

Nature vs. Nurture: Our Brain's Responses to Conflict

Presented by

Lesley Cook and Clare Fowler

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>> Hi. I'm Phil Moses, I'm director of CADRE, and welcome to today's webinar, "Nature versus Nurture: Our Brain's Responses to Conflict." We're delighted you can join us today. This webinar continues a series that began in 2010, and it's being presented by Drs. Lesley Cook and Clare Fowler. Now your phone lines have been muted to minimize interruptions. You can enter any questions or comments into the Questions box, so not the Chat box, please use the Questions box on your control panel. And the PDF for this webinar is available in the Handouts box on your control panel, and it's also -- you can find the materials on the CADRE website.

So we're very fortunate to have two terrific individuals to conduct today's webinar. Dr. Lesley Cook is a clinical psychologist licensed to practice in both the state of Hawaii and Virginia. She has expertise in working with ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities, depression, anxiety and the LGBT-specific issues, along with general life challenges. She has significant experience with neuropsychological evaluations, with a focus on learning and processing challenges. Lesley obtained her doctoral degree from the Argosy University in the Honolulu campus. She works with young children, adolescents, adults, couples and families.

Dr. Clare Fowler received her masters of dispute resolution from the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at the Pepperdine University School of Law, and her doctorate, focusing on dispute resolution systems design from the Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education. She serves as a managing editor at Mediate.com, and Clare also mediates workplace disputes and conducts trainings for companies and individuals on improving communication. So I will hand it over to Clare. Thank you for being here today.

>> Great! Thank you so much, Phil. So in the interest of full disclosure, because this will come out as I start talking, I should also share Lesley and I were college roommates. So that's where a lot of these stories will come from -- just be prepared. All right. So before we begin, I would like to ask you to grab a piece of paper and a pen. I know, I just began, I'm already giving you orders. My husband would not be surprised. And then let me also ask you to think of a conflict. So ideally, this would be a conflict that you've experienced, or observed or heard of in your workplace. All right? It doesn't need to be a big grandiose conflict, but just something small. All right, okay. Thank you.

So now keep that in the back of your minds. So let's go ahead and begin. So what we're going to be focused on today, obviously, is nature versus nurture. The idea there is that nature, okay, this is what we're born with, so you come predisposed with a certain reaction to conflict. Next, we are raised specifically by our parents by the culture that we grew up in, and that's nurture. That's how we learn specific reactions to conflict, okay? So what we're going to be talking about is the interplay between those two. So we'll start off with a little bit of theory, I know, the boring theory stuff, but I just want to begin with a little bit of grounding theory, where we talk about nature and nurture, and how that has created a specific response to conflict. And then we're going to move into how do we really want to respond to conflict? So there's a certain way that we have formed habits to respond, but what is the most effective response to conflict, okay? So that's what we'll be looking at today.

All right. So who is this aimed at? Well, it's aimed at people whose responsibility it is to manage conflict in a Special Ed system. So first, psychologists, mediators, facilitators that you can see here, everybody has a different role that they have to play in managing conflict. So I want to share with you a quick example of a friend of mine who's a teacher, and she was telling me about one of her students, we'll call him James, and it was James' first day at kindergarten. He was very excited. So the teacher wants to get everyone excited, and she amps them up for this big, fun game that they're going to play. And they're playing musical chairs, and the music's really loud, and everybody's running around, trying to grab their chairs. And James is in the corner of the classroom. And as it gets more intense and more competitive, and they begin running out of enough seats, then James begins to cry, and eventually to yell, and he begins holding onto his shoulders as he's rocking. And so now the teacher has a couple of choices she can make. She can go with her instinctual response, so this is nature. This is what her body is programmed to do, and that's to keep everything quiet. She's hearing him yelling, her first response is she doesn't like the yelling, so she wants to keep him quiet.

The next response is what she learned from her family. So that's the nature response, and that's the desire to control the situation. She has a certain plan, we're playing musical chairs, this is foundational, it builds good relationships for these kindergarteners, dang it, so she wants to control it, and have it that way. So that's the response that she learned from nurture. So there's a combination of wanting to keep things quiet, and wanting to control. But we have to ask ourselves, is that really the most effective response? If she keeps him quiet and if she keeps things very controlled, then is she going to get at the desired outcome that she really wants? Probably not. She's going to rush over to James and tell him he has to be quiet, or he has to sit in a corner, or he has to go to the principal's office. And short-term, she might get the response she wants. It might be quiet and controlled. But long-term, has she really connected with James? Has she found out what are some of the deeper things that he's dealing with? Is there home stress? Is there autism? Are there additional factors that she has to consider? But she won't know any of that until she has a more effective conversation.

So that's what we'll be talking about today. How do we combine our nature and nurture responses to create a more effective response? In this instance, she responded admirably. And she came at James from a place of curiosity. She said down with him and just said, "James, what's going on?" And having that open, curious spirit, she was able to really understand what was really going on with him. So quick example, just to show you that these conflict resolution skills are really intended to be used by people throughout the field. All right.

So all right, we've been through this. First we talked about nature and nurture, I have already asked you to pick a conflict. So I feel like we can move to the next one -- tada! Conflict path. So on the piece of paper that you've already grabbed, I want you to first put a little dot over on the left hand side. That's -- how did the conflict begin, okay? Next you can see the conflict escalates, and then hopefully by the end of today, we'll come up with some good practical examples where you can think of how we can exit this conflict. All right?

So the entrance, people can also call it "triggers," or what was it that really set the person off? Now, a lot of times, it can be different for other people. So for instance, if I wake up and I notice that all the creamer is gone for my coffee, and if I'm tired, because let's just pretend, I know I have a big webinar today, so I'm already kind of nervous, then I'm already stressed, right? And suddenly, there's a resource scarcity, the creamer that I want for my coffee isn't there. Now if my kids wake up, and they see that there is not creamer, they don't care, right, because they really shouldn't be drinking coffee. So what is a conflict trigger for me isn't necessarily a trigger for somebody else, all right, so that's one key thing that I want you to remember, that what really affects and bothers me doesn't affect and bother another person. Okay? So that's one foundational point to keep in the back of your head as we're moving forward.

So this is what entered me into conflict. And the only reason why it entered, why it was such a trigger for me is because there is additional stress. All right. Can you hear this very well? Okay, we're going to -- hold on, I'm going to do a quick pause, just to make sure the volume's all the way up. Are we good? We can come back to it. Okay. All right, it's okay, I'll talk through it. So what we're looking at right now is how when there's a concern, or there's not enough resources, that there's this feeling of unfairness, and that's what really triggers most of our conflicts, that I didn't get what I thought I should get. So what we're looking at right now are two monkeys, they give the lady a stone. One gets a cucumber, life is good, the other gets a grape -- wait a second. So the first monkey says, "Hey, here's my stone. What's this stupid cucumber? I don't want a cucumber. The other one got a grape!" So now notice the monkey's incredibly agitated, right? The conflict instantly escalates, because there's not enough information, and they don't know how to get the right response that they want. So he tries again.

Right, he's furious. Okay, how many of us can relate to this, where we don't understand why -- we can go ahead and X-out now, moving on, thank you.

So we don't know exactly why something happened. I don't know why my husband chose to drink all the creamer, but because I'm stressed, because there's a scarcity of resources and because I don't know how to fix it, the conflict quickly escalates, all right? So that came from -- these are some of the very common escalation themes that we see. So think about your conflict. For me, not having enough creamer, it was -- I was frustrated. I wasn't able to get what I needed. All right, so I'm just going to ask you to take a second and think about your own conflict, and write down on your beautiful piece of paper, why did it escalate? It might be one of these common themes, it might be something else. And I just want you to go through this exercise, so you can think about the people that you're working with; the teachers, the facilitators, et cetera, and think about what might have led to this conflict before they got in the room. Okay? So there's stress, there's a feeling that they don't know what to do, that they don't have enough resources, that they don't know who to turn to. Or, and this is a pretty common one, that they've had a previous negative experience. Maybe they were at a different school, or there was a teacher that didn't listen to them, or they're a kid who was being bullied in class. And so these negative experiences have led to all of the frustration that made the conflict escalate so quickly. Okay?

All right. So what we'll end up talking about today are some common exits. Now if your conflict has already ended, then fantastic, you can mark this down. If not, I just want you to think about if any of these exits would work for the conflicts that you're working with right now. So a really common one is, as soon as you feel safe. As soon as you feel like things are okay, you feel hurt, you feel understood, you feel validated, then you can let go of the conflict enough to be able to behave logically, right, to think logically through, how do I want to get out of this? Obviously, another big common exit is winning or losing. But the goal is collaborating, all right? So that's the most effective response, which is what we're working on today.

So number one, when you initially sense that there's a conflict, we go through these three stages. You recognize it, you react to it, and you choose your role in response to this conflict. So I will give you a quick example of, let's pretend we're 10,000 years ago, and you're in a cave with the Jabba family, okay, so Mr. Jabba and Mrs. Jabba are sleeping, and they have their five kids, Jabba one, two, and three. They have very limited language skills, okay, so give them a break -- that was all they could think of. So everybody's sleeping, they're in their cave, and suddenly Mr. Jabba hears this crack, noise outside. So his body instantly tenses up, right? There's a conflict. So his body starts to go through, without even thinking about it, his body starts to go through these three roles. So first he recognizes that there's a conflict, right?: He hears that there is that crack. So the first thing that happens is, his body prepares for a conflict. He's thinking, oh my gosh, it could be a cougar that's about to come and attack my family. And like it or not, even though it's still not effective, our body still reacts in this same way.

So as your body begins to prime yourself for conflict, here's some of the stuff that happens. Number one, your eyes change. It's just crazy how much your body changes, as soon as you think that you're in conflict. But number one, your eyes, which normally are focused on what's right in front of you, change, and they gather up the majority of their information from the periphery. Our body is so effective, and it tries to prime us for the situation that we're in. So normally, we're having a conversation with people, so our eyes are gathering all their information from what's in front of us, and just barely noticing what's in the periphery, right? So when you're in a conflict, the stuff in front of you almost blurs out, and you're hypersensitive to what's on the outside, okay, because Mr. Jabba needed things to be that way so that he could be prepared for the cougar sneaking up on him. Your ears do the exact same thing. Your ears, which are normally primed for having a conversation with people, so they're gathering the majority of their information from the midrange of decibels and pitches -- that fuzzes out a little bit, and it's grabbing most of the information from the low range and the high range. And if you think about that, again, it's perfect for our Mr. Jabba caveman, because the lower range could be the growl of a cougar and the higher range could be the shriek of his baby. Okay, so he's now primed for a conflict.

But what's happening if you're having a conversation with somebody, and you actually want to communicate with them? Are you really seeing them as a person for who they are right in front of you? No. It's like your body isn't even recognizing their face. Are you really listening to the nuances of how they're explaining something? No. What your ear is really picking up on is the one time that they raise their voice, and the one time that they got really aggressive, right, because that's where it's grabbing most of its information, is from the high and low points of what they're saying. So it's almost like your body is saying, "Yo, we're not in a place right now to have a conversation. I'm ready to go." Okay?

Your body goes through a lot of additional changes, which I'll just highlight. It feels a lot of the oxygen from places like your stomach, and instead it rushes that oxygen and blood towards your brain, or towards your muscles. That's starting to move into the second stage, so we'll talk about that in a second. It also really burns a lot of fat very quickly, because it wants you to have a lot of energy. So, I don't know, a new weight loss technique I might try out.

So right now this is the recognition stage -- again, this is purely instinctual. There is nothing you can really do about this stage when your body first recognizes that there's a conflict. But as we move into the next stage, we start to get a little bit of control -- sorry, just moved my mouse funny, there we go. Okay, so now we're starting to react to conflict. We all know fight or flight, and research is showing that there's a very third common response, which is freeze. Okay, so how many people, when you see somebody go into that fight mode, it's almost like they're enjoying it? It's as if their body is actually sending them more endorphins, and they're enjoying this moment. What's happening is that their body

is sending additional oxygen to their brain, so it's like they're getting this flood of information -- I'm sorry, it's like they're getting this flood of energy to be able to handle the conflict. So I mediate a lot, and I've seen people, when they walk out of a really intense situation, they walk away whistling, because they actually did get kind of a high off of that conflict, that fighting moment. They're enjoying it.

So then we get the next group of people that their first response is flight. So what's happening there is, their body is sending all of their blood out into their muscles; their muscles are completely primed and ready to go. You can tell if the person that you're working with, that if they're having this response, a lot of times they'll start to crunch up their hands, their legs will start to shake, they're breathing heavy, because they're ready to run. They're ready to get out of that room. They're not able to really sit and relax and have a conversation with you at that moment.

All right. The third one is freeze. And the best example I could think for this, well, it's kind of a bad one, but it's probably one that we've all seen. So imagine you're sitting at a soccer game, and there's this kid that's just not really enjoying himself there. He gets distracted by the plane going overhead, he's bending down to make a daisy chain -- you know, he's enjoying himself, just he's not playing soccer. And then there's a break, and his dad calls him over on the sideline. And his dad's just, "What were you thinking? Do you know how much I paid for you to be on this team? You know that your mom and I take off work and we drive you to practices. I just can't believe that you're wasting our time like this! Look me in the eye." And what's the kid doing? He's withdrawing deeper and deeper and deeper into himself, because everything is starting to shut down. His dad is asking him to respond, but he doesn't get that flood of oxygen to his brain. To things are slowing down, and chugging and churning. And he probably couldn't even tell his dad at that moment what one plus one equals, because he's not getting enough oxygen to his brain. He is hibernating. He's not getting blood to his muscles, so even if his dad is asking him to do something, his dad's asking him, "Well, show me what a good kick would look like!" He can't. He doesn't have enough blood in his muscles to be able to do that. His dad might be asking him to look him in the eye -- he can't. He's not getting the right neurons forming in the back of his neck where your vagal nerves are. He's not having the right synapses firing to even be able to lift his head; he is completely withdrawn.

Okay, so those are the main three reactions that we see -- fight, flight or freeze. But what's -- so our bodies are predisposed towards one of these, and but of course everything that has to do with our brain is a little bit complex, so it's not that we all just fall into one of these categories. We fall into different categories, based on the situation we're in, based on where we're at in a conflict. So initially, your first response might be to freeze. But then as you get a little bit more control over the situation, and let's say the dad is really starting to anger this kid, then finally the kid starts to rear his head up, and he's now ready to fight. So we're able to move from these different reactions, from fight to flight to freeze, and back, and so forth. And as I mentioned, we're starting to move out of the instinctual phase, into I'm

getting a little bit of control now. I'm primed to fight, flight or freeze, but this is the part in your reaction to conflict, where you can actually start to have some control.

So this is where conflict is escalating, and to begin to be aware of your response, the main question you want to ask yourself is, what's my part in this? What is it that I want to be doing? Okay, so in case you don't have young kids like I have in my house, we've seen this movie seventeen thousand times -- so these are the Minions. And then what I'm trying to portray here is that, so your brain has two main themes, right, that are handling its response to conflict, so a lot of things. But for the moment, we're just going to be talking about your prefrontal cortex and your amygdala. Your prefrontal -- so I'm going to ask you to do a little bit more homework, but don't worry, this one's easy. Hold your hand up, touch your thumb into your palm, and then fold your fingers over it. All right? This looks like a fist, but that's not what we're going for. This is your brain when it's well-functioning, when it is officially and effectively responding to the situation it's in. Things are first going through your prefrontal cortex, and your amygdala is just there, and checking in when it needs to. So your prefrontal cortex -- those are the four fingers in front that are folded over, your thumb is the amygdala that's tucked nicely inside. Okay?

So we want our prefrontal cortex to be the first thing that responds to conflict, because your prefrontal cortex can remember time; it can remember what's happening now in relation to the past, right? Oh boy, the last time I yelled at my kid, he really froze. Maybe I shouldn't do that again. And it can remember what's happening now, or it can place what's happening now in relationship to the future. Boy, if I don't want to get the same reaction out of my son, maybe I should try speaking to him in a different way. All right? So that's your prefrontal cortex, it's able to grab wisdom from the past and help you choose your response. But when we're in a really heated conflict, then -- now flip your four fingers up -- then your amygdala comes out, okay? That's our lovely purple Minion there, and that's the guy that just says, "I'm going to fight, flight or freeze, and you can't tell me what to do! Ahhhh!" All right, this is when he takes over to say, whoa, I don't feel that you're appropriately responding to conflict. This is when Mr. Jabba's amygdala would come out and say, "Oh my gosh, what are you doing analyzing your response right now? There's a cougar outside! Run, run, run!" Okay, so sometimes our amygdala really is helpful to say, whoa, there's a serious situation here, you have to respond to it. Okay? Our amygdala is helpful that way by telling us, oh my gosh, things are wrong. There are clues here you need to pick up on; there's a conflict.

So our amygdala is right there, but in our next stage we want to help to pull those fingers back down; in other words, to get our prefrontal cortex back on line to move from the purple to the yellow Minion, if you will, so that we can really choose how we want to respond to this conflict. Okay, so the goal is to stay centered. Okay, see that lovely -- well, it's supposed to be a bullseye, just go with me. So see the lovely bullseye in the center? That's the goal. If you want to respond to this conflict from a place where you're centered, where you get to be in control of the conflict, instead of the conflict happening to you -

- our common response is not so centered. Our common response is to take a role. And again, people are predisposed towards a certain role, but that can shift easily as you're in different situations, working with different people, or even as you're moving throughout that conflict. So I want you to take a second again and think about that personal conflict, and think about what type of a role you took.

So the common ones here are savior, victim and dragon. All right. So I'm going to do -- we'll do a quick scenario of an office conflict, all right? So let's say that you and a team member have been working for a while on this project, and it's taking a little longer, and you're analyzing over some of the details and the nuances, and you know that you should probably be submitting it soon. But you're kind of -- you're just trying to get it perfect. So then suddenly, another co-worker rushes and grabs the paper off of your desk, drops it over on the boss' desk and says, "Geez, I'm the only one that can get everything done around here! Gosh, you guys are so lucky to have me!" Okay, so that's the savior. And I bet that he or she thinks he's doing a great job of saving, but what's really happening is that he has completely destroyed his relationship with his co-workers, and he's not valuing any of their contribution to the situation. Okay?

So our next one is victim -- we can all relate to victim. This is the person who says, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe this. They just rushed in and took that off of my desk. I always work so hard on this stuff, and I never get any credit! I did 95 percent of that presentation. I just can't believe that once again, they stole the show!" Okay? And then there's the dragon, who says, "Well, forget it. I'm not working with the savior ever again. Forget it, forget working with him. I'm done. I'm never again working on a team. As a matter of fact, I'm putting new locks on my door. That's it, I'm done." Okay? So what all of these people have done, by choosing the savior, the victim or the dragon, is they're distancing themselves from the conflict. They don't want to actually deal with the conflict.

You know that quote, I think it was Thoreau, that said, "There's no way out but through?" Well, that's what we're looking at right now. They're trying all these different ways to avoid the conflict, when they actually just need to deal with it. They need to deal with, all right, how do we get this project done? How do we get through the situation?

So what we want to do now is to be aware of what role you typically take in a conflict, is it savior? Is it victim? Is it dragon? So that as you are in your next conflict, or as you're sitting in your next IEP meeting, or working with students or whatever it is, and you begin to notice these tendencies, that they're acting like the savior, or they're acting like the victim, or they're all upset and they're acting like the dragon, that what's really happening is, they're trying to protect themselves instead of dealing with the conflict.

So one way to help ourselves recognize this is by asking ourselves, how do I really want to treat you? How do I want to be treated? And how do these people actually want to treat each other? Nobody really wants to act like the dragon or the savior or the victim; what they really want is to deal with this conflict, but it's our job as the knowledgeable people in this room to help them get there, okay? So one additional thing is, we're thinking about what role people take, and also talking about what type of a conflict it is. Is it an external conflict, meaning, does it have to do with people -- they're kind of external to their circle? If so, then typically it's not as -- it doesn't really get to their heart, right? It doesn't really betray their identity. So those types of conflicts are easier to pull people back into their center.

Internal conflicts -- so that's we're starting to deal with their circle now, it's starting to affect them. That takes a little bit more work. And as we go even farther to a value-based conflict, so it's starting to affect the person's identity, or they feel like somebody's messed with their kid, okay, so now this conflict is getting serious. And what we notice a lot is that the more serious a conflict gets, the more it eats at the heart of the person, that they kind of go back and forth from -- it's like they move to the three stages again; they get themselves all worked up, and it's like they go through that recognition, and then they go through fight, flight or freeze, and then they move back into the role. So we notice a lot of moving back and forth between those stages, as conflicts get very serious.

But wait, there's more. Don't worry, all hope is not lost. So just because a conflict is serious, doesn't mean that we have to abandon somebody out in those roles. We can help them to move from these extrinsic places back into their center to deal with the conflict a little bit more efficiently and effectively. All right?

So we'll just acknowledge it's difficult to move from roles to interests. We talked about how your body is physiologically primed to take on and tackle conflict, right? We talked about how your eyes and your ears and your heart rates are all designed to tackle conflict. So I'm just acknowledging that; it is difficult, it's not impossible. But we do have to give people that space to be able to move them out of that conflict mode and move them into a collaborative, curiosity, creative kind of a mode.

All right, so how do we do that? Tada! So there will be three main ways to do that that we'll be talking about. The first one is neuroplasticity. So we have a lovely video that explains this; it's a little bit long, so I think we're just going to link to it and we'll provide it as one of the resources. But mainly what it's showing us is this example of how our brains are wired one way, but we can begin to change it. Here's a great example. Lesley, I'm kind of springing this on you, so I apologize. As I mentioned, Lesley and I were roommates, and it was our freshman year of college, and her parents had brought in these red,

plastic mixing bowls. And we were frying doughnuts, because it's midnight on a Friday, so what else do you do when you're a freshman? So we were frying doughnuts, and we had this big thing of hot oil. And Lesley says, "Well, Clare, what do you think we should do with it?" I said, "I don't know, let's just pour it in the bowl." She goes, "Gosh, don't you think it will melt?" "No, of course it won't melt." So we poured this big thing of hot oil into her plastic bowl. And then we're sitting back on our really uncomfortable little dorm beds eating our doughnuts, when Lesley points out that our floor is now all hot and warm and wet, and yucky. And so sure enough, the red plastic bowl had completely melted. And we had this great little ring around the top now, but that was it. All the rest of it was on the floor.

So what happened was, enough heat and pressure were applied, and plastic, right, because plastic is something that's normally pretty durable and held in one place, that when you apply heat and pressure, plastic actually melts and changes. And I learned that that night, so, yeah, sorry Lesley.

>> It's okay.

>> Your bowl, I think. So how do we apply this to our brains? So our brains are wired one way. Our brains are wired to -- for me, my brain is wired to freeze, and then move into the victim mode. That's what I do, that's how my body feels like it's protecting itself. So first I want to be aware of that, and if I notice other people around me going into that same mode, I can recognize their fight, flighting or freezing, and I recognize that they're not dealing with conflict well. Then I want to help them to change. So to do that, boy, you really have to be aware of it, that's the pressure part. So I mentioned you need heat and pressure to begin to change the way your brain thinks. So you need to apply pressure. So what this means is, every time you start to know that you're getting into that role, that you really want to say, gosh, how do I want to change here? It's hard, because when you're in conflict mode, you're not seeing other options, all right?

So I'm going to give you a little bit of homework. Hold up your left hand, and now put it right in front of your face. Okay. Now hold up your right hand and put it right in front of your face. Okay, so what do you see? Well, maybe you can see your hands. Maybe if you're like me, you have a little bit of brownie left over on there from breakfast, but you're not seeing a lot, right? You're not seeing very much. So what we're essentially doing right now is, you're locking yourself into -- let's say your left hand is previous experiences, okay, and let's say that your right hand is your nature. So we're locked in right now by our nature and our nurture, by we just -- we know the way this conflict is going to go, and we're only seeing what's right in front of us. We're not seeing any other options. But now if you drop your hands, then, tada! Suddenly you notice that you actually do have all of these other options and resources.

So to do that, we have to help our bodies to get out of what I call "conflict myopia," in other words, that when you're in conflict, you only see things that seem to reinforce that conflict. But to move out of that, we have to help ourselves, or our clients, teachers, students, et cetera, we have to help people to see additional options. And so one way is to be very aware of resources. Another way is to help people to write things down, okay, what are all the best alternatives that could come out of this? What are the worst alternatives? Let's go ahead and face those. What are some additional things that have worked in the past? So if you're going to help people, and again, this is applying constant pressure, if you're going to help people to really move themselves out of that role, then you need to have options prepared already. You need to know exactly what has worked in the past. How can I help these people?

All right, so I'm going to skip this video -- tada -- and I love this. I use this in my personal life all the time. All right, this, I think, is one of the best ways to help people to move themselves out of their conflict habits. I call it the "window of tolerance," the idea is really developed by this woman, Sarah Peyton -- not Sarah Palin -- Sarah Peyton. She's a neurobiologist from UCLA who then transitioned into the mediation field -- absolutely fascinating. Just amazing, worth listening to everything she does. Okay. On your piece of paper, I want you to draw a square, okay? Oh, that's lovely. Now on the side of your square, I want you to draw a dot. Okay? So now your square is your window, the dot on the outside of your square, that is outside of your window. Let's think of an example here. So let's just pretend that you're driving down the street and you hear sirens behind you. Instantly -- I don't know about you guys -- but instantly I hear the Jaws soundtrack behind me, and my body recognizes that there's conflict, and my heart rate escalates, and I immediately go into freeze mode, and I'm scared. And so what happens is, that experience is outside of my window of tolerance. I'm freaked out. I can't handle this well. My prefrontal cortex has completely gone off line, and amygdala, my purple Minion is just raging. This poor cop.

So I am not able to handle this situation in an effective way. However, let's say that the cop walks up to my window and says, "Hey, just wanted to let you know that you've got a broken taillight, here's what you do to fix it," blah blah blah, "Report back to me," et cetera. So I'm still scared, but it actually -- it was okay. I survived it. I was able to tolerate this experience. So a couple of days go by. I've totally forgotten to get my headlight fixed. I get pulled over again. And now I don't like it anymore, it's not comfortable. But you know what happens? So now, I want you to draw a bigger square that covers your dot. Okay, so what happens is, my window of tolerance has increased. It's still an uncomfortable situation, but I can handle it now. All right? I can move -- I can deal with that situation. That dot that was previously outside my window has now increased. Okay.

Now remember, your subconscious thinks that stories that it hears are pretty realistic, right, that's why we really want to be careful about letting your toddler watch the Walking Dead, right, because they're not really able to differentiate between what's real and what's not. But this works really well for us when we see people that are in conflict situations, because we can tell them a story, and preaching facts and data at them doesn't really help. It really needs to be a story so that you can grab the subconscious and take it along with you for the ride. But tell them a lovely story about somebody else who's been in a similar situation, and it might have been uncomfortable to have a difficult conversation, or it might have been difficult for that parent to sit through multiple IEP meetings. But at the end, their kids got the benefits that they needed, their kids were served well. So what happened is that your subconscious was able to walk through that difficult situation and then say, okay, I can tolerate this. Might not like it, it might not be my favorite thing to do, but my window of tolerance has now increased. So that's what's happening there.

But let's say that -- let's say you just [INAUDIBLE], completely freaked out. You don't have time to do any of those neuroplasticity window of tolerance stuff. You just need to get them back down to earth for a second, so you can have a conversation with him. All right, so now -- oh, sorry -- so now what we want to do is move on to our third immediate step, which is -- I call it "pleasure over anger," in other words, your body cannot have two diametrically opposed feelings at the same time. Diametrically opposed viewpoints? Oh yeah, we all have a million of those. But we can't hold two feelings at the same time.

Here's an example. They've noticed that right after people get married, that conflict goes up, right? That suddenly you're [INAUDIBLE] two different people into your household, and their fighting and they're arguing, and it's tough. But as soon as a baby is born, suddenly the report of conflicts goes way down, because babies are cute. Because your body cannot hold a feeling of anger and pleasure at the exact same time. And so a lot of the time, if it's a cute enough baby, then your body chooses joy over, you know, I really don't want to keep fighting with you. I'm still mad at you, but I'm just going to let it go for the moment.

So how does that work in a meeting where everybody's all amped up? What you want to do is figure out some grounding techniques ahead of time, such as, if you're in a pretty woody area, we can take five minutes and go for a walk. Or blame it on yourself and say, "Hey, I need to take a break. Could we make a cup of tea?" Or get a couple of funny jokes up your sleeve, okay? You want to just have a couple of -- these are your aces, these are your quick ways to help your brain reconnect and say wait, no, I don't want to be this freaked out, I don't want to be this angry. I don't want to yell at everybody at in this IEP meeting to the point where we can never talk to each other again. You want to help the people in your room to be able to calm down enough to be able to have an effective conversation.

So that's your next little bit of homework, is just thinking about ten or so things that you can do when the people around you are in that conflict situation. It might be grounding techniques for kids, it might be, for parents, helping them to remember what their long-term goals are, and how this is a difficult but necessary step to get to that goal. So having, let's say, five or ten things readily available in that conflict situation will really help you to bring the people back to earth. And I know it sounds cheesy, and nobody likes homework, but the reason I'm asking you to do it now is because right now, hopefully, you're not in a conflict situation. You're able to be creative. When you're in that conflict situation, in other words when you're sitting in that meeting, and the parent or the teacher is all freaked out and people start yelling, then like it or not, you'll start to have a physiological response, which diminishes your creativity. So you don't want to rely on yourself in the moment to think about good options. You really want to take time to do it now while you're grounded, and you're feeling creative. Hopefully that makes sense.

All right, so we just talked about a couple of practical steps. Now we just want to put some terms to those. What we're trying to do is do things like helping to retrain your brain, increasing the window of tolerance for your clients, and helping their brain to choose a more effective response. What we're trying to do there is gear them towards collaboration, that's the ultimate goal. That instead of being a conflictual situation, where it's win-lose, or I'm going to win at all costs, that we are gearing towards helping people to collaborate and come up with solutions together.

Power balance, so one of the big steps there is shifting the power. This is something that Lesley is really going to be talking about; I only want to do a five-second touch on. Power balance means a lot of the times, the low-key person in the room, the person that doesn't have a lot of power, they want to act out and get bigger to try to grab some of that power. So if you know that's the dynamic going in, in other words, if you've got a single parent walking into a room of ten administrators, you want to recognize that and immediately do what you can to give them back some of the power, so that they don't feel like they have to grab it through big fighting gestures and taking on big, tough positions.

Some of the other things you can do is, working together to create an agenda, maybe bringing kids in for part of it. Maybe talking about, all right, you want to draft up this part of the agreement, and you can create this part; that's doing multiple things that are inclusive, okay, so that's a major step towards collaborating. And then finally, you want to address the tension that's in the room. Okay, yep, this is a difficult situation guys, I'm sure that we would all rather be doing a binge Netflix night. But you know what? This is going to be better for all of us in the long run. Let's go ahead and have the conversation -- you know, address it. Normalize it. That is another big step at helping to increase people's window tolerance.

And then so plan your escape. In other words, because sometimes things do get out of control, and people are upset -- what's the ace up your sleeve? How can you help people to calm down, bring them back to earth? So when they're spiraling out of control, how can you help them to escape that path and exit it, and come back down to a more effective conversation? As I mentioned, grounding techniques -- having a cup of tea, going on a walk, telling a funny story, telling a story about people who have been in a similar situation that had the kind of result that these people are looking for. And as I mentioned, plan it now so that when you're in the middle of a conflict, you don't have to try to be creative then and come up with options.

So the sum of all this is yes, our brains are wired to sustain conflict. That's what we do. It's when we hear that there is a conflict approaching, when we hear that cougar in the woods, we physiologically react to it. But by understanding why we're in conflict, or the other person around us is in conflict, that helps us to move towards a place where we can collaborate and have a more effective conversation.

So thank you very much, and I'm just trying to see if there are any other questions that came in -- okay, so thank you very much. And Lesley, I would like to pass it to you.

>> All rightie, let's see if we can get my screen up there. All right. I apologize, one second here, I'm just trying to get this present mode. So I'm Lesley Cook. Again, I'm a clinical psychologist, and I'm currently in Virginia. I do work quite a bit with Special Education teams, both as a parent, I have two children in the Special Education system, probably my third will be there at some point as well, if statistics hold. And I also work quite a bit on the Special Ed teams as an outside evaluator, or as a parent friend, I've done that as well. So we're going to apply the information that we've been discussing, we're going to apply that now to the specific situations that happen in the SpEd system.

So some of the objectives and drawbacks of the Special Education System -- many of the people that are -- of you out there that are watching this webinar already know these things, so I'll just touch on a few. But basically, the objectives of the SpEd system is to identify educational needs, to develop a plan to treat those needs and accommodate those needs, hopefully to establish consensus and to implement strategies that effect change for students. Some of the drawbacks of the Special Education system is that the process itself brings conflict. Anytime you're gathering a bunch of people with different ideas about what needs to happen around the same table, there will be conflict that happens. We can use the conflict and use the energy that comes with the conflict to create better teams and better plans. If the conflict's not managed well, it can create an "us versus them" phenomenon, which is very common for anyone that's been at an IEP meeting; that's a very common phenomenon to happen. There can be a

mismatch between emotional needs versus the intellectual investment, so many times the professionals on a team have an intellectual investment that's primary for them.

So they've done testing, they've got ideas. But if you've ever been a parent in an IEP meeting, we do have intellectual investment as well, but our emotional investment is significantly higher, many times. Also, the SpEd system assumes that a level of background knowledge that often isn't realistic of many parents that are parents of kids in the Special Ed system, are just not well-versed in how the legal aspects of the system work, what the limitations are, but the school professionals are. And then of course aspirational desires that are constricted by realistic restrictions, which is something that is challenging for the team and the parents. Again, we'll link to the videos here, but basically this video was going to talk to you about really everything that Clare talked to you about before; how your prefrontal cortex, we want that to be in the driver's seat for our behavior. We want our decision-making to come out of the part of our brain that is associated with planning, with self-monitoring and choosing behavior that's going to be effective, not necessarily led by our amygdala, though our amygdala can inform what we do.

Common triggers for fight, flight and freeze -- we've talked about these before, but if any strong emotion can be a trigger, direct threats, implied threats, loss of resources and intimidation. This poor kitty is about to have a fight or flight scenario in about two seconds, here. Short-term stress is helpful. So again, if there's a tiger following you, we want you to have some short-term stress. But long-term stress is toxic, and it's toxic for the brain, it's toxic for the emotions. So if there's a zombie apocalypse, we're okay with everyone being stressed -- we need that. But over time, that's not going to be helpful.

So what can we change? Some of the things we can't change is if we have parents or professionals that have prior trauma -- we can't change that. They're going to bring in expectations that have to do with their traumatic histories -- biological responses, like Clare talked about. And then situational stress -- situational stress is going to be there. If you've ever met a professional who's not stressed at all during the Special Education process, I'd like to meet them, because I've never experienced that.

So what can we control? We can control our knowledge, our awareness of ourselves and others, our level of activation and how we use some emotional tools. And really, those four things are what we're going to talk about now. And I apologize, I need to exit this screen really quick here, so I can see in case there's any questions.

All right. So these are the four factors; the knowledge, awareness, effective use of emotional tools and activation. And you can see when those intersect, that's when we can effect change. I apologize, let me fix this here.

>> Sorry Lesley, that was me. I was trying to grab the YouTube videos and put them in the Chat thing.

>> Oh, okay. No problem. Let me see if I can get us back to where we were.

>> Excuse our little technical glitch.

>> That's okay, we're getting to review all the stops really quickly before we can get back to what we were doing, here.

>> We lost your screen too, Lesley.

>> Oh, you have? Okay. I apologize.

>> This is an intermission.

>> Can you see my screen?

>> No, you might have to hit the Show Screen button again.

>> I don't see that button anywhere. Let's see...

>> You know, if you want, we can just share our screen, you can just tell me to go to the next slide.

>> Okay.

>> There you are.

>> There I am. All right. Okay.

>> Oh, Lesley?

>> Yes?

>> It's already at the spot in the Prezi. We can just Share Screen, and you can just tell us when to go to the next...

>> Oh, sure. Okay.

>> Okay?

>> Perfect! All right. So this is back on -- there we go.

>> Good?

>> One more.

>> There you go.

>> Great.

>> All right. So I went over these, but just briefly, we're going to talk about knowledge -- so knowledge of physiology, knowledge of the law in the Special Education system, how the systems work, what the process is. Our awareness, our signs of our own stress and our signs of stress in others, our level of activation -- and we're going to really focus on that in just a moment -- and then using emotional tools. And this is really where the meat of this presentation happens, where we're talking about all of this background information that we've gained -- how do we use that to manage a level of conflict in the meeting? You can go ahead and forward. No, before these. You can just go around a circle here.

Okay, so the question is, how do we change, then, if we know our biological predispositions, if we know that our nurture, when we were parented, our experiences -- if we know how that works together, then how do we change? So the first thing is to really acknowledge that the fight or flight response system is adaptive. We don't want to fight that necessarily, we just need to understand it. But we need to learn to manage that reaction, so that the needs of the situation match our response. So if we're not being chased by a tiger, we don't want to get up and run out of the room. But we also do need to react in some way.

So neuroplastic change requires repetition. Neuroplasticity is really just a term that in the last 20 years has become more popular. All it means is that the brain is not use-it-or-lose-it, like we thought many years ago, and maybe some of us were taught in school that it can reorganize itself, it can change neuro-neural connections, it can change pathways. But to do that, the brain must, must, must repeat, repeat, repeat new behavior patterns, in order to make them actual change in the brain. And the process that we're going to talk about now can be applied in the individual, so everyone listening can do this for themselves. It can be applied on a team level and at a systems level. You can go to the next one.

Okay. So stress is very subjective, that's why many hospitals will use a zero to ten system for pain because one person's ten is another person's eight. Well, Dr. Tony Attwood, who has worked in the field of autism research and intervention for many years really pioneered the use of a thermometer with kids on the spectrum. It works so well with kids on the spectrum, that I use this in my own clinical work for myself and for my children, and I use it when I do trainings with systems. So we're going to work through this thermometer system and talk to you about how you can use it in whatever system you are present in for your job. Next slide, please.

All right. So you're going to have to click a couple of times here. We're going to have a thermometer magically appear. At the bottom we have zero, which is our relaxed state. So there's our yoga at the bottom. Around a five, we would call that for our purposes here irritated or anxious, and at a ten is

where we're really reaching Mel Gibson, who's the next -- if you click again, we'll get Mel up here -- oh, he'll come up in a couple of clicks. There he is. Poor Mel. That's your amygdala.

So each person might have different labels. These are my labels, relaxed, irritated or freaking out. What we know from quite a bit of longitudinal research is, about at a subjective level of seven -- so remember, someone else's seven may not be your seven, and that's okay -- whatever you identify as your seven, we know that it's around a seven out of ten where the amygdala begins to function as the primary driver of behavior, instead of that prefrontal cortex area.

So when we reach a seven, either internally or in our meeting, something has to happen. We can't keep going. We need to acknowledge that something is happening to take that emotional temperature, if you will, up and use a strategy, and that's what we're going to look at next here.

All right, so what do we do? The first step was the awareness which we just talked about, so being aware of what number you are on that scale, and now we're going to talk about what to do with that. The best way to work with conflict, and Clare talked a little bit about this in the beginning, is to front-load coping strategies. So in other words, don't wait. Don't wait until the conflict occurs and then be rapidly searching your memory banks for what you should do. You want to think about these things before the meetings begin. During the meetings, or actually at any time in your life, you can start by identifying your number. So you can take your own emotional temperature. If you start to feel those fight, flight or freeze responses, if you feel the heart rate, if you feel a flush in your face, you can ask yourself, what number am I? If you're a seven or above, it's time to engage in a strategy. For many people, those strategies are saying out loud that they're upset, they're breathing, they're eating, moving around. You're going to take your temperature again. If you've gotten yourself below a seven, then you can re-engage in the task. If you're a five or a six, go ahead and re-engage. But if you're still at a seven, you need to change strategy and try again. We can use this throughout the Special Ed process to make sure that our interactions with others and parents and kids stay in that neutral zone, which is a six or below. Next slide, please.

So I'm going to give you a quick awareness activity, and I'm going to -- I know that we're running a little bit short on time. So I'm going to read through this pretty quickly, and then what I just want you to listen for or look at, because you're going to be able to see it as what signs of activation of fight or flight do you perceive? How do the people in this meeting manage or mismanage stress, and what factors do we think led to the conflict? This is an actual example from about three weeks ago, that I was present in. You can go ahead to the next slide.

All right, so the team calls in Ms. Smith and her sister, who have been waiting in the front office for the meeting to begin. When they enter, they see ten people sitting at the far end of a round table. They're greeted warmly, and asked to sit. The care coordinator introduces herself and asks the other professionals to do the same. When it comes to Ms. Smith, she introduces herself as "just the mom." The team then shares the rights and responsibilities of the parents, and hands them a copy of their rights in printed form. They pull up a partially-completed IEP on the screen, and begin discussing the findings from the assessment that were discussed at the last meeting. Ms. Smith is listening quietly. When asked if she has any input or questions, she says no. The team goes on to begin listing goals and objectives one by one. Ms. Smith shifts in her chair. Goals and objectives and services are now fully listed, and the team asks Ms. Smith again if she has anything to offer or ask. She asks how the team is going to help her son, who has autism, learn how to use a bank account. The care coordinator reminds Ms. Smith that the IEP is about academic goals, and also reminds the team that they are short on time. Ms. Smith disagrees that teaching her son how to use a bank account should not be on the IEP, and asks why. The response from the team is that the goals have to match the identified needs from the assessment. Ms. Smith says she has no idea what that means, and that this meeting is a joke, and storms out with her sister, feeling angry and confused. The team is equally confused, and has no idea what's happened. You can go on to the next slide, here.

All right. So some of the setting factors for this IEP, this is actually a really, really sad IEP, and it did work out eventually; they had a second meeting, and we used some of the strategies that I'm going to talk about here, but it was a difficult one to be in. So there were several setting factors. Some of the questions I would ask you guys to think about is, where was everyone before the meeting? When did the stress begin? The tone was positive, so why didn't the parent feel supported? And what opportunities were missed? These are some of the responses that I would -- oops, sorry -- give. Can you do one more click for me? There we go.

So the power seat -- the team was already inside the room. And this is a common practice for schools. And I have a challenge for any school systems out there, that I think your meetings would be very, very different if the team came out to greet the parent and walked into the room together, instead of having parents walk in to a table that's already formed with people who already have relationships and are already discussing things. It makes a huge difference in the amount of conflict that the parents perceive. In my opinion, the conflict began as soon as she said, "I'm just the mom." And had I to do this over, I think I would have spoken up at that point and do what we call "surface," which is just saying, you know, "That's an interesting statement. Let's talk a minute about your role, because you're one of the most important people in here, if not the most important." Unspoken factors influence stress, so in this case, the power differential was very potent. And this parent, after the meeting, reported feeling powerless the moment she entered the room. There was a lot of "us and them," "you and us" language in this meeting. That makes a difference for conflict. Those are setting factors. And then finally, the team really didn't prepare the family. The family in this case didn't understand the system, they didn't

understand why the needs have to be linked to the assessment directly. They didn't know that that is a restraint that is put on the school as well, that the school system and the school teachers probably would have provided much more in their initial offering, if they didn't have to go through that process. And there may be other opportunities that you noticed when you listened to that scenario.

Okay. All right, here's good old Darth. So what happens when everybody leaves the meeting? This is the other part of stress that's really important for this presentation. Stress is a ghost, so even though it ends, technically, the conflict ends carry over stress, or generalized stress, can cause you to begin new tasks at a higher number before any of the situational stressors exist. For example, when we had the second IEP meeting to finish this IEP, before the mother entered, I asked her what her number was, and her number was a nine, before she even entered the room. So that's why we want to make sure that we are front-loading, or thinking about these strategies before we are actually in these environments. We know that chronic stress in work environments leads to burnout and disconnection from the purpose of the task at hand. So this stress doesn't only occur for parents, this is a huge issue in the teaching community and the paraprofessional community as well. Next slide, please.

All right, signs of major stress in a parent or a child, or a professional that should be directly addressed during the Special Education process -- if we start seeing arms crossed, if we see shifting in chairs, it's really okay to say something. It's okay to say, "I feel like the tone might be changing. I feel like there's some tension. Let's talk about that. Let's take a break from the task, and just address where everybody is. Let's take our temperature." You can ask if -- some school systems actually use this system, they'll have a thermometer in the classroom or in the meeting room, and they can take the temperature of the group right there. Changes in perspiration and heart rate -- we all know that. And a decrease in questions and increase in directive statements, and I'm sure you have others. Okay, next slide.

This is one of our last slides here, and this is what we often forget. We often forget that parents, not always but very often, have really no idea how the system or the Special Education IDEA works. Parents are emotionally activated. They have often been inappropriately prepped by other people; that's a common problem. And we often forget that parents know more about their child than anyone at that table, and we forget to use parents as a resource at times. What do we forget about our professionals? Our professionals are constrained. They're constrained by rules and regulations. When I'm on a team, I'm constrained by rules and regulations. I have never met a professional with a child who didn't genuinely want to help. Professionals must follow a sequence of events, that's not an option. IDEA is very specific. We forget that professionals offer parents very specialized knowledge and skills, and we forget that professionals also have feelings and opinions, but often have to put those aside in their role. Next slide, please.

Okay, so this is kind of a summary. Let's talk some turkey. What can we do to minimize and manage conflict during this bad process? We can manage the setting. We can manage background knowledge -- for example, why not have an evening seminar for all the parents that have IEP meetings in a given month, to not just give them their rights and responsibilities or their explanation of IDEA, but to talk through it, to answer questions, to make sure that they fully understand the process. We can manage expectations, build awareness of signs of conflict, both in ourselves, and then between ourselves and others, and in our systems. We can recognize activation of fight or flight, and we can stop the meeting to acknowledge that, and use emotional tools to keep the goal in mind and ahead of us. And then we can also use facilitators.

So on the next slide -- you can actually click two ahead -- here's some free -- oh yeah, there's our poor mouse. That's our stressed mouse. Oh, I think I might have skipped one, that's okay. We can go one more. We can go one more ahead, actually. Yeah, and one more ahead. So our facilitators and mediators out there, if you're out there, we know that facilitation and mediation in the Special Education process is incredibly valuable. We know it improves relationships, we know that it models appropriate communication. It's helpful to clarify messages, provides opportunities to resolve conflicts in the moment, not waiting until after the meeting. It helps us identify always the hidden third option that we don't realize is available, and it typically keeps that emotional temperature and supports follow-through. So we love our mediators.

And that's it. And we're so happy that you have hung with us through this webinar. This is a topic that's, I know, near and dear to both of our professional lives and personal lives, and I think we're going to try to open it up for some questions, if we have time.

>> Yeah, thank you so much. We may have time for a couple of questions. And that was absolutely fascinating. I think we could easily have a very long, extended and extensive conversation about all of the concepts that you shared today, it was really both thought-provoking and, I think, incredibly helpful to all the folks that participated. And if you do have a question, now would be the time to type it in. I think there was one question about the spelling of Sarah's name, which I believe is P-E-Y-T-O-N. Sarah Peyton, who Clare referenced earlier. So again, thank you so much to Lesley and Clare for sharing your experiences, including your early years as college roommates. And certainly all of the experience and knowledge you've gained since that first year in college, which was just a few years ago, right?

>> Sure.

>> There is a link on your screen. Thank you again, all of you, for joining us today. Please click on the link in the Chat box to fill out a very brief survey monkey, so hopefully you can see the link over in the Chat box on the right of your screen, and help us understand how helpful this webinar was for you by evaluating the webinar. We really greatly appreciate you taking a few minutes to do this. And let's see if there's some questions. Can you describe how teams that have a thermostat in the room use it?

>> Sure. If that's okay, can I grab that one, Clare?

>> Of course.

>> All right. So in several of the teams that I have worked on, they actually will have -- two of them have very large thermostats in their room, and they're laminated, they're up on the wall. And they're labeled. The zero, five and ten are labeled, and then several of the possible strategies are also labeled. Even things as simple as taking a break, asking about the air flow in the room. Many teams also have food during meetings, we know that food makes happy people. We know that candy makes happy people, even though we wish it didn't. And what'll happen is, if the team or the -- so the team and the parent are both empowered to notice aloud when they feel like the emotional temperature in the room is a seven or above. And if they feel like that, they'll stop, and they'll say, "I feel like our number is pretty high. Can we go around the room and say what we think it is?" And if there's a general consensus that it's pretty high, then for a few minutes, the team stops working on the IEP and chooses a strategy together. Now, some of the most wonderful strategies that I didn't get a chance to talk about today are, including a video of the child. So sometimes when the emotional temperature is too high, the team will take a break and watch a short video that a parent has prepared of the child. Or, they'll put a picture of the child in front of them on the table. Or perhaps they'll just all go up and get a bathroom break. But the key seems to be acknowledging that the tension is there; just acknowledging it tends to reduce the number in itself, and then using a strategy allows that prefrontal cortex to stay in charge and the conflict to come down.

>> Hey Les, would you mind talking a little bit about what are some strategies for when the child is in the room? What are some things that you do when the child actually attends the IEP meeting?

>> Well, I wish that that was a common occurrence. For me that's happened three times in my entire -- since about 2005. And all three times, they were older. The child -- in the example I just gave you, the child was actually in the room. She's a 17-year-old, so that did not -- you know, that initial meeting did not end well. Typically when there is a child in the room, they'll have them present for the portion of

the meeting that is just information-gathering, and then they'll have them not in the room very often when decisions are being made, and when there's a high propensity for conflict. But if you're working with an older child, I would empower the child to also notice if they're feeling stressed or need a break, to have them be an active participant in the process. I hope that answers that.

>> That's very helpful.

>> One thing that I really like is especially if there's a power imbalance in the room, like if the parent comes in and feels like they're being bombarded by the whole team, and especially to have water or food or something, for the person who has the most power to serve them a glass of water, you know, and serve the child a glass of water, or offer them something to make it very clear that you're welcome, and you're honored. So it's a tiny thing, but I think it's pretty powerful.

>> We have another question about strategies when the parents are in disagreement, and may be at different levels on that thermometer.

>> Yes, so there will most often be times when some people are not above a seven, and some are. We know that acknowledging the number tends to help when it's a parent, tends to help the parent come down, so if somebody were to ask, how are we all doing, we wouldn't want to identify the parent only, but we'd ask how are we all doing. And if a parent says, "I'm at a seven," one of the best things we can ask that parent is, "What can we do? How can we help?" Let the parent guide you. Because what the parent's going to do is, they're probably going to identify a confusion, a frustration, a disagreement. And if we spend a few moments just acknowledging that disagreement, a very common one is when children come in and parents are really anticipating that they will receive an IEP, and the team says, "Your child just doesn't meet criteria for an IEP. They're going to have something called a 504." That process is often very confusing for parents. They don't often understand the difference. And when they do understand the difference, they may disagree. So taking a moment, instead of just explaining on a cerebral level here's why, taking a moment to say this is really distressing for you. Man, if I was in your position, I'd probably feel the same way. Just acknowledging those feelings tends to bring that number down.

>> And if I can add, if you have parents that are at different levels, say you've got one that's at a seven and one that's at a three, I've seen it where the lead person turned and they only address the one that's at a three, right, thinking that they're clearly the rational or reasonable one to work with, here. So what

does the parent that's at a seven do? Well, they speak louder and stronger until they get their point heard. So they might amp themselves up to an eight or a nine, simply because they felt ignored.

>> That's right. We don't want to engage in the meeting if anybody is a seven or above. We can't think at that point. So if even one member is a seven or above, we've got to make time to bring that number down before we can re-engage. A lot of people worry that that's going to take time away from the meeting but what we find is, it actually makes the meeting more efficient, because instead of arguing or getting activated or upset, we're spending much more time in that nice neutral zone.

>> Great.

>> We have another couple of questions. School teams are often -- wait, can you scroll, move? The power dynamics within the school team are often unspoken, but affect the quality of the discussion and the ultimate outcomes. Do you have some thoughts about that?

>> Oh, the power balance. Yes. So another one of my very passionate beliefs is that before parents go into IEP meetings, that there should be some kind of either pre-meeting or group meeting with all the parents, or a phone call or something that explains to the family what everyone's role is, what their job is and is not, what does the care coordinator do, and why does that person have a little more power than the occupational therapist? Why is the assistant principal here? That's a question we get a lot, and why does it seem like they're guiding the meeting? The more information everyone has on the team to understand their role, theoretically the better it goes. Now, that also assumes that everyone is working in good faith. But I think more knowledge is the way to go.

>> And there is another question that somebody just posted, and I think the answer is pretty much the same thing. So somebody was asking if there are additional resources in schools for students to help them cope with stress and conflict. And the answer is really the same, that there is -- that there needs to be an increased knowledge, I think, that needs to be sent to superintendents, principals, et cetera, because there are so many fantastic resources available for students. There's pure mediation programs, there's online pure mediation programs. There's -- even the UN, or, I'm sorry, I think it was UNESCO, did an incredible communication and conflict series that's free and available online, and it's designed at kindergarten through fifth grade. And there are so many wonderful, free resources out there. And I think CADRE is doing a fantastic job of disseminating some of those resources and making them available for parents, principals, et cetera.

And this is a -- I'm not sponsored by this website at all, just so everyone -- full disclosure -- but Understood.org is a wonderful website with a wealth of resources, both on just the Special Ed process, and also how to manage emotional responses during the Special Ed process. And there are resources for children and parents. It's incredibly helpful. So that was Understood.org.

>> Great.

>> Great. There's also a question came in around states mandating IEP -- facilitated IEP meetings. I'll take that question. There aren't any states that mandate the facilitation of an IEP meeting, but right now, there are about 30 states that offer IEP facilitation of services under certain circumstances, and there are six more states that are doing pilots right now, and hope to have a statewide program available in the next year or so. And so depending on where you live, there's a very good chance that your state, in fact, does offer the service. And I think there is a question... Oh, can we post some of the resources offered at the end of the webinar? Yes. And we can post the list of resources, we also post a link to the videos.

Again, thank you so much. What a fascinating webinar, incredibly helpful. And it has been recorded, and it will be captioned, and it'll be made available fairly soon on the CADRE website. I'm certain a lot of the folks out there right now are going to say to some of your colleagues and friends and family members, you missed a terrific webinar today. But fortunately, they'll be able to view it, again, through the CADRE website, in the very near future, you can just check our home page out. Our next webinar, titled, "Trends in Dispute Resolution: What Might 11 Years of National Data Reveal" will occur in December. This webinar will be conducted by CADRE senior consultant Dick Zeller, and CADRE's new policy analyst, Candace Hawkins. And more information about that webinar will soon be available on the CADRE website. We look forward to you joining us.

Again, thanks to all of you, and especially our two wonderful presenters for a great webinar, and we all hope you have a terrific rest of your day. Thank you!

>> Thank you so much.