

Communication & Collaboration Between Teachers (TVIs), Transcribers, and Paraprofessionals

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A Look at Collaboration and Teamwork

What Does It Mean?

Teamwork is defined as the joint action of people working toward the same end result or goal. When one speaks of teamwork, generally, the meaning is the work that comes from people working together effectively.

Collaboration is the practice of two or more individuals or groups who work together to produce or create something and achieve a common goal. This practice requires the parties to generate and share ideas, and brainstorm for solutions to a problem.

The difference between teamwork and collaboration is a matter of leadership. When a group of individuals function as a team, they are working as individuals. Everyone has an identified task which contributes to the outcome. A successful team is dependent on having a strong leader who guides the team toward the goal.

Within a collaboration the group not only has to work together, they have to think together. The end product comes from the efforts of the group. In a collaboration, collaborators are equal partners – there is no leader.

The end result of collaboration or teamwork is often the same. When a group collaborates, they are working together toward a shared goal. Everyone in the group has the same vision in mind. The same applies to a group that works as a team, they too work together toward a shared goal. Everyone is committed to a single outcome.

Who Are the Team Members?

For those of us serving visually impaired students, our goal is to provide environments that foster education and learning for students. In order to achieve this, it is important that staff and faculty members work together. In a collaborative environment, the team members include the teachers for visually impaired students (TVIs), classroom teachers, braille transcribers (if the student is blind), orientation and mobility specialists (O&M), and the student support staff which includes paraprofessional(s), paraeducators, or special education assistants (SEAs).





Communication

Communication is the act of transferring or exchanging information from one place, person or group to another. It refers to how people send out and receive messages. Every act of communication involves at least one sender, a message and a recipient. Communication includes emotions, cultural situations, the medium and means used to communicate, and even location.

Good communication is essential in any situation, but especially in a collaborative situation. This can involve nonverbal cues, including active listening, and being able to understand others as well as expressing yourself. Open and ongoing communication is essential for all parties in the educational setting and is one of the most important aspects of meeting the individual needs of students. It is at the center of everything successful you do. A good communicator conveys their point in a simple and clear manner, the intended recipient(s) of the message understands, and the work gets done. It is important that both sides of the story are understood.

Good communicators:

- Convey their message to the listener on a personal level
- Provide factual information
- Give specific information
- Ask questions to ensure understanding
- Ask questions for clarification
- Are active listeners
- Look for nonverbal cues

Benefits of Communication and Collaboration

- Vital for success in the educational setting
- Teachers and paraprofessionals / paraeducators / SEAs need to be on same page in order to support student needs to the maximum extent
- Important information is shared and conveyed about students in order to provide appropriate support
- Share and consider the student's IEP
- Share and consider any health plans
- Address student safety concerns
- Learning needs of the student can be addressed
- Share and address behavior support plans
- Keep open communication lines

Accountability, Roles, and Responsibilities

Classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and TVIs all work collaboratively and each have roles and responsibilities within the learning environment. Establishing team guidelines or a team charter will ensure that all members are carrying out their respective duties. The charter should be developed with input from all parties and should reflect their own guidelines or rules to be followed. A sample charter is provided as follows:

- I agree that all discussions are confidential
- I agree to be prompt so that meetings can start and end on time
- I agree to be present, informed, prepared, and focus on all comments to the issue at hand
- I agree to a safe and positive community atmosphere by treating other members with dignity, avoiding judgmental comments, honoring the individuality of each member of the group
- I agree to focus on what is best for students; to set aside vested interests and concentrate on the “big picture”
- I agree to support and implement the decisions of the team
- I agree to share relevant questions and concerns at the meeting either in small groups or the whole group
- I agree to listen with respect, empathy, and open mind in order to understand all sides of the issue

Responsibilities & Roles

I will:

- Adhere to the team guidelines
- Enforce team guidelines
- Be informed of what takes place at the team meeting if I am absent

Paraprofessionals / Paraeducators / Special Education Assistants

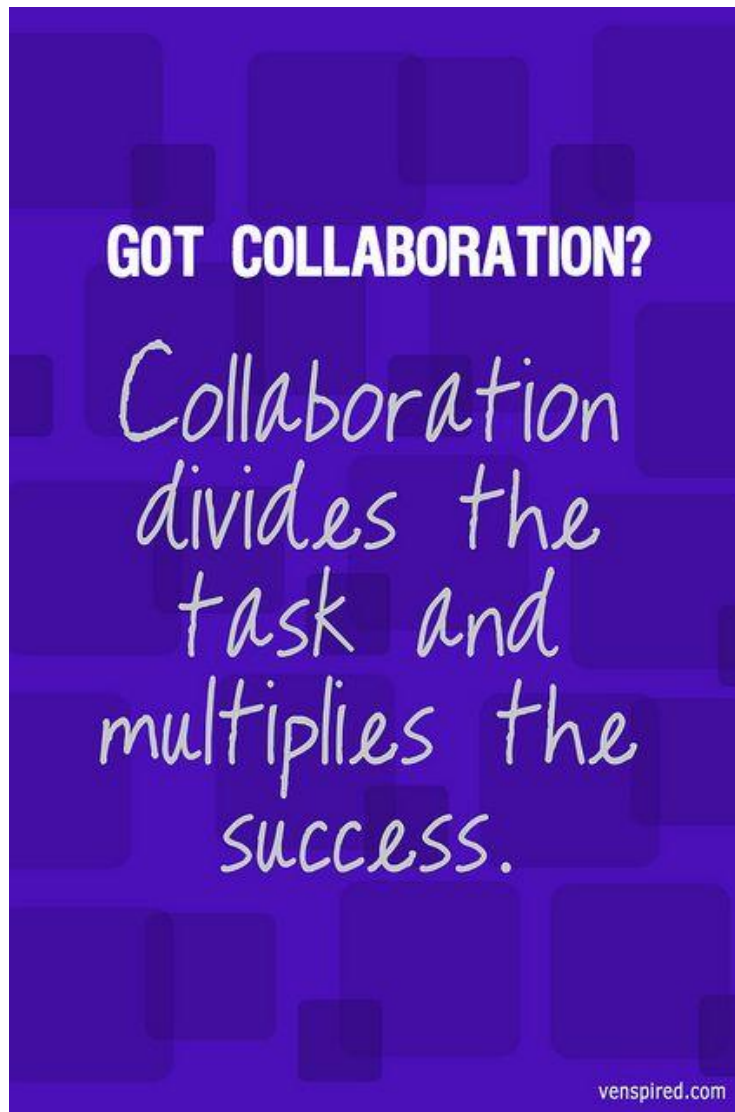
- Bring your unique skills, trainings, interests to the learning environment
- Be responsible for details of what goes on during the day with your individual student(s)
- Communicate with the TVI and/or classroom teacher about individual student needs (i.e. curriculum requirements, classroom requirements)
- Be flexible, have a backup plan
- Be respectful



The Culture of Collaboration

In order to sustain a culture of collaboration, team members need to possess and maintain the following skills:

- Trust – Build it and sustain it for it is the foundation of interaction
- Conflict management – Differences of opinion are neither good nor bad; it's how conflicts are resolved that are positive or negative
- Influence skills – obtaining the support and commitment of others over whom we do not have direct authority



Conflict Management

Source:

<https://www.cacsd.org/cms/lib/NY01001870/Centricity/Domain/469/Conflict%20Styles%20Packet%20v2.pdf>

Different people use different strategies for managing conflicts. The following activity *How I Act in Conflicts* includes traditional proverbs for resolving conflict and a rating scale to assist you in determining which conflict style closely reflects your action.

How I Act in Conflicts

The proverbs listed below can be thought of as descriptions of some of the different strategies for resolving conflicts. Proverbs state traditional wisdom. These proverbs reflect traditional wisdom for resolving conflicts.

Read each of the proverbs carefully. Using the scale given below, indicate how typical each proverb is of your actions in a conflict.

- 5 Very often the way I act in a conflict
- 4 Frequently the way I act in a conflict
- 3 Sometimes the way I act in a conflict
- 2 Seldom the way I act in a conflict
- 1 Never the way I act in a conflict

Your Rating	Item #	Proverbs
	1.	It is easier to refrain than to retreat from a quarrel.
	2.	If you cannot make a person think as you do, make him or her do as you think.
	3.	Soft words win hard hearts.
	4.	You scratched my back; I'll scratch yours.
	5.	Come now and let us reason together.
	6.	When two quarrel, the person who keeps silent first is the most praiseworthy.
	7.	Might overcomes right.



	8.	Smooth words make smooth ways.
	9.	Better half a loaf than no bread at all.
	10.	Truth lies in knowledge, not in majority opinion.
	11.	He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.
	12.	He hath conquered well that hath made his enemies flee.
	13.	Kill your enemies with kindness.
	14.	A fair exchange brings no quarrel.
	15.	No person has the final answer but everybody has a piece to contribute.
	16.	Stay away from people who disagree with you.
	17.	Fields are won by those who believe in winning.
	18.	Kind words are worth much and cost little.
	19.	Tit for tat is fair play.
	20.	Only the person who is willing to give up his or her monopoly on the truth can ever profit from the trust that others hold.
	21.	Avoid quarrelsome people, as they will only make your life miserable.
	22.	A person who will not flee will make others flee.
	23.	Soft words ensure harmony.
	24.	One gift for another makes good friends.
	25.	Bring your conflicts into the open and face them directly; only then will the best solution be discovered.
	26.	The best way of handling conflicts is to avoid them.
	27.	Put your foot down where you mean to stand.
	28.	Gentleness will triumph over anger.

	29.	Getting part of what you want is better than not getting anything at all.
	30.	Frankness, honesty and truth will move mountains.
	31.	There is nothing so important you have to fight for it.
	32.	There are two kinds of people in the world – the winner and the loser.
	33.	When one hits you with a stone, hit him or her with a piece of cotton.
	34.	When both people give in half way a fair settlement is achieved.
	35.	By digging and digging, the truth is discovered.

How I Act in Conflict Scoring Sheet

Avoiding		Competing		Accommodating		Collaborating		Compromising	
Item #	Score	Item #	Score	Item #	Score	Item #	Score	Item #	Score
1		2		3		5		4	
11		7		6		10		9	
16		12		8		14		15	
18		17		13		20		24	
21		19		23		25		29	
26		22		28		30		34	
		27		31		35			
		32		33					
Total:		Total:		Total:		Total:		Total:	


My lead style: _____

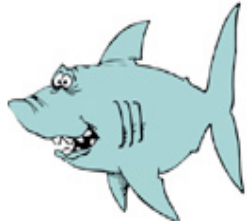

Conflict Styles



How do you manage conflict?

Different people have different styles of handling conflicts. These styles are learned, usually when you are a child. And they seem to function automatically. Usually we are not aware of how we act in conflict situations. We just do whatever seems to come naturally. But we do have a personal style, and because it was learned, we can always change it by learning new and more effective ways of handling conflicts.

There are two major concerns in a conflict. The first concern is achieving your personal goals. You are in conflict because you have a goal that conflicts with another person's goal. Your goal may be highly important to you, or may be of little importance. The second concern is keeping a good working relationship with the other person. You may need to be able to work effectively with that person in the future. The relationship may be very important to you, or it may be of little importance. How important your personal goals are to you and how important the relationship is to you affects how you act in a conflict. Given these two concerns, five styles of managing conflicts can be identified.

<p>The Turtle <i>Avoiding</i></p>  <p>Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflicts. They give up their personal goals and relationships. They stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place and from the people they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is hopeless to try to resolve conflicts. They feel helpless. They believe it is easier to withdraw (physically and psychologically) from a conflict than to face it.</p>	<p>Appropriate times to use a Turtle Style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the stakes are not high or issue is trivial • When confrontation will hurt a working relationship • When there is little chance of satisfying your wants • When disruption outweighs benefit of conflict resolution • When gathering information is more important than an immediate decision • When others can more effectively resolve the conflict • When time constraints demand a delay
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<p>The Shark <i>Competing</i></p> <p>Sharks try to overpower opponents by forcing them to accept their solution to the conflict. Their goals are highly important to them and the relationship is of no importance. They seek to achieve their goals at all costs. They are not concerned with the needs of the other person. They do not care if the other person likes or accepts them. Sharks assume that conflicts are settled by one person winning and one person losing. They want to be the winner. Winning gives sharks a sense of pride and achievement. Losing gives them a sense of weakness, inadequacy, and failure. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming, and intimidating the other person.</p>	<p>Appropriate times to use a Shark style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When conflict involves personal differences that are difficult to change • When fostering intimate or supportive relationships is not critical • When others are likely to take advantage of noncompetitive behavior • When conflict resolution is urgent; when decision is vital in crisis • When unpopular decisions need to be implemented 
<p>The Teddy Bear <i>Accommodating</i></p> <p>To Teddy Bears, the relationship is of great importance, while their own goals are of little importance. Teddy Bears want to be accepted and liked by other people. They think that conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony and believe that conflicts cannot be discussed without damaging relationships. They are afraid that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt, and that would ruin the relationship. They give up their goals to preserve the relationship. Teddy Bears say, "I'll give up my goals, and let you have what you want in order for you to like me." Teddy Bears try to smooth over the conflict in fear of harming the relationship.</p>	<p>Appropriate times to use a Teddy Bear Style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When maintaining the relationship outweighs other considerations • When suggestions/changes are not important to the accommodator • When minimizing losses in situations where outmatched or losing • When time is limited or when harmony and stability are valued 

<p>The Fox <i>Compromising</i></p> <p>Foxes are moderately concerned with their own goals and about their relationships with other people. Foxes seek a compromise. They give up part of their goals and persuade the other person in a conflict or give up part of his goals. They seek a solution to conflict where both sides gain something, the middle ground between two extreme positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships in order to find agreement for the common good.</p>	<p>Appropriate times to use a Fox Style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When important/complex issues leave no clear or simple solutions • When all conflicting people are equal in power and have strong interests in different solutions • When there are no time restraints 
<p>The Owl <i>Collaborating</i></p>  <p>Owls highly value their own goals and relationships. They view conflict as problems to be solved and seek a solution that achieves both their own goals and the goals of the other person in the conflict. Owls see conflicts as improving relationships by reducing tension between two people. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflict as a problem. By seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other person, owls maintain the relationship. Owls are not satisfied until a solution is found that achieves their goals and the other person's goals. And they are not satisfied until the tensions and negative feelings have been fully resolved.</p>	<p>Appropriate times to use an Owl Style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When maintaining relationships is important • When time is not a concern • When peer conflict is involved • When trying to gain commitment through consensus building • When learning and trying to merge differing perspectives

Source: *Mastering Human Relations, 3rd Ed.* by A. Falikowski

Conflict Styles Pro's and Con's

Style	Advantages	Disadvantages
Competing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normally uses less time • Leads to total victory if you have more power than the other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can lead to stalemates if the other side uses the same approach • The other side can become resentful and vengeful
Compromising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A natural style for most people • Appears to be quite fair, as both sides win and lose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can lead to extreme initial positions, as both sides anticipate splitting the difference • May result in agreements that neither side is really happy about
Avoiding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful when issues are trivial • Helpful when other side has much greater power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem is postponed, not resolved • Can result in nothing being done if too many problems are swept under the rug
Accommodating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the other side is right you should give in. • When the relationship with the other side is more important than negotiating issues. • Creates potential IOUs for future negotiations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May result in a major loss to you on important issues. • Can lead to a habit of giving in on all issues that can result in a significant loss of your power and reputation.



Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Both sides can win big.• Personal relationships can be improved, rather than harmed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can be extremely time-consuming.• Negotiators with a forcing style may interpret this approach as weakness.
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“Alone we
can do so
little; together
we can do
so much”

Helen Keller