Collaborative Advocacy

Guiding Principles

Supporting the prevention and resolution of disputes through partnership and

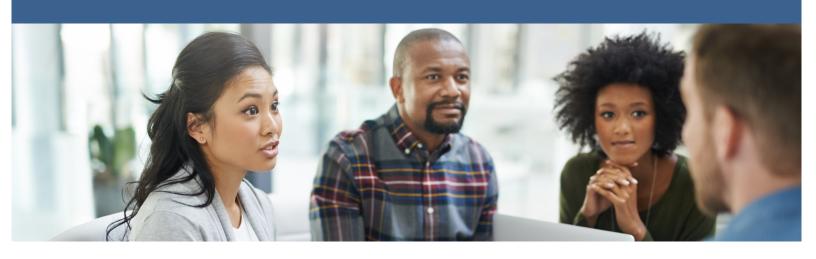
Collaborative Advocacy is an approach to advocating for children with disabilities that utilizes collaborative problem-solving skills and relationship-strengthening strategies to resolve disagreements. This approach can be used by anyone serving as a third-party advocate to focus on improving educational and developmental outcomes for students with disabilities.

Individuals who practice Collaborative Advocacy voluntarily adhere to the following guiding principles:

- 1.) <u>Dignity:</u> Recognize all people have inherent dignity and value as human beings. Promoting dignity includes:
 - a. Treating everyone with respect and civility at all times
 - b. Assuming best intentions
 - c. Recognizing the right of parents and guardians to make informed decisions about their children's educational needs
- 2.) Child-centered: Understand that a child with a disability is at the heart of every special education decision. Child-centered decision-making includes:
 - a. Ensuring that interactions and communication with parents and educators are focused on the child's present needs
 - b. Redirecting the team to the child's needs when the conversation has lost focus
- 3.) Empowerment: Encourage meaningful parent participation in developing the programs and plans. Empowerment can be facilitated by:
 - a. Educating parents about the special education process and procedural safeguards
 - b. Helping parents clarify, prioritize, and articulate their concerns, needs, and vision for their child's education and future to prepare parents to participate effectively in IEP/IFSP meetings
 - c. Helping ensure the parent gathers the information necessary to be fully informed and ready to participate in problem solving as an equal partner
 - d. Modeling collaborative problem-solving skills



- **4.)** <u>Collaboration</u>: Practice collaborative problem-solving skills and strategies to resolve disagreements and disputes. Collaboration includes:
 - a. Recognizing the value of conflict for identifying and clarifying concerns
 - b. Asking questions to identify the interest underneath a position or demand
 - c. Using an interest-based approach to problem solving
 - d. Being open to different perspectives
 - e. Listening for understanding
 - f. Separating people from the problem
 - g. Identifying areas of agreement
 - h. Helping team members identify and evaluate potential solutions
- **5.)** <u>Relationship Building</u>: Recognize the importance of team member relationships and seek to strengthen relationships through effective communication and collaborative problem-solving skills. Relationship-building includes:
 - a. Modeling effective and respectful communication skills
 - b. Encouraging and empowering parents to participate meaningfully in conversations about their child
 - c. Refraining from conduct that would harm the relationship, such as: making disparaging comments to and about others; interfering with or discouraging communication between the family and the school or early intervention provider; encouraging parents to withhold relevant information; or knowingly misleading or misinforming parents or others
- **6.)** <u>Professionalism</u>: Remain professional at all times. Professionalism includes:
 - a. Maintaining regular contact with parents
 - b. Responding to questions and concerns in a timely manner
 - c. Following through with commitments
 - d. Being aware of personal biases from past experiences, and making sure those do not negatively affect interactions
- **7.)** <u>Community Liaison</u>: Connect families with local agencies, resources, and other parents, helping to build a support system within the community. Acting as a community liaison includes:
 - a. Sharing knowledge of various community resources that can benefit families



- b. Referring families to other agencies to ensure whole family support is in place (e.g., mental health services, respite care, health care)
- c. Supporting families to find and organize learning opportunities and support groups
- **8.)** <u>Integrity</u>: Remain honest and trustworthy. Motives are aligned with the child's needs and clearly articulated. Acting with integrity includes:
 - a. Upholding commitments
 - b. Sharing accurate information
 - c. Disclosing conflicts of interest
 - d. Keeping the child's needs as the focus
- **9.)** <u>Competence</u>: Stay informed and knowledgeable about the special education and early intervention processes and regulations in the jurisdictions within which services are provided, understanding the limits of individual experiences. Competency includes:
 - a. Being honest with existing and potential clients about relevant experience and expertise
 - b. Informing existing and potential clients if not competent to handle a specific issue
 - c. Preparing adequately and reasonably to provide the requested assistance
 - d. Completing continuing education courses in special education on a consistent or annual basis to stay informed of developments and changes in the field
 - e. Understanding the limits of non-attorney advocacy as defined by the jurisdiction's regulations concerning the "unauthorized practice of law"
- **10.)** <u>Privacy/confidentiality</u>: Recognize sensitive information concerning a child with a disability must be protected. Protecting privacy includes:
 - a. Obtaining permission before discussing matters with others, including school and early intervention personnel, in accordance with state and federal regulations
 - b. Informing the parent that communications may not be protected by an advocate-client privilege and that advocates may have to comply with lawfully issued subpoenas to appear in a due process or civil court proceeding
 - c. Informing parents and early intervention or school personnel that advocates do not speak for the parents

