

Overview:

The 11-year training partnership between the Department of Education and the Conflict Resolution Center of Iowa, LLC (CRCI) is continuing. This partnership, and the expertise professionals and parents have received through CRCI's training programs, is one reason that Iowa is **number one** in the nation with the fewest special education hearings, complaints and mediations. Our long-term goal is to get differences resolved early to even further reduce the need for formal, legally binding dispute resolution processes. RESPECT, (Recognizing Everyone's Strengths through Peacebuilding, Empathizing, Communicating and Trustbuilding) is intended for professional and parent members of IEP, IFSP and Child Study Teams. It aims to strengthen team member relationships and get differences addressed and meaningfully resolved early on so as to enhance student learning. Mediation training provides the skills necessary for persons to facilitate difficult conversations between parents and educators, and resolve differences **before conflicts escalate and formal, legally binding processes are called into play**. The Conflict Resolution Center of Iowa also will provide its program called "Creating Solutions" for parents in 2006-07. The training programs are described below. Testimonials from participants in past programs are also included.

RESPECT

Recognizing Everyone's Strengths by Peacebuilding, Empathizing, Communicating and Trustbuilding

Long-term Goal:

The primary goal of this four day, 30-hour training program is to help educator and family members of IEP, IFSP and Child Study Teams meaningfully resolve differences in order to reduce the need for legally binding preappeals, resolution sessions and due process hearings. A second long-term goal is to enhance learning for students receiving special education services by respectfully and creatively building and growing relationships among team members.

These goals are based on the theory that the power of a team to produce results that will meet student, educator and family needs is rooted in the quality of the relationship among team members. Moreover, the quality of these relationships is dependent to a large extent on the way team members work collaboratively to bridge differences -- it isn't necessary for disagreements to reach a dead-end!

Short-term Goals:

We are teaching team members how to:

1. Engage with each other constructively and from the heart so that differences and/or problems can be addressed and resolved in a way that builds, grows and preserves relationships.
2. Meaningfully resolve conflicts by going beyond traditional approaches to conflict resolution that are centered in problem solving and in improving the techniques of communication.
3. Be "facilitative participants" in team meetings.

Some AEAs have arranged for 2-units of graduate credit to be awarded for this course

Comments from past participants:

Great job! So pertinent to what we do in Special Ed.! Everyone needs this training, especially administrators.

The trainers were all great and personable. Excellent materials, style, knowledge, and pace.

I really enjoyed the variety and manner in which the material was presented. I truly appreciate being invited and included in the training. I feel a shared sense of purpose with all of those in attendance during this time.

I can't say enough about this respect training; it all hit home and I want more.

Mediation Training

Conflict is a natural and inevitable part of life. Simply stated, it occurs when people decide that their differences are just “too much to bear.” When this happens, misunderstandings, arguments or disputes follow, but this doesn’t have to box people in to legal procedures. When individuals in conflict are unable to resolve it themselves, an impartial third party who facilitates dialogue and eventual problem solving — a mediator or resolution facilitator — helps them talk and listen to each other, and helps them make the decisions necessary to improve their situation.

It is desirable to resolve conflict at the earliest possible time to keep it from escalating to the point where more formal and legally binding processes now mandated by IDEA 2004 come into play. This is the rationale behind the program of introductory and advanced mediation training. The program will teach participants how to use third-party mediation skills, both formally and informally, to keep conflict among parents, students and educators from escalating to harmful proportions. It will also teach participants how to use mediation and resolution facilitation skills to help people solve the problems that keep them from working together effectively and that interfere with the goal of helping children.

Introductory Mediation Training

Goal:

This 28-hour course will help participants learn to use mediation skills to help persons with differences in PK-12 education have the difficult conversations necessary for meaningful conflict resolution. It will help participants improve their negotiation skills, learn mediation skills, and learn how to use those skills to manage conflict, prevent unnecessary conflict, and improve working relationships. It is a practical skill-building class utilizing role-plays, exercises, discussions and trainer presentations to achieve the learning objectives. The emphasis throughout will be on conflict situations that arise in PK-12 education. This training will be useful for persons wishing to improve their ability to address and resolve conflicts informally and for persons wishing to become AEA resolution facilitators.

Comments from past participants:

This training was very thoroughly prepared and appropriately paced for adult learning styles.

Good leadership!

Bravo! One of the best courses I've had at any level. Useful in many ways.

I found this to be extremely valuable training. Those of us who work in people professions need these skills. Keep promoting this training – the world needs this!

Very thorough, I liked the structure and continuous opportunity for practice. I also appreciated the “real world” examples.

I thoroughly enjoyed this training. Lots of hands on – role-playing was excellent. I can apply these skills to a variety of situations.

One of the best trainings I've had in 20 years of being with the AEA. This was a wonderful use of my time. I learned much that I can use.

Advanced Mediation Training

Goal:

This 28-hour course will help participants build on and practice the skills they developed in introductory mediation training. New topics such as mediator ethics, the impact of mediator “presence” and questioning theory and techniques will be introduced. Certain challenges mediators and resolution facilitators face will be considered in depth. The focus will be on conflict situations that arise in PK-12 education.

Comments from past participants:

Once is not enough! This needs to be done again in order for us to continue growing as resolution facilitators.

As always the training was wonderful! You all do such a nice job of putting all the pieces together.

Advanced Mediation Training, Part II

Goals:

The goals of this 14 hour advanced mediation and resolution facilitation training program are to further develop:

1. Mediation knowledge and skills gained through CRCI’s introductory and Part-I advanced mediation training programs, and through participants’ experiences;
2. Participants’ confidence as mediators and resolution facilitators; and
3. Participants’ abilities to intervene in conflicts as mediators and resolution facilitators.

Comments from past participants:

Thanks - another useful training session for me. This smaller group was especially comfortable. I think reviewing participants’ experiences with mediation in the AEA was a particularly helpful way to start and may be something that would be useful in the agency.

Thanks for the great training. I will be a more effective facilitator in my role with school personnel, parents, colleagues and personal relationships.

Mediation Refresher Training

Goal:

This one-day workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to practice and sharpen their mediation skills, learn from each other's experiences as resolution facilitators, and explore a key conflict resolution topic in-depth. Refresher trainings are individually designed based on participants' needs.

Comments from past participants:

We need this kind of ongoing refresher and practice.

I enjoy these refresher trainings. Even if I don't do actual facilitations, I use the skills learned in other aspects of life.

Everything was done very well, nice connections to our reality – practical. Great role- play examples.

Thank you for organizing a practical application of our facilitation skills – we can apply this information every day in our work and personal lives.

Parent/Educator Training

Creating Solutions: Skills to Effectively Resolve Disputes Between Parents and Educators

Goals: This one day program for parents will provide some of the same content that educators receive in introductory mediation and other CRCI training. Its goals are to:

- 1) Make it easier for parents to raise issues that concern them regarding their children's education in a positive way that will contribute to the creation of solutions.
- 2) Increase the likelihood that parents and educators will work together collaboratively in the best interest of students.
- 3) Provide parents an opportunity to learn the same core skills that have been presented to educators in CRCI's mediation and conflict resolution skills training programs.

Comments from past participants:

I feel more empowered to come up with resolutions.

Please keep offering this to parents!

Very enlightening, interesting 2 days of learning – best I've spent in training.

I enjoyed this class very much and would recommend it to others.

Thanks for an enriching day!

Activities were great!

Nice teamwork delivery system.

This was a great reminder of the value of listening