

Delivering an education that is appropriate to the strengths and needs of students receiving special education programs and services is the goal of all partners in special education. The interests of these students are usually best served when conflicts are resolved promptly, without bad feelings, and with minimal stress for all parties. Conflict resolution approaches are useful and effective tools for achieving such a result.

Special Education Advisory Committee

Shared Solutions

A Summary



Conflict Resolution Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Look for solutions
- Focus on the problem
- Take a non-adversarial approach
- Use dialogue
- Focus on the student's interests
- Think that 'everyone can win'
- Focus on change

Don't:

- Look for someone to blame
- Focus on the person
- Take an adversarial approach
- Engage in debate
- Focus on a predetermined outcome
- Think that 'someone has to lose'
- Focus on control

Please contact our Superintendent of Education for more information (toll free) at 1-877-275-7771 ext. 229.

A guide to preventing and resolving conflicts regarding programs and services for students with special needs.

All stakeholders create a culture of learning so that students come first.

This guide addresses conflicts affecting students with special education needs, but the strategies it discusses can be used to resolve conflicts for all students, as well as conflicts that arise in contexts outside of the education system.

The Parent's Perspective

It is important for all those involved in the education of students with special education needs to consider the pressures that can arise for families in adapting to the needs of their child. For some parents, the acknowledgement and recognition of their child's special needs can be very traumatic, and it takes time for them to adapt to the feelings they are experiencing. These feelings can include denial, anxiety and fear. Understanding the experiences that parents may go through with their children as they enter and progress in school can be invaluable in enabling educators to help the student and their parents make the most of their experiences.

The Educator's Perspective

Some students with special needs require the intervention of a number of professionals and para-professionals, and this can create a challenge for the delivery of a special education program by the classroom teacher. It is important for parents to understand that educators must balance many interests in today's classrooms and must use their professional judgment daily to ensure that all students across Ontario receive an appropriate education.



Factors Contributing to Conflict

- Insufficient, wrong, or misunderstood information - Conflicts can arise when people have too little or incorrect information or when they misunderstand the information supplied.
- Miscommunication - Difference in communication styles may lead the parties to misinterpret the intentions, perceptions, or attitudes of another. As well, the parties may not be aware of the way they come across and the impression they are making.
- Differing values - Differing values may mean that the parties have differing and possibly incompatible goals.
- Historical factors - There may be a history of disagreements and/or real or perceived injustices based on the parties' past experiences.
- Structural factors - Structures exist for parents, schools and school boards over which they may have little control. This may limit the range of possible solutions for one or more parties.
- Personal/emotional factors - The need for attention, autonomy, control, power, or recognition may influence the behaviour of one of more parties.

Possible Solutions

- Providing complete and/or accurate information
- Identifying what has been misunderstood and providing clarification
- Listening actively, asking questions to identify and understand assumptions that may need to be corrected, and validating the feelings of others
- Expressing how one feels and demonstrating empathy
- Identifying and respecting others' core values while showing and seeking flexibility in areas where compromise is possible
- Keeping an open mind and showing patience and willingness to listen and work to reestablish trust
- Showing empathy for frustrations, providing help with negotiating procedural obstacles, and being flexible (e.g., scheduling meetings at times that are convenient for parents, wherever possible)
- Identifying the possible needs of participants and attempting to respond to them in appropriate ways while serving the student's best interests