

IEP Facilitation: Tips of the Trade

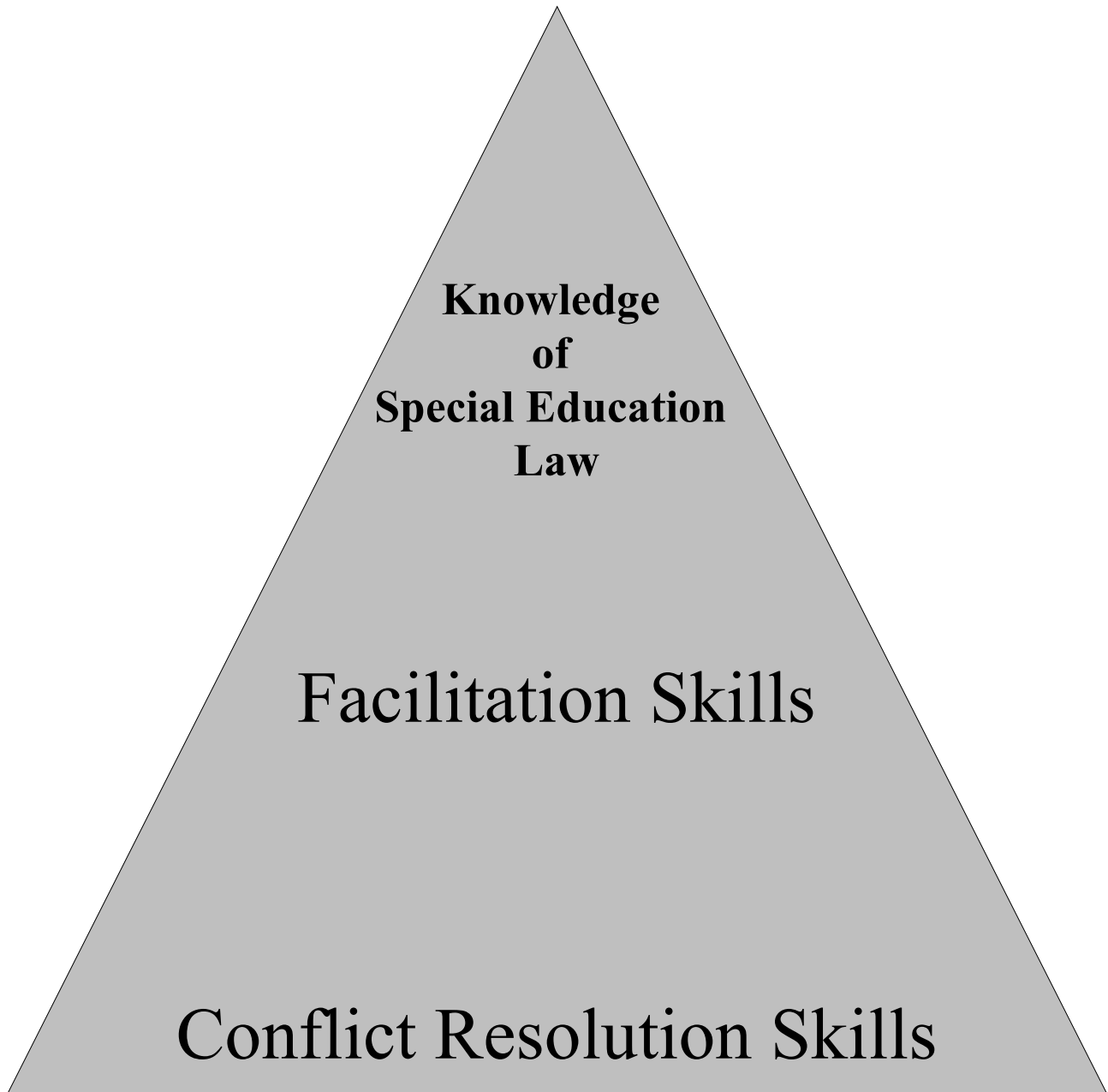
Presented by:
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for the
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IEP FACILITATION SKILLS



FACILITATOR ROLES

<u>External Facilitator</u>	<u>Internal Facilitator</u>	<u>Facilitative Leader</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Is a facilitation expert. ◆ Is <i>not</i> a member of the IEP team. ◆ Is impartial. ◆ Does <i>not</i> participate in content-related discussion or decisions. ◆ Assists the group in making process-related decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Is skilled in facilitation techniques, but is not an facilitation expert. ◆ Is a member of either the school district or a parent advocacy group, but is not a member of the IEP team. ◆ Is impartial to the specific situation, but not impartial to the global impact. ◆ Does <i>not</i> participate in content-related discussion or decisions unless asked by the group. ◆ Assists the group in making process-related decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Is skilled in facilitation techniques, but is not an facilitation expert. ◆ Is a member of the IEP team. ◆ Is <i>not</i> impartial. ◆ Participates in content-related discussion and decisions. ◆ Assists the group in making process-related decisions.

IMPARTIALITY

It is difficult to maintain both actual impartiality and the perception of impartiality. Consider the following techniques:

- 1. Become that party.** Feel the anger and frustration of the party. How has the party's upbringing helped determine who they are today? How are the party's current circumstances affecting how they are acting today? This may provide you with a better understanding of who she is and thus help you find your center of impartiality.
- 2. Look at the Party's Fingernail.** Do you have difficulty with the party's fingernail? Of course not! This illustration is simply to remind everyone that there are attributes to every person that you do not have difficulty. We all have similarities. Find those similarities between yourself and the party. Work from their fingernails to their hands to their arms and so on. Focus on your common ground with the party, not the differences.
- 3. Crack the Goo.** For those who have fantastic imaginations, imagine all of irritation with a party as mustard yellow goo that is oozing from their head to their toes. Let the goo ooze as long as you feel irritated. Then, gradually, imagine the goo hardening into a shell on the party. When you are ready, imagine the shell cracking away from the party, along with your irritations. You will meet the party anew and free of irritation.
- 4. Don't Take the Parties' Feelings Personally.** Simply stated, the party's feelings are not your responsibility. You are responsible for how you are acting in the situation and the party is responsible for how she is acting in the situation. Acknowledge her feelings, be compassionate about her feelings, but do not take responsibility for her feelings. When you are responsible for a party's feelings, you are no longer impartial.
- 5. Shift the Perspective.** Imagine the absolute worst conflicted party imaginable. Then compare your current conflicted party. Is the party with whom you are having difficulties as bad as your imaginable party? If not, take heart, it could always be worse.
- 6. Walk-N-Talk.** Take a private walk with the party. The act of walking (i.e. physically moving), getting some fresh air (if appropriate), and changing the environment gets the blood flowing and allows for perspective.

GROUND RULES

Ground rules protect groups from unproductive behavior. In order for ground rules to be effective, the group needs to agree upon (1) each ground rule, (2) who will enforce the ground rules, and (3) the consequences for failing to follow a ground rule.

When creating ground rules, keep the language simple and refrain from using multi-definitional words such as “respectful.” Place the ground rules in a visual manner for the group to consider throughout the meeting (i.e. chalk board, white board, flip chart, hand-out, etc.). Additionally, research shows that the number of items people can hold in short-term memory is seven +/- two. With this information in mind, the following suggested ground rules may be helpful at your next meeting.

Suggested Ground Rules

- One person speaks at a time
- Put ALL cards on the table. (Explain what you want to happen, why you want it to happen, and how it will impact the child)
- Use constructive comments (describe what is happening - negative, indifferent, or positive - *PLUS* a suggestion to improve the situation)
- All decisions shall be attempted to be made by consensus (which means you can “live with” the decision, even if you do not agree to every specific item of the decision)

Consequences of Failing to Follow a Ground Rule

The group must have a discussion about the consequences of failing to follow a ground rule. My favorite consequence is, “Anyone who breaks a ground rule two times in one meeting must bring donuts to the next meeting and may not eat a single donut.” Go ahead, be creative!

Note: A strong facilitator may choose not to use ground rules.

FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

- 1. Timed Talk.** When either the group or an individual talks too much, a facilitator may suggest using the timed talk tool. The facilitator applies the timed talk tool by determining either how long one person may talk at a time or how long the group may talk on a particular topic. Once applied to the situation, the facilitator must maintain the stated time-frame in order to maintain the respect of group.
- 2. Talking Ball.** The talking ball is a tool that limits individuals from interrupting. The facilitator simply provides a ball to the group and no one may speak unless the speaker has the talking ball. This way, the interrupter cannot speak until the ball is in her possession and thus cannot interrupt other speakers.
- 3. Quick-Check-Why.** The quick-check-why tool is helpful when there is not enough time for discussion. The facilitator applies the quick-check-why tool by providing the group with a minute to silently process their thoughts. Then, the facilitator asks each person, “Sally, where do you stand on _____ right now and why? You have one minute.” After the first person provides their commentary, the facilitator continues to proceed in a clockwise manner until the entire group has had an opportunity to speak. By understanding who supports and opposes a proposed solution, and why each member holds their position, the group can focus its time and efforts to attempt to meet the minority member’s interests and thus create consensus.
- 4. Red-Yellow-Green.** This tool requires a red indicator sign, a yellow indicator sign and a green indicator sign, which can easily be made from card stock and craft sticks. This tool is most helpful when the group is continually discussing an issue and the facilitator needs to quickly know if the issue being discussed is either a barrier to consensus or an attempt to achieve perfection. Simply ask the group to vote with their red, yellow and green indicator signs whether they fully agree with the proposition (green), whether they agree with the proposition with reservations (yellow), or whether they will block the proposition until their concern is met (red).
- 5. Talking List.** When too many people want to participate in the discussion, the facilitator may employ a talking list, which is simply a list placed in a conspicuous place detailing who is currently talking, who is the next person to talk, and so on.
- 6. Celebrate Success.** Celebrate every success the group achieves. Go ahead, be a goof.
- 7. Invite Contributions.** When specific group members are too quiet, invite them to provide their input. Sometimes group members feel they need permission to speak. By inviting them into the conversation, they may provide valuable input they otherwise may not have contributed.

FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

Continued

8. **Humor**. Use humor as appropriate. Keep the meeting light and respectful.
9. **Processing Time**. Every individual processes information in different ways. Some people process information as they talk - this person is called an external processor. Others need time to properly process information by themselves - this person is an internal processor. Some participants need quiet time to process information.
10. **New Information Only**. Large groups are challenging - especially when members of the group feel the need to share their individual opinions after every different opinion shared. During these times, a good facilitator will ask the person who wants to provide feedback if the information is new or if it replicates another's previously shared thoughts.
11. **Parking Lot**. The parking lot is a white board, flip chart, or overhead, where off-topic areas can be placed for discussion at a later date. The parking lot reminds individuals that the agenda will be followed unless the group, and not a single individual, changes the direction of the meeting. It also provides visual confirmation that the topic will be discussed at a later time.
12. **Time-out, Reframe, Move-on**. The facilitator may utilize the time-out signal (i.e. the right hand horizontally placed over the vertical left hand) when a speaker is either repeating herself, escalating, or wandering in her presentation. When the speaker breaks for the time-out, the facilitator should place the burden upon themselves for the time-out (i.e. "Sally, you have given a lot of information, but I need to make sure I understand everything), then reframe what has been said, offer the speaker two minutes to make three additional points and then move to the next speaker.
13. **Set a Deadline**. It is amazing how groups will vacillate for hours and then because a perceived deadline is approaching will finally make decisions.
14. **Walk-N-Talk**. Sometimes the best way to keep a meeting moving forward in a positive manner is to take a break and ask the "problem" member of the meeting to take a walk with you. The facilitator should literally walk with the "problem" member because walking will increase blood flow and breathing, which will help reduce the stress the "problem" member is feeling. Also, the private nature of the walk will provide the facilitator the opportunity to ask open ended questions such as, "Tell me how the meeting is going for you?" and potentially find buttons or misperceptions that the facilitator can help resolve.
15. **Columbo**. Blame yourself for problems the group is experiencing. This will assist the group from blaming each other and increase the probability to achieve success.

FACILITATION TOOLS

1. **Name cards.** IEP meetings have many faces and titles. The facilitator, the parents, invited participants, and school personnel need gentle reminders of everyone's name and function in the meeting. I have found over the years that people hate name tags, but they are indifferent to name cards (of the table tent variety). Therefore, I use name cards that are placed on the table with each person's first name and function on the name card.
2. **Food.** IEP meetings are stressful. When people are stressed, their blood sugar levels fall and they become very grumpy. Therefore, I bring snacks to every meeting. I include chocolate, nuts, cereal bars, a sugar-free option, and microwave popcorn. I also make sure there is water in the room.
3. **Stress balls and pipe cleaners.** Place stress balls and pipe cleaners around the table. I intentionally do not tell the participants why these items are on the table. Inevitably, during either stressful or boring times of the meeting, people begin playing with these manipulatives. They provide the participants with an outlet for their emotions without disturbing the meeting.
4. **Notepads and pens.** There is a lot of information conveyed during an IEP meeting. Some participants forget to bring paper and pens to take notes. By providing it for them, you are inviting them to participate in the meeting at a higher level.
5. **Facial tissue.** Many people cry in my facilitations. Enough said.
6. **Flip chart pack.** Even when the meeting is being recorded in a different method (i.e a computer, a white board, etc.) it is sometimes necessary to chart additional information for the participants to review side by side. Therefore, I always pack flip chart paper, a flip chart easel, and flip chart pens in varying colors.
7. **White board pack.** Many conference rooms have white boards. However, the white boards generally are very dirty and do not have any pens that work. Pack white board pens in various colors, a white board eraser, and cleaner to accommodate this phenomena.
8. **General IEP Agenda.** I always post a general IEP agenda. Inevitably, a participant asks to discuss a matter that cannot be addressed until other matters are first addressed. By having a general IEP agenda posted, the facilitator can point to where the discussion should occur (and possibly place the discussion item in the parking lot).

TOP TWENTY TIPS OF THE TRADE

When . . .	Try . . .
1. A group member is late.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the group if it wants to wait or proceed without the person. • Re-work the agenda so that the group will not be disadvantaged by the late party's absence.
2. A group member objects to the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the group if anyone else shares the concern. If so, restructure the process to meet the entire group's need. If not, use your Open Ended Questions to find the speaker's interest and try to re-structure the process to meet the speaker's interest as well as the remainder of the group's interests. • Ask the group how it wants to proceed.
3. The group is engaged in a meaningful discussion, but time is running out?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring the situation to the group's attention and ask the group how it wants to proceed. • Bring the situation to the group's attention and suggest the Quick-Check-Why tool to assess where the group is toward reaching consensus. • Re-schedule the meeting

When . . .	Try . . .
4. Group members are uncomfortable giving their opinions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Open-Ended Questions to solicit responses in their voices. • Use the Invite Contributions tool. • Walk-N-Talk
5. A group member asks a question off topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place the question or statement into the 'Parking Lot.'
6. Mutiny occurs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be honest with the group that the process is not working. Then, ask the group how they want to proceed. • Take a break and/or re-schedule the meeting. Some problems don't have easy solutions. • Run. (Just kidding).
7. Two or more group members engage in side discussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the behavior and enforce the ground rules in the manner previously determined by the group. Try, "There seem to be several side conversations. I understood the enforcement of the ground rules to mean _____." • Don't forget the "look." It is amazing how many people will refrain from side discussions when you give them the "look." • Stand next to the side talkers. • Ask the side talkers for their opinions on the subject matter up for discussion.

When . . .	Try . . .
8. The group is stuck.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move onto another agenda item. • Take a break. • Ask the group how it would like to proceed.
9. One person is escalating (tone, pitch, pace, aggression, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise your voice to a similar intensity as the speaker and slowly reduce your intensity while asking the speaker open-ended questions (this may take awhile). • Walk-N-Talk to privately address your concerns with the person.
10. One person engages in filibustering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframe the speaker’s main points. People tend to repeat themselves when they do not feel heard. Try, “Sally, I heard you say X, Y, and Z. Is that correct? (Sally answers, ‘Yes’) Great, thank you for your contributions. We have a lot of people to hear from, so I would now like to move on to Jim. If Sally says, “No,” then ask her, “Please tell me your four main points you would like the group to understand.” Reframe the points you heard and repeat the question. • Record the speaker’s comments on the flip chart. • When they take a breath say, “Sally, please summarize your main points in one minute.” Then, “I need to move on to ____.” • Utilize the Time-out, Reframe, Move-on tool.

When . . .	Try . . .
<p>11. Interruptions are occurring.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try, “I am noticing that interruptions are occurring. At the beginning of the meeting we agreed to refrain from interruptions and to enforce interruptions by _____” • Say, “Thank you, Sally, however, I need to hear the end of Jane’s comments before moving onto another’s comments.” • Talking Ball • Talking List • Walk-N-Talk
<p>12. One meeting member is attacking another meeting member.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop the speaker as soon as it is clear she is not acting appropriately and remind <u>the group</u> that the particular behavior is not acceptable for the meeting. • Inform the speaking party how her actions and words may be impacting the other party (i.e. her intent may not equal the actual impact) • Walk-N-Talk • Time-Out, Reframe, Move-on

When . . .	Try . . .
13. A party uses the word “respect”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the party to define respect
14. A party suggests you are not impartial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask open-ended questions to surface the party’s concern. • Consider withdrawing yourself from the situation
15. You begin caring too much about one party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdraw yourself from the situation. When you care too much about the fate of a party, the process cannot work.
16. A party uses a term that the other party may not understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Columbo technique by playing dumb and asking the speaker what she meant by the statement. This provides the listener an opportunity to hear the explanation without sacrificing ‘face.’
17. A party is not engaging in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in with the party • Offer chocolate (or another snack) – conflict is very stressful, and stress drops blood sugar • Suggest to re-schedule the meeting • Walk-N-Talk
18. You want to soften the reframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “From your perspective...” • “I hear you saying ...” • “So, if I understood correctly...”

When . . .	Try . . .
<p>19. You need to summarize multiple parties' perspectives at the same time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The superior way to summarize after hearing multiple parties' perspectives is to first summarize the areas where there is common areas of agreement, and then summarize the areas of disagreement. This provides the parties the opportunity to make the connection that if there are common areas of agreement, there is a possibility to find a solution to the areas of disagreement.
<p>20. A party is not directly stating her emotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not assume the party's emotions. By misnaming the emotion, the situation may dramatically escalate out of control. Therefore, if the party does not directly state her emotion, I suggest acknowledging the party's non-verbal actions. For example, a listener may say, "I notice you are breathing very rapidly. Is there anything you would like me to understand right now?" This question provides the party the opportunity to define her feelings and expand upon why she is feeling that particular way.

PRE-MEETING CHECKLIST

- Is every member available to attend the full meeting?
- If not, does Parent approve of _____'s partial attendance? Do you need a written waiver of participation from Parent? Do you have the written waiver with you?
- Was the meeting notice (with date, time and specific location) sent to every member?
- Is the room reserved for the appropriate amount of time including overflow time?
- Create an agenda with specific items for discussion. (See IEP General Agenda)
- Was the district written information sent to parents for review
- Do you have the necessary paperwork, including a draft IEP for each member of the team, school records, written waiver of participation, written amendment to the IEP and consent to evaluate?
- Are there name cards for each member?
- Are there enough appropriate chairs for everyone in the group?
- Is there a flip chart, flip chart easel, or white board with multiple colored pens?
- Are there pens and paper for each member?
- Is there tissue, water, and snacks?
- Are there manipulatives?
- Is there a general IEP agenda?
- Is everyone and everything ready for a *productive* meeting? Re-schedule the meeting if the necessary information is not available or if all the stake-holders cannot attend.

MEETING CHECKLIST

- Name cards, tissue, pens, paper, water, manipulatives, and snacks on table.
- General IEP agenda in full view of the members.
- Copies of all documents for all participants (i.e. old IEP, draft IEP, evaluations, data, attendance records, report cards, written waiver of participation, written amendment to the IEP and consent to evaluate.)
- Chairs and table arranged for collaborative work.
- Greet every member (the same way). The greeting creates the tone and individual expectations for the meeting.
- Introduce every member, explain each person's role, and discuss each member's connection to the child.
- Explain your role as the facilitator.
- Determine who will fill, and explain expectations of, the following roles:
 - Meeting Recorder: captures ideas and discussion points; paraphrases what is said.
 - IEP Writer: writes the IEP
- Explain the time-frame of the meeting and determine each person's ability to stay until the conclusion of the meeting.
- Explain the structure of the meeting including the definition of consensus, the rules requiring an IEP team to attempt consensus, and the district representative's duty should consensus not be reached. It is vitally important that the parents understand they have a voice equal to each individual members and not an equal voice to the district.
- Review the agenda. Ask members for additions to the items for discussions.
- Create ground rules (if necessary).
- Direct the group through the agenda
- Sign the IEP and provide a copy of the IEP to the parents, OR
- Plan a time and date to reconvene the meeting and determine the agenda.
- Acknowledge what was accomplished at the meeting.
- Honestly and compassionately thank every member for his/her participation.

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