

CADRE and JAMS Foundation Present:
Voices from the Field
Interview Clip #2 Transcript – Diana Autin

Marshall: You've worked with countless parents at SPAN helping them to prepare for their children's IEP and IFSP meetings and as you think about the advice that you give to families are there nuggets that you feel like are particularly helpful?

Diana: There are and the nuggets are different today than they would have been five years ago before the work that we did on the Creating Agreement initiative. I think the work that we did around Creating Agreement really helped us think about the relationship aspect of families working with school districts and families working with the early intervention system, issues around identifying what your real interests are instead of walking in with positions and backup positions, prioritizing the things that are most important to figure out and come to agreement on now and things that might be able to wait down the road. Issues around listening, we spend a lot more time talking to parents about the importance of really listening and not just listening for the words but also listening for the heart of what the professionals around the table are saying and also listening more to their children and the heart of what it is their children are contributing to the conversation. Another nugget that we bring to the table is it is important to know what your rights are in the process and what your children's rights are in the process. Not so much to come to the table pounding your fist and demanding your rights, but to be able to understand that there may be times when you can't come to agreement and you're going to have to make a decision about the possibility of using some of the procedural safeguards and some of the dispute resolution mechanisms that do exist in the law and it's better to be able to make positive decisions that are based on knowing your rights as well as your responsibilities in the system. I think another really important nugget of wisdom that we share with parents is the act of relationship building - that it really is to be a proactive step that parents take and even though we believe that professionals should be the ones that are going first in trying to understand the parent we do talk with parents about the fact that somebody does have to go first and if you're really going to build a positive relationship it can be the parent that who is the person who tries to understand the other person. And I think the last nugget of wisdom that we would say is really critical to every parent going into an IFSP or IEP meeting is...that...when difficulties do arise, because difficulties are

going to arise in any relationship where people really care about the outcome, that, that it is okay to take some time to think about what direction you want to go into. You don't have to make a snap judgment. You can ask for, you know, either the meeting to be paused or you can ask to reconvene the meeting after both sides have had the opportunity to consider other options. It's okay not to resolve everything right now and if there is a dispute you can ask for some time so that you can come back to the table, everybody can come back to the table having thought more about the issue, having researched other possible solutions and even just taking some time to help think through what's most important in the situation.