

How to Succeed and Communicate with the Most Challenging Personalities

How to get along when you don't get along

Special Education Mediation Services





SPECIAL EDUCATION MEDIATION SERVICES

**How to Succeed and Communicate with
the Most Challenging Personalities**

How to get along when you don't get along



Scenario



Charlie Jones



Mrs. Jones



Liz



Ms. Smith

- Charlie Jones (student)
10th grader, OHI qualification, fully included since Kindergarten, immersed in state core curriculum, not diploma seeking.
- Mrs. Jones (Mom)
- Ms. Smith (Special Educator)
- Liz (1:1 aid)

Good morning
Mrs. Jones, Charlie, Liz. Why
don't we step into this office
so we can talk, and Charlie can
take his medicine.



Mrs. Jones, these worksheets are examples of the level of difficulty the students are expected to be able to master in this class. I'm having a difficult time modifying them so that Charlie can grasp the concepts.



Ms. Smith, these are hard, but I have learned a lot over the years, and I believe any curriculum can be modified for my son. Charlie loves science and I am confident that he can grasp the concept that carbon monoxide is bad for our air, the trees, and the overall environment. And he can learn the types of things that produce carbon monoxide. I'd like for you to focus on the macro-level concepts with Charlie, not the chemical reactions and compounds.





Ms. Jones, what are you doing? Why are you doing this to Charlie?



What do you mean?



Why are you making him do this work, why have you included Charlie? Is it to build social skills and to make friends? Because if that's why, it's not working. He doesn't have any friends.





You had better choose your words more wisely and watch what you say about Charlie in front of him!





Is everything ok? Did I do something wrong? Are you guys mad at me?



All right, that's enough! I know what you're thinking, and you can't. This meeting needs to end now. Ms. Smith, go back to your class. Ms. Jones, go home! Charlie, let's take a walk to the smoothie bar.





What Happened?



What Makes Dealing with Challenging Personalities So Incredibly Difficult These Days?

- Stress and exhaustion have caused overwhelming frustration for many – our emotional needs are not being met.
- Civility has left the building- people are mad and frustrated and have given up believing that those they disagree with are acting in good faith.
- There just isn't time to spend on building the skills involved in establishing trust and executing effective communication.

Today's Agenda



- Review the importance of Trust.
- What role we **EACH** play in disagreements.
- Building blocks to moving forward successfully.
- Learn how to overcome the top five barriers to dealing with challenging personalities.

The Importance of Trust in Family-School Partnerships



- A willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is **open, benevolent, reliable, honest, and competent.**
 - Dr. Tracy Gershwin,
School of Special Education at the University of Northern Colorado
- Trust: Choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions.
- Distrust: What is important to me is not safe with this person in this situation (or any situation).
 - Charles Feltman

reliable Benevolent
est competen
le Benevolent re
ent **honest** re
IPETENT reliable
t **TRUST**
reliable Benevolent
est competen
e Benevolent re
nt **honest** re
PETENT reliable



Trust Meter

Make Deposits of Trust

- Kind rather than judgmental
- Helpful
- Reliable
- Curious
- Calm, safe, welcoming, friendly

Keep an Eye on the Reservoir

- When low, go slow and carefully



Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principal that holds all relationships.

- Covey, The Speed of Trust

Musings

1. All educational teams don't have trust, collaboration and strong communication.
2. **ALL** must be willing to do the work.
3. We don't want to be here.
4. This is the ideal v real paradigm.
5. We are all leaders on the team – and not in charge – responsible for everyone in your charge - in our case it is the student.
6. Give away credit and acclaim.
7. Hard work! Setting aside ego and personal crap.
8. Nobody is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes.
9. The only effective way to work with people who are difficult is to show them you care and are willing to listen to what they have to say.
10. We're going to talk about changing the way we think, talk and act in conversations.



Problem Solving = Situation Changing

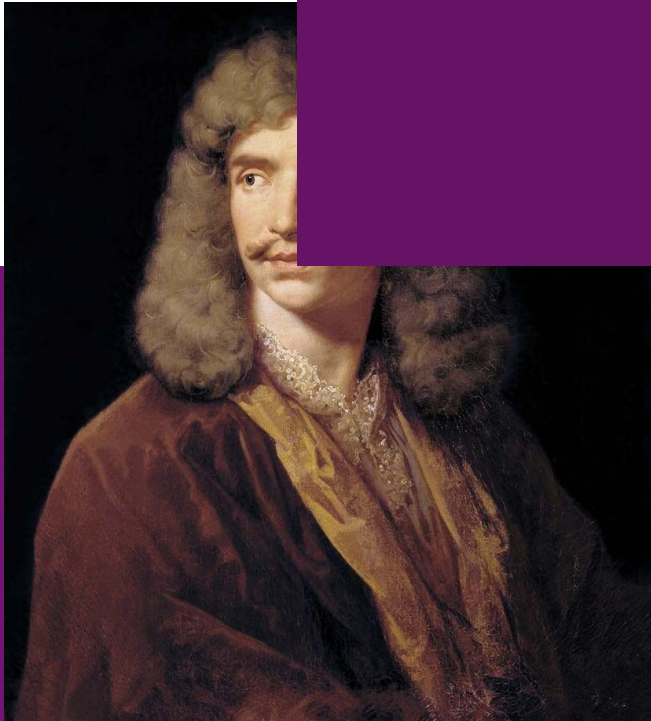


4 Stages of Change

1. Denial
2. Anger & resistance
3. Exploration & acceptance
4. Commitment

7 Dynamics of Change

1. People feel awkward
2. People focus on what they have to give up
3. People feel alone even if everyone is changing
4. People can only handle so much change
5. People are different levels of readiness for change
6. People will be concerned with having enough resources to change
7. If you take the pressure off, people will revert to old behavior



Moliere
1622-1673

*"It infuriates me to be wrong
when I know I'm right!"*



Samuel Clemens
1835-1910

It ain't what you don't know
that gets you into trouble. It's
what you know for sure that
just ain't so.

Empathy



Cognitive

Simply knowing how the other person feels and what they might be thinking. Sometimes called perspective-taking.

If you imagine yourself in your friend's shoes, you know she is likely to be feeling sad, as well as anxious because she relies on that income to pay her student loans. However, having only cognitive empathy keeps you at a distance from your friend. To truly connect with your friend, you need to share their feelings. This is where emotional empathy comes in.

Emotional

When you feel physically along with the other person, as though their emotions were contagious.

This type of empathy can also extend to physical sensations, which is why we cringe when someone else stubs their toe. In this case, you would look inwards to identify a situation where you were similarly anxious about the future. The situation itself need not be identical, as each individual is different. What's important is that the emotions resulting from the situation are the same.

Compassionate

With this kind of empathy, we not only understand a person's predicament and feel with them, but are spontaneously moved to help, if needed.

It is the balance between Cognitive and Emotional Empathy that enables us to act without being overcome with feeling or jumping straight into a problem-solving process.



Brene Brown on Empathy https://youtu.be/1Ewgu369Jw?si=wlwnoZ2n-5qvz_Qs

Conflicting priorities



- Change the way we think
- Are you busy?



Your Priorities, Needs and Feelings



Take time to get to know your own priorities.

- What could you give up?
- What would happen if you were forced to give up each priority?
- How much time does each need? Is there enough time?
- Which is easiest to accomplish?
- Which could be modified? (change)





Their Priorities, Needs and Feelings

- What do you think are their priorities?
- Why do you think they have those priorities? (empathy)
- What would you like to see changed?
- What can you help with?
- What information are they missing?



Priority	Need	Feeling when met	Feeling when not met
Member of school community	Inclusion	Belongs	Othered
Minimize modification	Accomplish job	Competent	Overwhelmed
Mom happy	Harmony	Benevolent	Incensed

Building Blocks to Moving Forward Successfully



- Identify “North Stars”
- Assume positive intent
- Parent and educator partnerships are key to successful results for students with disabilities.
- Value of ALL stakeholders
- Make space for emotions



Partnership

- Parent and educator partnerships are key to successful results for students with disabilities.

Do you believe this to be true?

If so, what are you willing to do to make it work?

- Recognize value of ALL team members.

Student + Parent/caregiver + teacher + principal
+ special education + service providers + support
staff.

Do you believe this to be true?

How do specific words/actions demonstrate that you
are valuing all voices?





**KEEP
CALM
AND
CARRY
ON**

Strategies for dealing with difficult personalities

- Shift from getting emotional, trying to give them insight into themselves, or trying to resolve the past.
- Focus on calming language, the choices they have for the present and future and setting limits on future behavior.

Bill Eddy: *BIFF: Quick Responses to High-Conflict People, Their Personal Attacks, Hostile Email and Social Media Meltdowns*





Four specific strategies for responding to challenging personalities



- Be **brief**
- Be **informative**
- Maintain **friendliness**
- Be **firm**

*Bill Eddy: **BIFF**: Quick Responses to High-Conflict People, Their Personal Attacks, Hostile Email and Social Media Meltdowns*

Words Matter



- Powerful statements
 - I don't know
 - I need help
 - I was wrong
 - I am sorry
- How you say things
 - Thank you for sharing that with me. It must have been difficult.
 - REFLECT: Is it true, is it kind, does it need to be said?

Little things can make a big difference

- Be welcoming and show empathy
- Reflect back before responding.
- Offer understanding.
- Give compliments and show optimism.
- Admit you aren't always perfect





Embrace Diversity in all forms



- Accept that there is value in differences.
- Everyone has a good side to discover and nurture.
- Allow fresh starts.

Ignore static



- Expect that people at times will say unthoughtful and inaccurate things.
- Focus on what is most important and/or what you both can agree on.
- Go to the balcony.

Be Curious



- Remain open to learning.
- Ask genuine questions.

Principles of Persuasion



Helpful principles that influence the ability to persuade:

- **Unity:** A shared identity or purpose.
- **Reciprocity:** People feel obligated to return favors.
- **Commitment (and Consistency):** We have a deep human need to be seen as consistent.
- **Social Proof:** People do what they observe other people doing, because they want to be accepted.

Author Robert Cialdini, primarily from *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*.

Lizard or Monkey



There are two parts of our brain that are called into play when we argue. The Old Brain (the lizard) is the primal ‘fight or flight’ response. All action and not a lot of thought. The other is called the New Brain (the monkey) and involves cognitive (thought) processes such as empathy, reflection and understanding.



Escalation



- Ms. Smith challenges Ms. Jones' (Mom) intent.
- Ms. Jones challenges Ms. Smith
(fight not flight)



Reframing



<p>What was Said by T</p> <p>Ms. Jones what are you doing this to Charlie? I do this work, why have you to build social skills? Because if that's why it doesn't have any friends</p>	<p>What If</p> <p>I'm so glad to hear that you're so dedicated to helping your son succeed. I can see that the idea of inclusion is important to you. Can you tell me a little more about why that is?</p>
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<p>What was said by Mo</p> <p>YOU had better choose to watch what you say at</p>	<p>What if</p> <p>This is a really important conversation and I'm glad we're talking about these things. I'm wondering if this should be a private conversation at another time and perhaps, we should invite the whole team.</p>
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Reframing



What was said by Mom:

Ms. Smith, these are hard, but I have a lot of experience with this. I have a lot of experience with this, and I believe any concept can be modified for my son. Charlie loves science and I am confident that he can learn the types of things that produce carbon monoxide. I'd like for you to focus on macro-level concepts with Charlie, not on chemical reactions and compounds.

What if:

Ms. Smith, it sounds like we both want to support Charlie's love of science. What do you think about helping Charlie to focus on big picture concepts in this class? What could that look like?

Top Five Barriers To Effectively Dealing With Challenging Personalities



1. **Fear** - Our brain doesn't like stress.
2. **Brain drain** – It is a lot of work and wear on our brain.
3. **Button pushing** - we instinctively react strongly to defend what we know is right.
4. **A depleted reservoir** - It is difficult to be kind when others aren't.
5. **Winging it** – We sometimes underestimate the value of preparation.



Plan, Plan Ahead

- Re-frame the disagreement.
- Seek input and draft a proposed agenda
- Establish clear boundaries and expectations.
- Prepare yourself for the emotion.
- Involve a 3rd party neutral (call SEMS!)



Special Education Mediation Services

Grant-Funded

A Grant-Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education (OSE).

Free

Offer FREE mediation, IEP facilitation and collaborative communication training to schools and parents across Michigan.

Federally Mandated

Enables the OSE to meet its obligation under the IDEA to provide statewide mediation services at no-cost to schools and parents to resolve special education disputes.

What We Do



We support students who receive special education supports and services (IFSP/IEP) birth to age 26 by fostering cooperation and effective teamwork among those who plan their education. The overall goal is to help students, parents and educators make decisions that improve education outcomes.



How We Do It

Free • Effective • Fast



Mediation

A FREE neutral mediator leads families and schools through a process to resolve conflict and come to a mutual agreement on a plan to benefit the student and improve outcomes.

Facilitation

We help families and schools navigate complex meetings, stay on task, and make sure all points of view are heard by providing a FREE neutral meeting facilitator.

Contact SEMS



Services

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Michigan Department of Education
Office of Special Education



We are here to support you!

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For more information visit:

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Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

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