

ADR Skill of the Month

Southwest SELPA

Alternative Dispute Resolution Services (ADR)

- Mediation
- Training
- Coaching
- Facilitation

September 2010

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New Term, New 'Tude

In conflict resolution it is often helpful to find ways to start fresh. There's frequently a need for folks to put history behind them; to rebuild trust, or maybe establish it once and for all after prior attempts faltered. For those of us doing this work in educational contexts, we are fortunate to have a ready-made opportunity for refreshing our attitudes and energies. It's called "September."

The new school year is a natural and wonderful occasion for everyone to get off on the right foot: parents, teachers and school district officials alike. It's an inherently exciting time, brimming with potential. It's Opening Day when everybody's favorite team is tied for first place. It's our annual shot at a "honeymoon period" when optimism and good will are most abundant – meaning that we have our greatest prospects for breakthroughs, for progress, for establishing positive precedents and, ultimately, for gaining successful outcomes.

With so much promise in the fall air, the one thing we cannot do is blow the chance. If you are entering this new term still dragging around last year's baggage (mistrust, grudges, etc.), then you are surely setting yourself up for failure. And that means failure for your child/student. So, for everyone's sake, do whatever you can to rinse away any lingering bad tastes in your mouth. And if you're having a hard time doing this, call me for help! Seriously, I am here to support you – or more precisely to support whatever will advance the ability of your student/child to learn, be safe and, yes, have some fun too. All of which depends on getting off to the right start.

Marc Purchin, Director of ADR Services

Suggested Tips on Practicing This Skill

1. Welcome each other to the new school year... while thinking about the sweetness of apples.
2. If you are a teacher or administrator, let parents know the best form and style of communication with you (phone calls, e-mails, walk-ins, communication logs, etc). If you are a parent, respect this request but if the method honestly doesn't work for you, come up with something together that does.
3. Begin the term with an expectation that it is going to be great! In fact, say it to yourself: "This is going to be a great year and if something comes up that concern me, I trust I can work it out with my parents/teachers/school/district."
4. Don't sweat the small stuff; keep things in perspective.

A Closing Thought...

In the spirit of New Beginnings, take this time to rededicate yourself to the important work ahead. Remember that you are part of a team, and that all members of that team are mutually dedicated to supporting children who need them. Therefore positive relationships and open communication are helpful and essential between staff members and parents. Your support network includes your Special Education Coordinator or Director, and probably Program Specialists in your district. Use them. Likewise feel free to contact me or anyone at the SELPA – and let's have a great year