Collaborative Advocacy is an approach to advocating for children with disabilities that utilizes collaborative problem-solving skills and relationship-strengthening strategies to resolve disagreements. This approach can be used by anyone serving as a third-party advocate to focus on improving educational and developmental outcomes for students with disabilities.

Individuals who practice Collaborative Advocacy voluntarily adhere to the following guiding principles:

1.) **Dignity:** Recognize all people have inherent dignity and value as human beings. Promoting dignity includes:
   a. Treating everyone with respect and civility at all times
   b. Assuming best intentions
   c. Recognizing the right of parents and guardians to make informed decisions about their children’s educational needs

2.) **Child-centered:** Understand that a child with a disability is at the heart of every special education decision. Child-centered decision-making includes:
   a. Ensuring that interactions and communication with parents and educators are focused on the child’s present needs
   b. Redirecting the team to the child’s needs when the conversation has lost focus

3.) **Empowerment:** Encourage meaningful parent participation in developing the programs and plans. Empowerment can be facilitated by:
   a. Educating parents about the special education process and procedural safeguards
   b. Helping parents clarify, prioritize, and articulate their concerns, needs, and vision for their child’s education and future to prepare parents to participate effectively in IEP/IFSP meetings
   c. Helping ensure the parent gathers the information necessary to be fully informed and ready to participate in problem solving as an equal partner
   d. Modeling collaborative problem-solving skills
4.) **Collaboration**: Practice collaborative problem-solving skills and strategies to resolve disagreements and disputes. Collaboration includes:
   a. Recognizing the value of conflict for identifying and clarifying concerns
   b. Asking questions to identify the interest underneath a position or demand
   c. Using an interest-based approach to problem solving
   d. Being open to different perspectives
   e. Listening for understanding
   f. Separating people from the problem
   g. Identifying areas of agreement
   h. Helping team members identify and evaluate potential solutions

5.) **Relationship Building**: Recognize the importance of team member relationships and seek to strengthen relationships through effective communication and collaborative problem-solving skills. Relationship-building includes:
   a. Modeling effective and respectful communication skills
   b. Encouraging and empowering parents to participate meaningfully in conversations about their child
   c. Refraining from conduct that would harm the relationship, such as: making disparaging comments to and about others; interfering with or discouraging communication between the family and the school or early intervention provider; encouraging parents to withhold relevant information; or knowingly misleading or misinforming parents or others

6.) **Professionalism**: Remain professional at all times. Professionalism includes:
   a. Maintaining regular contact with parents
   b. Responding to questions and concerns in a timely manner
   c. Following through with commitments
   d. Being aware of personal biases from past experiences, and making sure those do not negatively affect interactions

7.) **Community Liaison**: Connect families with local agencies, resources, and other parents, helping to build a support system within the community. Acting as a community liaison includes:
   a. Sharing knowledge of various community resources that can benefit families

[www.cadreworks.org](http://www.cadreworks.org)
b. Referring families to other agencies to ensure whole family support is in place (e.g., mental health services, respite care, health care)
c. Supporting families to find and organize learning opportunities and support groups

8.) Integrity: Remain honest and trustworthy. Motives are aligned with the child’s needs and clearly articulated. Acting with integrity includes:
   a. Upholding commitments
   b. Sharing accurate information
   c. Disclosing conflicts of interest
   d. Keeping the child’s needs as the focus

9.) Competence: Stay informed and knowledgeable about the special education and early intervention processes and regulations in the jurisdictions within which services are provided, understanding the limits of individual experiences. Competency includes:
   a. Being honest with existing and potential clients about relevant experience and expertise
   b. Informing existing and potential clients if not competent to handle a specific issue
   c. Preparing adequately and reasonably to provide the requested assistance
   d. Completing continuing education courses in special education on a consistent or annual basis to stay informed of developments and changes in the field
   e. Understanding the limits of non-attorney advocacy as defined by the jurisdiction’s regulations concerning the “unauthorized practice of law”

10.) Privacy/confidentiality: Recognize sensitive information concerning a child with a disability must be protected. Protecting privacy includes:
   a. Obtaining permission before discussing matters with others, including school and early intervention personnel, in accordance with state and federal regulations
   b. Informing the parent that communications may not be protected by an advocate-client privilege and that advocates may have to comply with lawfully issued subpoenas to appear in a due process or civil court proceeding
   c. Informing parents and early intervention or school personnel that advocates do not speak for the parents