



# RESPECT Day Three

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**Thinking and acting as an  
omni-partial facilitator or  
coach**

# Day Three - Thinking Like a Third Party Agenda



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Reconnecting in circle

Reflections on second assignment

Review days one and two and preview day three

Deescalating conflict from the "third side"

Role of the facilitator/coach

Being the "third side"

Final assignment

Reflecting and journaling

Assessing the day



# Being The Third Side

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Basically, this means being an **omni-partial** member of the team in a meeting: one who can hear all sides, facilitate the conversation and encourage collaborative problem solving.

**The person on the third side thinks and acts like a facilitator or coach even though he or she is not formally in that role.**

The person or persons who take on the third side role are also known as facilitative participants. That is, as *participants* they have a stake in the outcome of a meeting, **and** they pursue their own interests in a facilitative manner by modeling authentic dialogue and cooperative behavior.



# Being The Third Side

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Being the third side also means:

- Recognizing that you and every other team member have legitimate interests,
- Insuring that every member's input is valued (including your own),
- Insuring that the decision making process is fair, and
- Working to make it as easy as possible for each member of the team to engage in open dialogue and cooperative behavior.



# The Steps for Being the Third Side

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1. “Re-imagine” conflict as three-sided
2. **Avoid defensive reactions by “going to the balcony”**
3. **Build bridges across lines of conflict**
4. Gently use open-ended probes and questions, including dangerous ones
5. **Suggest some approaches for addressing concerns**
6. **Repair injured relationships**



# 1. Re-imagining Conflict as Three-Sided

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Conflict is usually imagined as two-sided: parents and educators for example.

**However, in every conflict there is an opportunity for the third side to emerge.**

Visualize an IEP meeting as taking place in a circle rather than at a conference table with the family on one side and educators on the other.

There is equality in a circle and the wisdom needed to respond to problems is found within the circle.

Any member of the circle may emerge as a “third-sider”



# 1. Re-imagining Conflict as Three-Sided

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Again, there is equality in a circle so the IEP team forms a community of equally valued members: a community where connections are intentionally recognized and openly valued.

In theory it is this community that is the third side. This team of interdependent persons who share a common goal is the third side.

In practice then anyone skillful enough can take on a third side role.



## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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Reacting without thinking is a natural human response when confronted with a difficult situation. We either:

- **Fight fire with fire**
- **Give in, or**
- **Break off the relationship**

Being the third side means acting intentionally rather than without thinking, so we have to distance ourselves from our natural impulses and manage our emotions.

We choose not to react; going instead to the balcony.





## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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Going to the balcony is a metaphor for two things:

- a mental attitude of detachment, and
- the skill of separating affect from thinking

In going to the balcony, **where we temporarily store our emotions**, we step back, collect our wits, and look at the situation objectively.



## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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From our perspective in the balcony we can look down and calmly and rationally evaluate the conflict from the point of view of the third side.

We can respond to conflict with more thought and less emotion.

We can hear all sides.

We can think constructively for all sides.



## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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From our third side perch in the balcony we will have a better chance of finding a collaborative, mutually beneficial way of meaningfully resolving the conflict. Why?

Because we are calm and can think more clearly when we have an attitude of detachment, and we can separate emotion from thinking!



## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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Additionally, when we look at the situation objectively we have a better chance of understanding each of the perspectives in the room.



## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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When should we go to the balcony?

Ideally in preparing for a difficult conversation, and at every possible opportunity throughout the conversation.



## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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Going to the balcony should be intentional, purposeful, and directed toward the following two goals:

2. To think clearly in the midst of conflict, and
1. To stay calm enough to achieve goal # 2.



## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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What's the path to achieving these two goals?

When you strongly disagree with another try thinking like an impartial third party and listen for the merit in the other's point of view.



## 2. Avoiding Reaction by Going to The Balcony

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An impartial third party works to understand each person's perspective and looks for the value in it.

In this role one refrains from judging which of the "sides" is right or wrong. Instead one tries to see the merit in each side's perspective.





### 3. Building Bridges Across Lines of Conflict by Being Omni-Partial

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When a team member shows that he is on everyone's side and on the side of fairness in team processes - is omni-partial - natural bridges for authentic dialogue and collaborative problem solving emerge from the fog of conflict.

**Team members can use these bridges to get to their good relationship savings accounts and then draw on them to deal with issues that arise.**



### 3. Building Bridges Across Lines of Conflict by Being Omni-Partial

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Omni-partial team members (bridge builders) can foster authentic dialogue by listening deeply, keeping everyone focused on the common ground (meeting student needs), and inviting ideas to that will help people occupy that common ground.

**As with many other aspects of RESPECT, thinking in omni-partial terms requires and acting differently from what most of us are used to.**



## 3a. Genuine Dialogue Via Deep Listening

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Genuine dialogue aims to promote mutual understanding and to strengthen relationships in order to prevent unnecessary conflict escalation.

**Deep listeners listen to gain insight into the beliefs and concerns of others.**

Questions are asked out of curiosity not out of a competitive desire to win points.



## Genuine Dialogue Is:

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- Collaborative
- **Conducted in a safe environment**
- Preventative
- **Fair**
- Hopeful and focused on the future
- **Heartfelt**
- Inquisitive
- **Expansive**



## 3b. The Bridge to Common Ground

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The key is to focus on identifying and then satisfying underlying interests rather than focusing on taking and holding fast to positions.

**A position is something one wants. An interest is the concern that underlies that want. Once an interest is identified, alternative ways to satisfy it can be developed and the search for common ground will be more fruitful.**

For example: “I want my child to be taught using XYZ methodology” is a **position**. “I’m concerned about my child’s reading skills” is the underlying **interest**.



## The Bridge to Common Ground

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To identify interests, ask “why” in a way calculated not to produce a defensive response. Asking why a person wants something will generally uncover interests and lead to problem solving dialogue rather than contentious debate.

“Michele, would you please say some more about the thinking behind your request for the Orton-Gillingham approach?”



## 3c. Open-ended Questions as Bridges

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Open-ended questions or probes encourage deeper thinking and reflection. As such, they are building blocks for a natural avenue for communication.

- **Tell me a little more about ...**
- **What are you seeing that indicates ...**
- **Which part of XYZ seems most challenging?**
- **Please help me understand ...**
- **Which is most important? Why is that?**



## 3c. Open-ended Questions as Bridges

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Open-ended questions or probes encourage deeper thinking and reflection. As such, they are building blocks for a natural avenue for communication.

- **What is it about this approach that concerns you?**
- **What other possibilities might there be to ...?**
- **What kind of help would be useful to you?**
- **What would you see and hear in Jane's behavior if she were less oppositional?**
- **What caused her to respond that way?**





## 4. “Gentle” Open-ended Questions or Probes

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In addition to using open-ended questions to bridge differences across lines of conflict, such questions or probes (even dangerous ones) would be asked in the spirit of coaching or facilitating to get below the tip of the iceberg. For example:

**Please say more about ...**

**I’m curious about ...**

**I’d like to hear more about...**

**Then are you saying...?**

**What would happen if you ...?**

**What would happen if you didn’t ...?**

**What do you think about that idea?**

**What can you add to what Phyllis just said?**

**Here’s one area you might help us think through...**

**Do you see it differently?**



## 5. Suggesting Some Approaches

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By using conciliatory or “what if” language rather than advocacy language, a person on the third side can advance the process of conflict resolution/collaborative problem solving and seek a mutually satisfactory solution that satisfies underlying interests to the extent possible by:

- **Probing for each sides’ underlying interests as on pg. 45**
- **Facilitating brainstorming the means to satisfy interests**
- **Advancing the process of negotiation by saying such things as:**
  - **We all seem to want \_\_\_\_\_. What if we tried to make that happen?**
  - **Mr. Jeferson is out on family leave and so far he’s the only one who’s provided that service. I wonder, has anyone thought about Mrs. Washington as a resource here?**



## 5. Suggesting Some Approaches

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Advancing the process of negotiation by saying such things as:

- Which do you think might be more effective - X, Y, or Z?
- How else might you ...?
- There are many ways to do that. Here's one idea... What do you think?



## 6. Repairing Injured Relationships

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Wounds may remain even after a conflict has seemingly been resolved. As a result the conflict may recur. Thus, to be meaningfully resolved relationships must be repaired.

A team member can facilitate healing by:

- a. Creating the right climate**
- b. Listening deeply and acknowledging and validating (thus empathizing)**
- c. Encouraging apology**



## 6a. Creating the Right Climate

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Set the right climate at the start of a meeting and maintain it throughout.

Consider using a circle process. At least incorporate circle values and guidelines such as:

- **Safety - a space where people feel safe to share**
- **Equality - every voice is important**
- **Heart-centered sharing and listening**
- **Gratitude for all who sit and share with us**
- **Respectful listening**
- **Honoring the talking piece - share air time and let people finish their thoughts**
- **Respectful speech - from the heart and with words that don't hurt**



## 6b. Listen Deeply and Acknowledge and Validate

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To listen deeply is to give the speaker the gift of your undivided attention.

**Acknowledging** what one says reinforces the effect of listening and shows that the listener is **paying attention**.

**Validating**, without taking sides, also reinforces the effect of listening and it shows that you **understand** what is being said.

An example:

**Speaker:** “I feel like a volleyball net and the two of them are volleying shots over my head.”

**Third side:** “So balls are whizzing over your head and you’re feeling caught in the middle. Is that right?”



## 6c. Encourage Apology

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When warranted, a sincere apology can go a long way toward restoring injured relationships.

A person taking the third side can facilitate an apology, at the appropriate time and under the appropriate circumstances by saying something along these lines:

**“Do you think it would be possible for the two of you to forgive each other?”**



## 6c. Encourage Apology

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When relationships have been harmed, the goal should be reconciliation. Reconciliation doesn't just happen. It takes hard work. It takes:

- **Speaking about one's own pain**
- **Struggling to listen deeply and with the heart**
- **Showing empathy by acknowledging others' pain**
- **Giving an authentic and heartfelt apology**
- **Speaking the truth as you know it**
- **Giving and accepting the gift of forgiveness**

Reconciliation is achieved through hard work and through the presence of someone on the third side who encourages, and above all, who listens. Keep in mind that this person may need to reconcile with other team members as well.