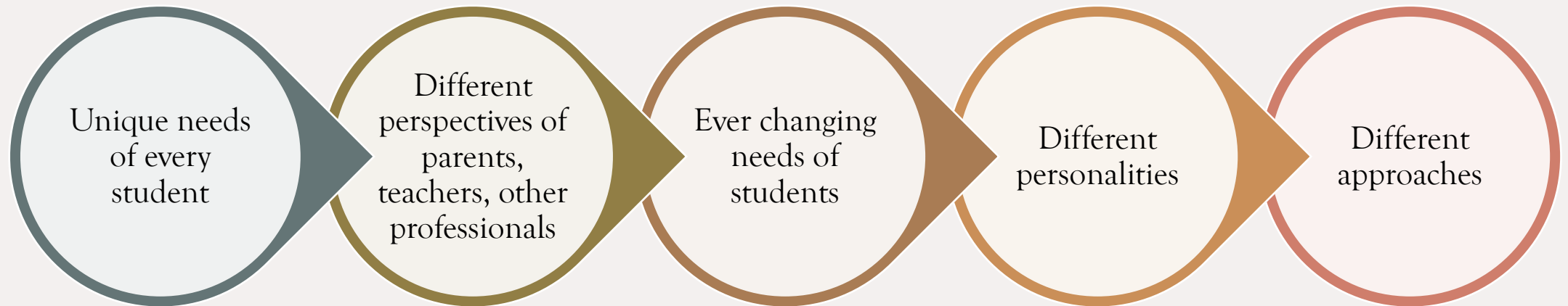


Special Education

CONFLICT RESOLUTION
STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS:

NAVIGATING SPECIAL
EDUCATION
CONVERSATIONS

Conflict is a Fact of Life – The Special Education Arena is Fertile Ground for Conflict



In General, Conflicts in SPED Involve



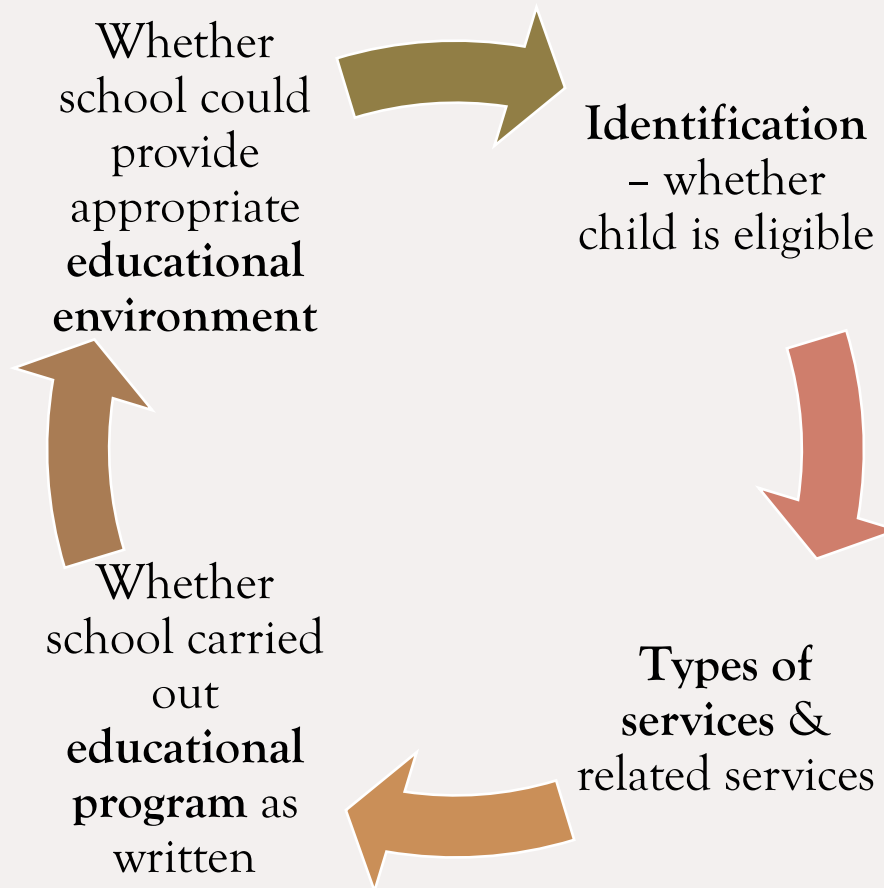
DESIGN



DELIVERY



RELATIONSHIPS



KEY ISSUES

Parent does not want their child evaluated.

The child is found ineligible for services. Parent disagrees.

Parent would like additional assessments from outside professionals, school doesn't agree.

Parent provides information from outside professionals and requests reimbursement for costs.

The school recommends placement in a special education classroom and the parent requests placement in a general education class

Parents disagree with the placement and requests private school placement

The parent wants increased number of hours for a specific service

Parent requests additional services that are not recommended

Parents request a specific professional to provide the services and feels no one else is qualified

Amount of related services and who the provider will be

Transition services – assessments, areas of vocational service

Additional assessments for communication or functional behavior

Compensatory education services for failure to provide FAPE

The school shows the child is making progress, but the parent feels the child isn't

IEP goals to more accurately reflect student needs and level of performance

Parent feels their child isn't being treated fairly (in relation to learning or behavioral differences; or how child is being treated by others)

Improved communication among team members

Early Mediation

Keeps the focus on
the needs of the
child

Preserves and
strengthens
relationships

Is faster and less
stressful

Promotes creative,
customized
solutions

Gives parents a
voice

Helps schools
better understand
family perspectives

Reduces the risk of
escalating into a
legal battle

Can help build
trust

Early Mediation vs. Mediating Before a Hearing

EARLY MEDIATION

- Parties are more open to problem solving
- Focus on interests
- Listening, empathy, perspectives
- Look to the future
- More creative problem-solving and solutions
- Temporary or trial solutions may be applied
- More likely to improve the working relationship

MEDIATING AFTER DP REQUEST

- Parties are more positioned
- Focus on the law
- Listening, application of the law
- Look at what happened in the past
- More focus on whether law supports request
- May improve working relationship
- Final solutions are required or hearing is the next step

Encouraging Early Mediation

The needs of the child can be met quickly

Emotions can be de-escalated promptly

What's working can continue working, what isn't working can be addressed thoughtfully, safely, and collaboratively



Working through disagreements in early mediation, helps to resolve the issues quickly and may avoid escalation including making solutions more flexible.

Mediation can also create, maintain, or even strengthen a partnership between school and parent



You might be experiencing...

- ♦ Feeling like your concerns aren't being heard
- ♦ Disagreeing about services or supports
- ♦ Confusion about what your child is entitled to
- ♦ Communication that feels rushed or unclear
- ♦ Past experiences affecting current trust

With a Few Basic Concepts Conflicts Can be Prevented or Quickly Resolved



Put yourself in charge of you. Think first before speaking or writing.



Listen first to be heard...Listen deeply with empathy and understanding



Be mindful of nonverbal communication



Avoid using words that trigger negative emotions & criticism



Express your feelings honestly and respectfully

Beware of the Amygdala Hijack

DEEP INSTINCTS → BAD COMMUNICATION

- Fear *“I can’t help you!”*
- Grief *“I told you already!”*
- Loss *“I’m too busy!”*
- Flight *“How should I know?”*
- Fight *“I can’t believe you did that?”*
- Stress *“SO, WHAT!”*
- Deceive
- Hide
- Submit



REMEMBER NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION MAY CHANGE OR CONFLICT WITH A VERBAL MESSAGE

93% of Communication is Nonverbal

- Voice
- Tone
- Body language





- S Face person Squarely
- O with Open posture
- L Lean forward
- E Eye contact (appropriate without staring)
- R Relaxed body stance, nodding to indicate you are attending

Remain Neutral

DON'T FORM AN OPINION ABOUT WHAT
THEY ARE SAYING... LISTEN DEEPLY AND TRY
TO UNDERSTAND THEIR PERSPECTIVE



Share Your Ideas Without Being Critical



Use “I” statements



Share what’s important to you



Remain calm



Ask questions to keep the conversation going



State your feelings – “I feel _____



State the action – “When people _____



State the reason – “Because _____

ASK OPEN
ENDED
QUESTIONS TO
START THE
CONVERSATION

“Tell me more about ...”

*“Can you describe how
that process works?”*

Tools You Can Use in Conversations with the School

Grounding or
Centering yourself
emotionally

Notice what you're
feeling (frustration,
fear, urgency)

Ask: *"What does my
child need most right
now?"*

Listen to
understand (**even if
you disagree**)

Ask questions
instead of making
assumptions

Focus on your
child's needs (not
positions)

Take notes during meetings

It's okay to ask for time to
think before responding

Pause before
reacting

Helpful Phrases for Parents to Use

“Can you help me understand how that decision was made?”

“I’d like to make sure we’re focusing on what my child needs most”

“Can we explore a few different options?”

“I need a moment to process this”

A Few Guidelines



Criticizing is confrontational... it will lead to conflict

Start statements with “I” instead of “you”
Avoid using words like “always” and “never”



Don't criticize, blame, or judge... describe what is happening using facts



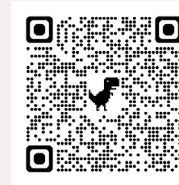
Be clear about what you need and don't talk about what you don't need



Be polite and show appreciation (“please”, “I would appreciate it if you would....”)

If You Want Support, Here's How to Get It

- ♦ Step 1: Review Hawai'i DOE Dispute Resolution Website
<https://hawaiipublicschools.org/school-services/parent-rights/dispute-resolutions-and-mediations/>
- ♦ Step 2: Contact The Mediation Center of the Pacific
 - We recommend filling out the **SPECIAL EDUCATION MEDIATION REQUEST FORM**
 - <https://hawaiipublicschools.org/DOE%20Forms/Special%20Education/AlternativeDisputeResolutionForm.pdf>
 - At any point you can contact MCP directly at mcp@mediatehawaii.org or 808-521-6767
 - Following receipt of mediation request, MCP staff will follow-up and begin scheduling the mediation
- ♦ Parents can also request to include an advocate to help them through the process



Key Takeaways for Parents

You are your child's strongest advocate

Conflict is common—and can be navigated

You don't have to handle it alone

Early action creates more possibilities

Your voice matters