



Enhancing Family Participation in IEPs Using Structured Protocols

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Session Goals

1. Understand how structured protocols can support collaboration in teams.
2. Understand specific protocols that could be relevant to IEP meetings
3. Reflect on which protocols would be most helpful in their own work.
4. Leave with multiple resources for free protocols that are available and possible uses for them beyond IEP meetings.

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Why focus on family participation?

Family participation is part of the legal requirements for the IEP process as well as professional best practice.

Despite this, we know that:

- Many parents report minimal or peripheral participation (Sanderson, 2023).
- Participation is restricted by lack of understanding about processes (Rosetti et al., 2018),
- Participation is often limited to passive opportunities (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Kurth et. al, 2019),
- There is a lack of acknowledgement of the family's expertise (Goldman & Burke, 2017; Kervick, 2017; Sanderson, 2023)
- Power dynamics exist that undermine participation (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Kurth et al., 2020; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014; Macleod, Causton, Radel, & Radel, 2017).

What are structured protocols?

- Step by step ways to consider or discuss or a situation or issue or content
- Many have been created for educational settings
- Provide a structure to a task/discussion
- Help ensure equity and support routine
- You have probably used one!

Why use protocols?

Protocols provide a structured way to boost family participation in a balanced manner.

Referring to protocols, Harvard Graduate instructor Sarah Leibel commented [they] "really democratize a space, ensuring that everyone has a voice and has access to the conversation" (2017, para. 3)

Decrease cognitive load of "getting a turn"

Effective family participation has cited benefits such as increased family satisfaction and more broadly, family participation and engagement in schools has documented benefits such as increased academic performance of children (Dunst et al., 2007, 2008; Sanderson & Goldman, 2023).

Considerations for all protocols

-You know families best! Some protocols we discuss could be used as part of your routine in meetings, while other should be for specific purposes.

-consider how to prepare interpreters, and which protocols might be more challenging to engage with use of an interpreter

-suspend disbelief on some of them for a bit-- try them!

-we encourage creative thinking, there are different uses for many of the protocols, they may fit in more than one category



NORMING PROTOCOLS

NORMING PROTOCOL

Community Agreements

Overview/adapted use:

These are four already developed agreements that focus on community. They could be shared with all team members when the drafts are sent home and then reviewed briefly at the start of the meeting. You could ask for confirmation that all team members have read and agreed to the agreements.

Amount of time: minimal, have a volunteer read the 4 agreements (not the description)

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

- as a part of introductions
- agenda
- time keeping

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful

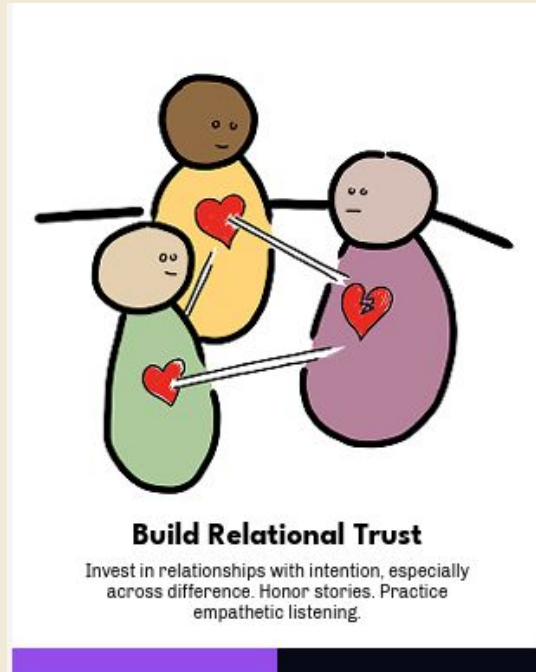
- serves as grounding principles to keep the focus of the work on the student

Preparation

- share agreements with all team members when sending draft documents
- have printed copies of the agreements available on the table or hanging in large print in the meeting room

NORMING PROTOCOL

Liberatory Design Card Set



Overview/adapted use:

This is a set of mindsets or agreements that focus on shared work, recognizing inequalities, and encouraging creative actions that may be used to establish norms or expectations for a meeting. There are 13 mindsets each with a visual and accompanying description. These could be shared before hand. Then at the beginning of the meeting team members could review them and choose one to focus on for themselves. This could be shared or kept private.

Amount of time: 5-10 minutes depending on if team members are asked to share their focus mindset.

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

- as a part of introductions
- agenda setting

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful

- serves as grounding principles to keep the focus of the work on the student and collaboration

Preparation

- share agreements with all team members when sending draft documents and ask that each team member choose one to focus on during the meeting
- have the visuals of the mindsets hanging around the room

The background features a white central area flanked by two large triangular shapes. The left triangle is gold with a pattern of small circular perforations. The right triangle is teal with a brick-like texture. A small grey triangle with vertical stripes is at the bottom left corner.

PARTICIPATION PROTOCOLS

PARTICIPATION PROTOCOL

A Picture is Worth 1000 Words

Overview/adapted use:

Each participant brings a picture of the student or work sample that they believe is representative of the “essence” of the student. Each person shares their image and why they chose it.

Amount of time: <1 minute per participant

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

- as a part of introductions
- PLAAFP
- parent/family input
- have student participate

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful

- centers the uniqueness/personhood of student and family
- multiple perspectives
- common/concrete understanding of student's work

Preparation

- share protocol description with family when sending draft documents and ask them to bring/email picture or work sample
- remind the family 1 day in advance of the meeting
- remind team members to be ready (or have them email you theirs to print)

PARTICIPATION PROTOCOLS

Two stars and a wish

Overview: each participant shares two aspects about the student that they feel like are going well/there has been significant growth

Amount of time- <1 minute per participant

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

- PLAAFP
- goal setting
- accommodations

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful

- how the family and other team members are prioritizing next steps
- additional perspectives about strengths
- student's self reflection about their own progress and priorities

Preparation: prepare families ahead of time by telling them you will be talking about both growth/strengths of the student as well as next steps

PARTICIPATION PROTOCOLS

Artifact Box Protocol

Overview/adapted use:

Participants look at a variety of artifacts in silence and take notes on what they observe, then pick one to objectively describe how it relates to the student and questions they may have about the artifact. Participants should choose different artifacts.

Amount of time: <3 minute per participant

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

- as a part of introductions
- PLAAFP
- parent/family input
- have student participate

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful

- centers the uniqueness/personhood of student and family
- multiple perspectives
- common/concrete understanding of student's work
- raises questions that might be helpful for determining a need for further evaluation

Preparation

-case manager could collect all artifacts OR each member of the team could bring one including the family, if this happens the family would need time to collect and a reminder to bring or email the artifact before the meeting

PARTICIPATION PROTOCOLS

What? So What? Now What?

Overview/adapted use: Each participant (including student) shares one success or challenge related to the students current progress/work. As each participant shares their what, they are asked so what. In other words, why is this important to or for the student. Participants should reflect back what they have heard. After everyone has shared, there is quiet reflection regarding the “now what.” Each participant should write down “now what” or next steps for the student on sticky notes or large paper. Everyone reads the next steps silently. These may then be included in the PLAAFP and/or used during goal setting.

Amount of time: <3 minute per participant plus reflection time after everyone has shared

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

- PLAAFP
- goals; complete the first steps at the beginning of the meeting and revisit during goal setting

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful

- ensures everyone's voice is in the room
- ensures that goals are related to successes and challenges

Preparation

- share the questions that will be asked when drafts are sent to the family, reshare the questions 1 day in advance when a meeting reminder is sent

The background features a white central area with decorative elements on the sides. On the left, a gold-colored triangular shape with a pattern of small circular perforations points towards the center. On the right, a teal-colored triangular shape with a brick-like pattern points towards the center. A small gold triangle is also visible at the top right corner.

GOAL SETTING AND DECISION MAKING

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Magic Wand

Overview/adapted use: each person describes some areas they would like to focus on in the next year (if you had a magic wand, what would be one change you would like the student to be doing by next year?), then one at a time, people name their top priority to focus on

Amount of time: 5-10 minutes

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

- PLAAFP
- goal setting

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful:

- helps support team's understanding of priorities
- supports appropriate goals/objectives within a year

Preparation: do not prewrite goals in draft. Ask family, team, and student to consider priorities for next year.

GOAL SETTING AND DECISION MAKING

Back to the Future

Overview/adapted use: each person describes in present tense how they would like to see the student progress in the next year- i.e., each person describes what they see/hear/feel (example: She is now bringing her materials to each class OR she has no missing assignments OR she identifies several people she considers friends), ask student to start or prepare something ahead of time

Amount of time: 1-2 minutes per participant

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

-as a transition between current functioning and goal setting/accommodations

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful: helps to create common vision and centers future thinking

Preparation: ask family, team, and student to consider priorities for next year

GOAL SETTING AND DECISION MAKING

Three-talk model

(part of Shared Decision Making)

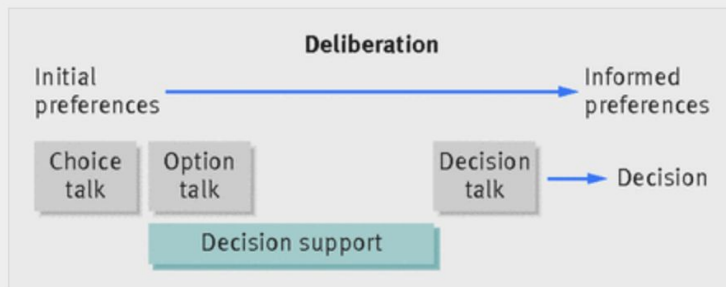


Fig 1 Three-talk model of shared decision making, 2012³

↓ [Download figure](#) [Open in new tab](#) [Download powerpoint](#)

Overview: Includes three stages: team talk (time to build rapport/center reasons why a decision needs to be made), option talk (present different options and pros/cons of each), and decision talk (facilitator supports team in considering evidence and options)

Amount of time: significant, could structure entire meeting

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

- change of placement meetings
- service options
- focus of goals

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful:

- supports family to be informed decision makers
- empowers multiple perspectives and considerations

Preparation: ensure all team is aware of decision being discussed

PROBLEM SOLVING PROTOCOLS

PROBLEM SOLVING PROTOCOL

Peeling an Onion

Overview: This protocol is intended to help a team deeply understand a problem, which has been named by the team. A facilitator is needed to ask a series of questions and keep the responses focused on information not advice. The facilitator asks a series of questions and each team member takes a turn to respond to each question before the final round each person has an opportunity to respond by using this sentence stem “Having heard these comments and questions, now I think ...” Then the team members discuss the possibilities and options that have been offered.

Amount of time: significant, this could be an entire meeting, especially useful if the team had reached an impasse during a previous meeting

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing

- small scale this protocol could be used to develop goals, the team would focus on a challenge for the student and share ideas before settling on a shared idea for a goal.
- change of placement/service delivery

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful: allows for all voices to be heard in a respectful organized manner, no one voice is valued, offers an opportunity to deeply understand a problem before trying to solve it

Preparation: share protocol when sending meeting invites, name the problem in writing in the meeting agenda

PROBLEM SOLVING PROTOCOL

Collaborative Problem Solving

Overview/adaptations: The goal of this protocol is to solve instructional or logistical problems while also promoting teamwork. First the problem is stated and the statement is agreed upon. This could happen before the meeting or during the meeting with the facilitator offering prompts to help develop consensus for the problem. Then each team member uses sticky notes to identify what's working well (pluses) and what the challenges (deltas) are. They are not yet writing down solutions. Then the pluses and deltas are discussed in small groups, again, not focusing on solutions yet. The final part of the protocol is to independently write down solutions on sticky notes. Then review the listed solutions with a partner, then reflection and open discussion as a whole team.

Amount of time: 25-40 minutes

Uses/ relevant sections of IEP and/or timing:

-Most useful when the team has reached an impasse or challenge.

What information it could give you/how it might be helpful:

Allows for multiple voices and points of views to be heard, creates documentation about the problem and what is going well in addition to what is hard or needs to be changed

Preparation:

-share protocol when scheduling meeting and setting meeting agendas

Reflection

- Go back to your reflection notes from the beginning of the session.
- Consider the different protocols.
- Pick one that will be useful for your team or a particular child/family
- Turn to a partner; share the protocol that you chose and why it might be helpful.

Other uses for protocols?

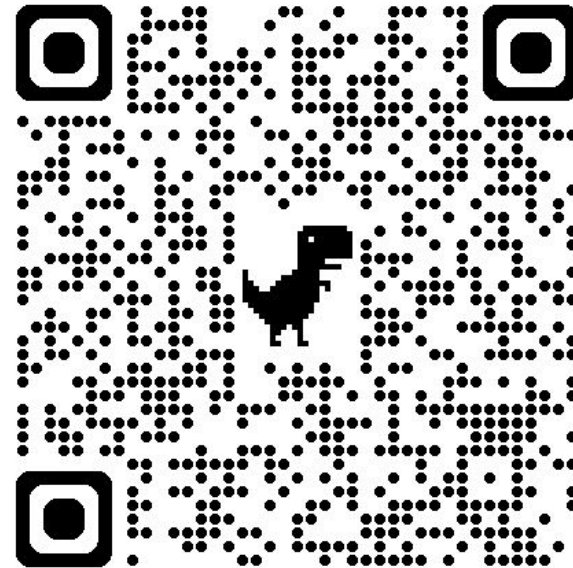
- School based team building
- Special education/classroom teaming and collaboration
- Transition planning
- Decision making
- Goal setting for school/team
- MTSS processes
- Committee Work
- Classroom (with students)

Any time there is a potential equity issue and it is important to have all voices in the room!

“Meaningful family engagement goes beyond compliance—it requires cultivating authentic relationships and true partnership.”

—Staci Suits, PhD

References



Questions?? Comments

Thank you!

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