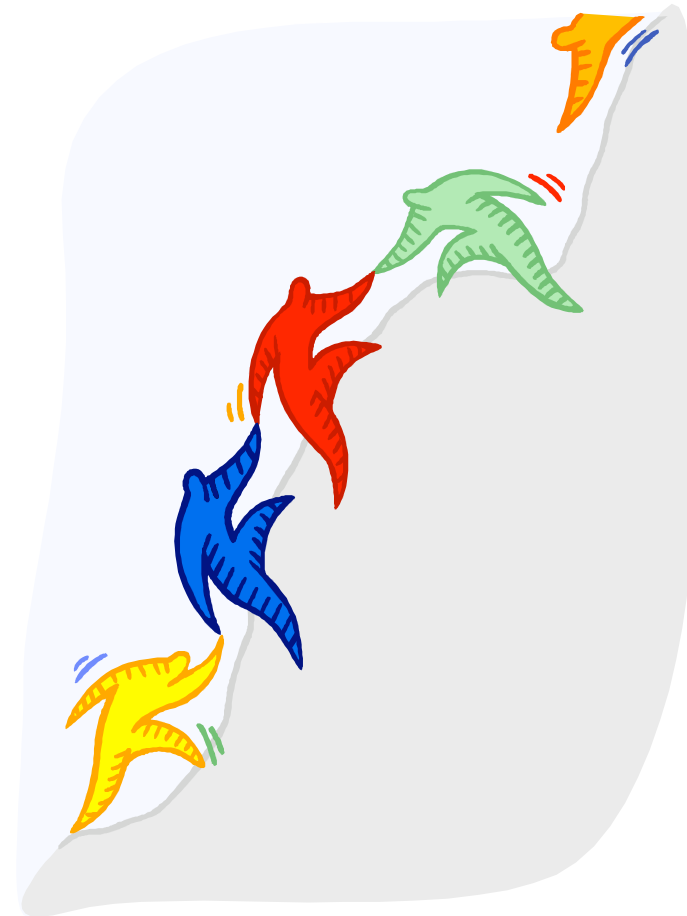
# Barriers that Hinder Communication

- Failure to understand the importance of open, honest communication
- Either parents or school personnel not fully understanding each other's perspective
- Different cultural expectations of parents and teachers
- Negative memories of their own school or less than perfect past experiences
- Defensiveness
- Hesitancy of team members to communicate too often



# Supporting the Partnership through Effective Communication

- Bring a positive attitude
- Build mutual trust
- Realize your value
- Commit to the process



# Effective Organization and Preparation





# It's All About Your Child

- Learn all you can about your child's special needs
- Remember your child's strengths
- Use the knowledge and skills you already have
- Keep current on state and federal laws



**Remember as a parent you know your child best and bring this knowledge to the team!!!**

- Be informed about the process of special education in your school system
- Talk to other parents or members of a support group
- Know your community resources and exchange information about the special education process
- **Get involved!**



# Getting Organized

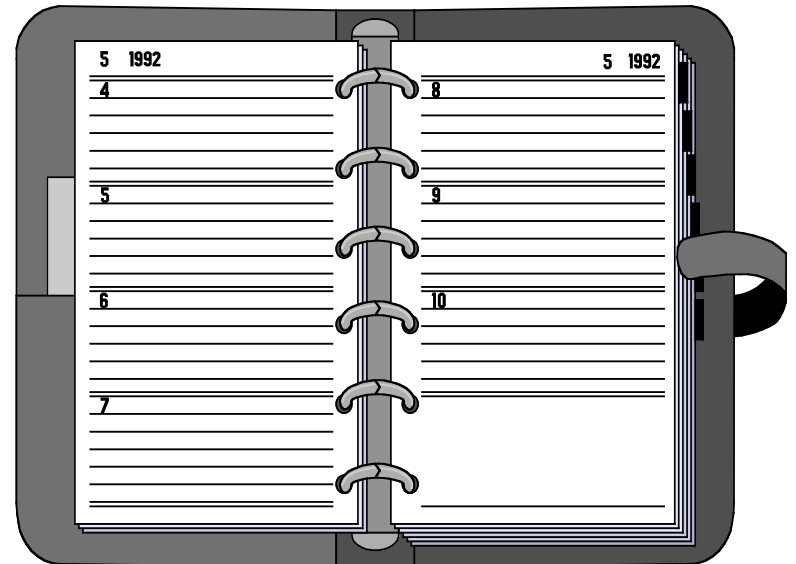
- Develop a file system
- Keep copies of papers
- Write down your child's accomplishments and keep copies of work samples
- Keep notes about your concerns, questions, and answers
- Keep notes on phone calls and visits
- Keep copies of all letters and records



# What records are important?

## *School records:*

- Letters
- Report cards
- Current and prior IEP
- Homework and classwork
- Attendance and discipline
- Therapy reports
- Evaluations
- Anecdotal records and observations



Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

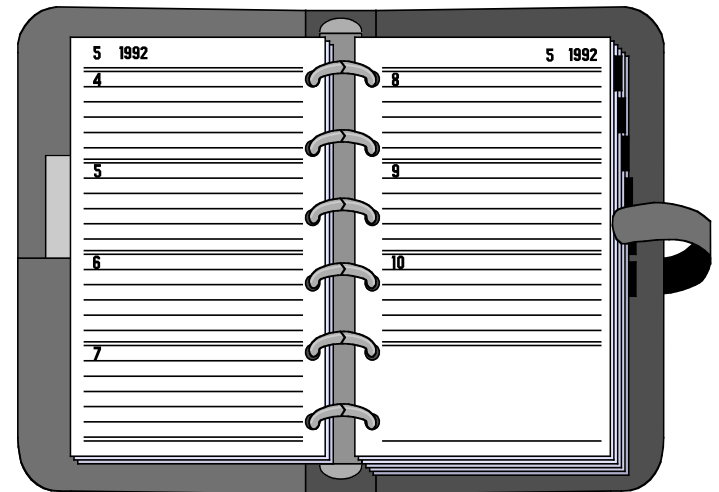
[www.ed.gov/policy/gen/reg/ferpa/index](http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/reg/ferpa/index)

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# What records are important?

## *Parent's records:*

- Doctor reports/medical records
- Telephone calls
- Community information
- Private evaluations
- Private therapy reports
- Progress reports/ work samples



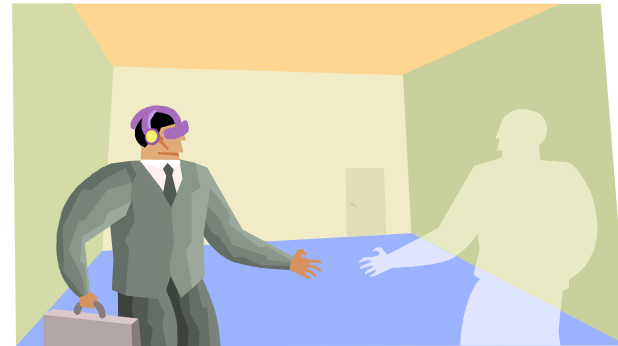
# Preparing for Your Child's IEP Meeting

- Develop and refine your vision for your child
- Review your child's most recent evaluations and other relevant records
- Make a list of all your ideas, concerns, and what your child needs to do to achieve that vision
- Ask for a copy of the proposed IEP, if one has been drafted, to review provide feedback and input



# Supporting the Partnership Through Effective Preparation

- Get up-to-date on laws, interpretation of laws, and new research developments that relate to your child's unique strengths and needs
- Come prepared to share your vision as well as your concerns for your child
- Be prepared to actively listen and to compromise if necessary



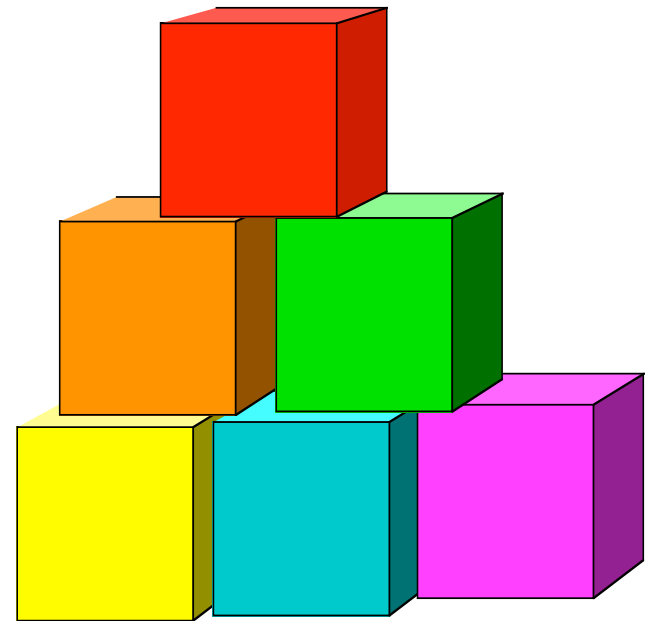
# Effective Participation in the IEP Process





# Building Blocks for Successful Meetings

- Be prepared
- Prioritize the most important issues
- Stay positive
- Refocus the discussion



# At the IEP Table

- Remember you have the right to invite anyone that can help provide insight or has knowledge about your child
- Be prompt
- If appropriate, have your child attend and invite professionals who know your child
- Be specific as possible about your child's abilities and needs
- Stick with the issues at hand and **REMEMBER** the purpose of the meeting is your child's education



- Make sure there is enough time set aside for the meeting to address the issues
- Ask questions!!! Ask questions!!!
- Remain as friendly as possible, separate people from problems
- Request a second meeting if unable to address all areas of concern



# If the IEP is not being followed...

- If you feel the school is not following the IEP...speak up!
- First, start by talking to your child's teacher or the case manager, then the school administrator
- Contact the director of special education
- Request a Facilitated IEP (if available)
- Follow your parental rights/procedural safeguards regarding resolving disagreements



# Supporting the Partnership Advocating in Harmony



- **Effective Communication**
- **Effective Organization and Preparation**
- **Effective Participation in the IEP Process**

The special education process can be a long partnership. You may be working with the IEP team for many years. Stay positive, focused and keep the lines of communication open.

