

CADRE and JAMS Foundation Present:
Voices from the Field
Interview Clip #4 Transcript – Patricia McGinnis

Marshall: Patricia, you spend a great deal of time talking with parents and educators who are in conflict and who are sometimes may sound pretty upset and adversarial. Are there techniques, ways that you approach those situations that can create a more collaborative tone, a more openness to working together?

Patricia: Quite a few things are possible. Karl Rogers is an influence for me to assist both parties in assuming positive intent of the other. That is sometimes difficult when you're in conflict, but to make assumptions of negative intent doesn't make sense in the situation. If I can help them see that, because both parties care about the child. That's without a doubt. Parents of course care deeply about their children and educators didn't go into teaching because they disliked children. So they have to give each other a little break here and if I can help them do that I think that is one step that is helpful. Another is for them to see conflict in a different way. That adversarial conflict, yes that's difficult and we're trying to reduce that. There is need, however, for conflict that is about differences. We need those difference to have an effective meeting. If everyone agreed, what would be the point? You know, we want these different perspectives throughout the meeting. So to, to accept the difference and discuss it and figure out what's good or may not work, that can be more of a grounded kind of conversation than just attacking the other person's idea. So to see conflict in a, a different way that, that it's needed, its' natural and it's necessary. I can promote some of that when I'm talking with them. One other thing, which is what we heard from our evaluations is how often conflict is about poor communication, misunderstanding. So if I can be crystal clear, at least, in what I'm saying and having them be the same, I can model a way to do that. I think they develop some trust in me, if I can give them my complete attention when I'm listening to them, I can clarify what they say and make sure I fully understand and for them to do that during the session then may give them some ideas of how they can approach difficult situations. It doesn't have to make you crazy, you know, you can just be curious about how did that person form that conclusion and tell me what factors you considered with the decision that you've made about what you think is best for this child. So all of those things. I think staying calm is another factor and I'm told I have a calm voice and interesting in our last

training with mediators, one of our meditators said, 'If your heartbeat gets over ninety beats a minute, you can't think straight.' That's interesting research, I gotta look at that a little bit more. And so staying calm is part of being effective and if they can do that during the session that may be helpful to them to. So I think it's that modeling and that full attention to them listening below the words – it's kind of a way to put it, that you, that I'm not distracted when I'm listening and can give them my full attention. So all of those different ways, I think, can make an impression on people feeling a little more ready to go into a session and not have to get so highly emotional and adversarial that they can't think.