



COLLABORATIVE TEACHING

Session **F**

# Effective Communication for Collaborative Teams



# Effective Communication for Collaborative Teams

## PURPOSE



In this session, the facilitator guides collaborative teachers through activities to improve communication and conflict management skills. Participants will learn strategies to help them:

- Identify areas of conflict that can interfere with collaborative teaching
- Develop an awareness and understanding of effective communication skills for collaboration
- Identify and develop ways to improve communication between collaborative partners

## Activities



This 2-hour session includes five activities:

*Welcome and Introductions* (10 minutes)

*Introductory Activity:* **Communication Breakdown** (20 minutes)–Participants reflect on a communication breakdown they experienced and discuss the impact of communication problems on relationships.

*Activity 1:* **Conflict Management Profile** (35 minutes)–Participants identify and share their own conflict management styles. Collaborative partners will learn about each other’s conflict management styles and how these styles might affect communication.

*Activity 2:* **Communication and Conflict–Challenges and Strategies** (20 minutes)–Participants will examine conflict situations that can arise in collaborative teaching. Partners will match communication strategies that can help resolve specific conflicts.

**Activity 3:** **Effective Communication Action Plan** (20 minutes)– Participants develop communication strategies for their own partnerships. Partners share critical information about their learning and communication needs.

**Activity 4:** **Effective Communication Follow-Up** (15 minutes)– Participants will review and discuss the *Follow-Up Form* and process.

## Materials



All Handouts are one per person unless otherwise noted in each activity:

- Chart paper
- Markers
- Name tags
- Sign-in sheets and other necessary documents
- Sticky Notes (several per person)
- Handout 1: *Communication and Conflict*
- Handout 2: *Conflict Management Profile*
- Handout 2a: *Conflict Management Style*
- Posters: *Conflict Styles*
- Handout 3: *Collaborative Teaching Vignette*
- Handout 4: *Sources of Conflict in Schools*
- Handout 5 and 5a: *Challenges and Strategies Matching Game Cards* (see directions on the Handout)
- Handout 6: *Effective Communication Strategies Checklist*
- Handout 7: *Effective Communication Joint Action Plan*
- Handout 8: *Effective Communication Joint Follow-Up Form*



# Activity Directions

## Welcome and Introductions

Total time: 10 minutes

Welcome all participants. Introduce yourself and your role. Briefly review the purpose and objectives of the session. Review the sign-in process, session materials, bathroom locations, and the timelines.

## INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY: Communication Breakdown!

Total time: 20 minutes



### Materials:

- Sticky notes
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Handout 1: *Communication and Conflict*

### Activity steps:

1

10 min

Ask participants to stand, hold up their right hand, make eye contact with someone they don't know, and point to that person. The person will be their partner for the activity. Ask participants to take their sticky note pad and a pen or pencil and sit with their partner. With smaller groups where everyone knows each other, ask participants to choose someone that they don't work with often.

Ask participants to think of a time in the past when one of the events listed on the chart paper occurred:

- Your expectation(s) were not met.
- You misunderstood another or they misunderstood you.
- You avoided a situation.



Ask them to think of a personal or professional experience. "Why did this occur? Why were your expectations unmet? Why were you misunderstood? Why did you avoid the situation?"

Share the personal example you prepared with the group. Describe why the situation occurred and write it on a sticky note. Post your sticky note on the blank chart paper with the event and the reason. Briefly review the directions again with the whole group:

- Ask each person to think about a situation they have experienced and record reasons why they think the situation occurred, one per sticky note.
- Give partners four minutes (two minutes each) to discuss their responses with each other, and then ask them to post their sticky notes on the chart.
- While participants are posting sticky notes, silently read, categorize, and cluster similar responses.

Examples of reasons for miscommunication may include:

- Was afraid of change
- Didn't ask for clarification
- Made assumptions
- Misinterpreted
- Didn't listen closely enough
- Didn't want to find a solution
- Felt the effort was a waste of time
- Wanted to avoid conflict
- Lacked confidence or knowledge
- Thought someone else would do it
- Heard selectively

2

10 min

Review and summarize the sticky note categories and responses with the whole group. Ask the group:



**“Do all or most of these responses reflect challenges related to communication between two people?”**

**Can communication challenges occur both in and out of the classroom?”**



**Discussion points:**

Refer participants to Handout 1: *Communication and Conflict* and provide your version of the following comments:

Conflict can occur in any relationship. Conflict doesn't mean that the relationship is bad, but we do need to know how to deal with it. Some conflicts will disappear on their own, but some can build and become very destructive. It is important to know how you, as partners, deal with conflict and how you can keep conflicts from affecting your work together for students. Today's session will provide an opportunity to use communication strategies to resolve conflicts.

**Some thoughts on communication:**

- Fear of change can be a cause and a result of poor communication between people.
- Communication problems are part of human nature – we ALL experience them at one time or another!

COLLABORATIVE TEACHING

## SESSION F:

# Effective Communication for Collaborative Teams



## HANDOUTS



## Communication and Conflict

Conflict can occur in any relationship. Conflict doesn't mean that the relationship is bad, but we do need to know how to deal with it. Some conflicts will disappear on their own, but some can build and become very destructive. It is important to know how you, as partners, deal with conflict and how you can keep conflicts from affecting your work together for students. Today's session will provide an opportunity to use communication strategies to resolve conflicts.

### Some thoughts on communication:

- Fear of change can be a cause and a result of poor communication between people.
- Communication problems are part of human nature – we ALL experience them at one time or another!
- Poor communication can often lead to conflict between people.
- Effective communication strategies are essential tools for your collaborative teaching work.

### Some thoughts on conflict:

- Conflict is neither good nor bad.
- Conflict can help build relationships.
- Conflict can alter our perceptions and beliefs.
- Conflict can help us understand other points of view.
- Conflict can make us stretch.
- Conflict can be a tool for change.
- Conflict can destroy relationships if not properly addressed.

Check out the references on Handout 9 for more information about effective communication and dealing with conflict in schools.



## Effective Communication Strategies Checklist

### Develop expectations

- Identify ground rules for your classroom.
- Identify your “non-negotiables” (*pet peeves, beliefs you’re not willing to compromise*).
- Anticipate different points of view.
- State your expected accomplishments (*for you and your students*).
- Agree upon reasonable accommodations for specific students.
- Review your roles and responsibilities in and out of the classroom.
- Ask what your partner expects from you.

### Plan ahead:

- Review meeting locations and arrangements.
- Develop an agenda for each meeting.
- Identify and bring appropriate resources.
- Review the purpose of the meeting.
- Establish methods of obtaining feedback after the meeting.

### Understand varying perspectives:

- Ask questions directly related to your colleague’s points of view: *“Tell me more about your thoughts on...”*
- Replace the word “but” with “and”, “I see your point”, “I’m concerned about...”
- Show interest in your partner’s perspectives.
- Share information, articles, and other resources.
- Develop ways to encourage each other such as note cards, candy, and e-mails.

### Make inquiries:

- Balance questions with statements. Decide what you will say before you talk.
- Ask open-ended questions to clarify meaning: *“Can you tell me more about...?”*
- Ask a colleague to tell you how, rather than why, they do something.
- Know the intent of your colleague’s questions. *What do they need from you?*

- Pose thought-provoking questions: *“How can we make sure all of our students are valued and challenged?”*
- Seek opinions and feedback from your colleague: *“What do you think about doing it this way?”*
- Seek support from others

### Listen Intently:

- Monitor your listening. Don’t tune out your partner.
- Make active listening a routine throughout your day.
- Identify conditions that interfere with effective listening, such as phone calls or student interruptions.
- Remove barriers to effective listening: Close the door, turn off your cell phone, change the meeting location.
- Notice body language. Pay attention to voice tone and gestures.
- Take note of the intent of the message. Does your partner need encouragement?

### Speak Clearly:

- Use “I” messages: *“I believe...”, “I would like...”, “I need to...”*
- Check for understanding and feedback as you speak: *“Is this making sense to you?”*
- Be aware of appropriate voice intonation, volume, and gestures.
- Be specific in your language. When you thank a colleague, tell them exactly why.
- Think about ways to encourage others: *“Your lesson really connected with the students today!”*
- Identify situations when you avoid speaking. Strive to share more.
- Monitor your speaking patterns. *Do you dominate the conversation, talk too much, or beat around the bush?*
- Identify and model what good speakers do. *Which of your co-workers has good communication skills?*



REMEMBER: If you practice these communication skills as partners, your collaborative relationship will be successful beyond measure!

# Effective Communication Joint Action Plan

*Please complete each segment below in collaboration with your partner(s).*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ District: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Considering our conflict management styles, one area of communication that we can improve is...

2. Three effective communication strategies that we can use to address our needs as noted above are...

3. Ways we will use these new strategies are...

**Please return this form, along with your Follow-Up Form to \_\_\_\_\_**

**At: \_\_\_\_\_ By: \_\_\_\_\_**

Thank you!

