



Seeing a Better Future: Conflict Coaching in Your Special Education Dispute Work

**CADRE Conference
October 2025
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And
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Ph.D.**

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Goals:

- Introduce Conflict Coaching
- Helping Them "See" the Future Change

-Where they want to go:

- Conflict and Vision Mapping
- Trust Visions
- Appreciative Inquiry

How They Can Get There

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Conflict Coaching Matters

Getting to Know You – At Your Table

Choose one of the questions below and share with your colleagues a short answer to that question in terms of your recent experience in your special education work.

What is one of the most meaningful affirmations you have ever received?

www.weand.me

What is something that amazes you?

www.weand.me

What is one thing life is teaching you right now?

www.weand.me

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Conflict Coaching Matters



Introducing Conflict Coaching As An ADR Process

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Conflict Coaching Matters

Conflict Coaching Defined

Conflict coaching is a one-on-one ADR process to help the party:

1. Understand and analyze their conflict from self and other perspective.
2. Identify preferred direction for relationship and conflict situation.
3. Develop specific skills to enact the preferred direction.



A photograph showing two men in a professional setting. One man, wearing a grey t-shirt, is seated and gesturing with his hands while speaking. The other man, wearing a blue button-down shirt, is seated across from him, listening attentively. They are in a room with a window and a display board in the background.

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Conflict Coaching Assumptions



A photograph showing two women in a professional setting. One woman, wearing a light blue blazer, is seated and gesturing with her hands while speaking. The other woman, wearing a white shirt, is seated across from her, listening attentively. They are at a table with papers and a coffee cup.

- Party maintains decision-making control
- Voluntary, confidential, and transparent
- Ideally part of a larger ADR system
- Follows principle of efficiency – maximum benefit in minimum time

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Why Conflict Coaching?

- Early intervention
- Preventative (and de-escalatory)
- Focus on conflict analysis
- Emphasis on perspective-taking
- Builds skills and applications
- Low cost
- Online and in-person
- Works well with other ADR processes



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A Brief History of Conflict Coaching

- Developed in 1995/96 as a response to no-shows in mediation programs
- Since 2007/8 part of ADR Systems in
 - Federal agencies (under ADRA/ MS 110)
 - State agencies
 - Private sector
 - Education
- Fastest Growing ADR Process



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Contexts of Conflict Coaching – Where Is It Working?

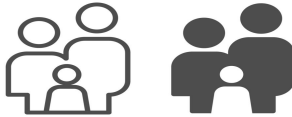


➤ **Workplace Conflicts**

- *Change Processes
- *Team Conflict
- *High Conflict Parties
- *AA/EEO

➤ **Family Conflict**

- *Co-parenting
- *Divorce
- *Elder/Other Care
- *Family Business



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➤ **Community/Court Conflicts**

- *Diversion
- *Small Claims
- *Housing/Eviction
- *General Community

➤ **Education**

- *K-12
- *Special Education
- *Higher Education



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What Is Your Experience With Conflict Coaching As An ADR Process?

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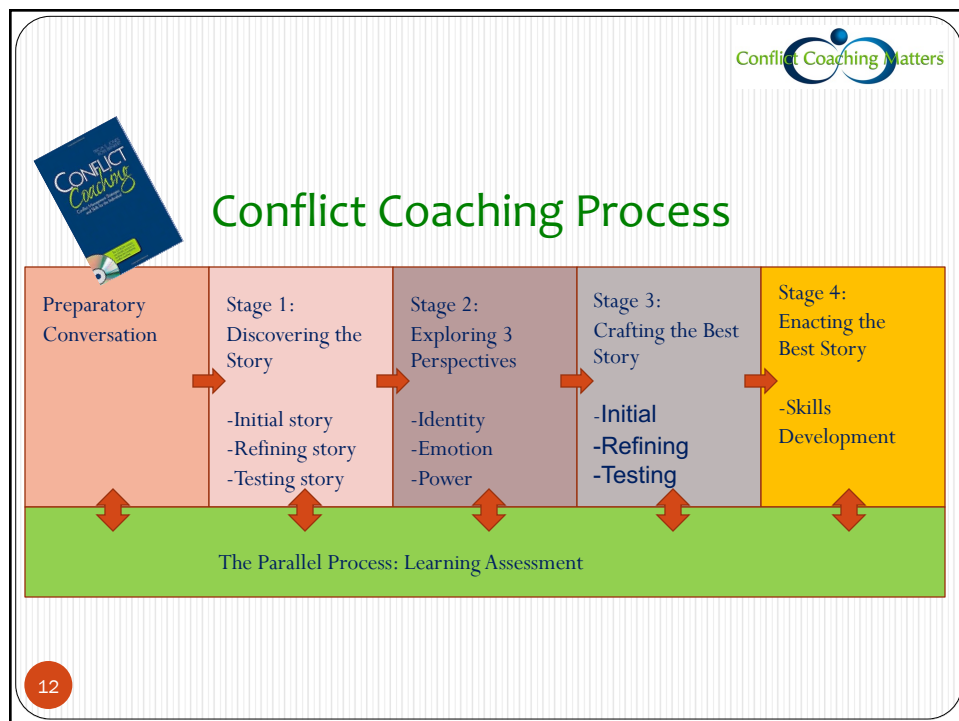
Enter the code

XXXX XXXX

When the slides come on your phone enter your answers and we'll see the results on screen

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The Preparatory Conversation

Conflict Coaching Matters



A basic conversation is needed to...

- Explain conflict coaching
- Make sure the party wants to proceed

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Stage 1: Discovering the Story

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Inviting the Initial Story

--

What is the conflict?

➔

Refining the Initial Story

--

Do we fully understand the conflict?

➔

Testing the Initial Story

--

What perspectives or assumptions of the party may need to be challenged?

Narrative is powerful and persuasive.

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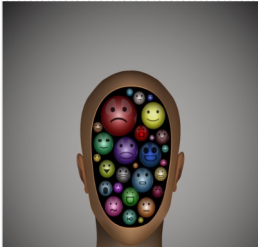
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Stage 2: Know the Conflict Drivers

Identity, Emotion, Power



Who do I/they want to be respected as)?
– **Identity**



How do I/they want to feel?
– **Emotion**



What can I/they make happen in this situation?
– **Power**

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Stage 3: Crafting the Best Story

- Focus on “what can be” – the future
- Visioning the desired future
 - The Best Visions are detailed, clarified, refined
- Help parties discuss realistic outcomes and coping strategies if change is difficult



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Stage 4: Enacting the Best Story – Skills Development

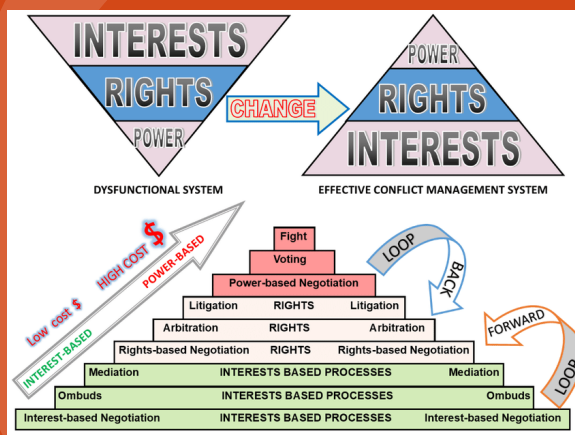


Stage Four is the process of skills development – How To Make The Best Story Happen

- Critical skills necessary to enact the “best” story
- Skills development agenda
- Skills development work

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Conflict Coaching Integration Into Mediation and ADR Programs

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CADRE Continuum of Dispute Resolution Processes & Practices																		
Stages of Conflict	Stage I			Stage II		Stage III			Stage IV		Stage V							
Levels of Intervention	Prevention			Disagreement		Conflict			Procedural Safeguards		Legal Review							
Assistance/ Intervention Options	Parent Engagement	Participant & Stakeholder Training	Stakeholder Council	Collaborative Rule Making	Parent to Parent Assistance	Case Manager	Telephone Intermediary	Facilitation	Mediation Models	Ombudsperson	Third-Party Opinion/Consultation	Resolution Meeting	Mediation under IDEA	Written State Complaints	Due Process Hearing	Hearing Appeal (Two-Tier Systems)	Litigation	Legislation
Dimensions that help clarify placement of the options along the Continuum	Third-Party Assistance				Third-Party Intervention													
	Decision Making by Parties				Decision Making by Third-Party													
	Interest-Based				Rights-Based													
	Informal & Flexible				Formal & Fixed													

Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE)
<http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/>



Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent
"Making Education Work for All Georgians"
www.gadoe.org

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River metaphor of conflict, continued

upstream



downstream



engagement efforts,
shared norms

training, skills
development

dialogue,
negotiation

conciliation

mediation

neutral evaluation

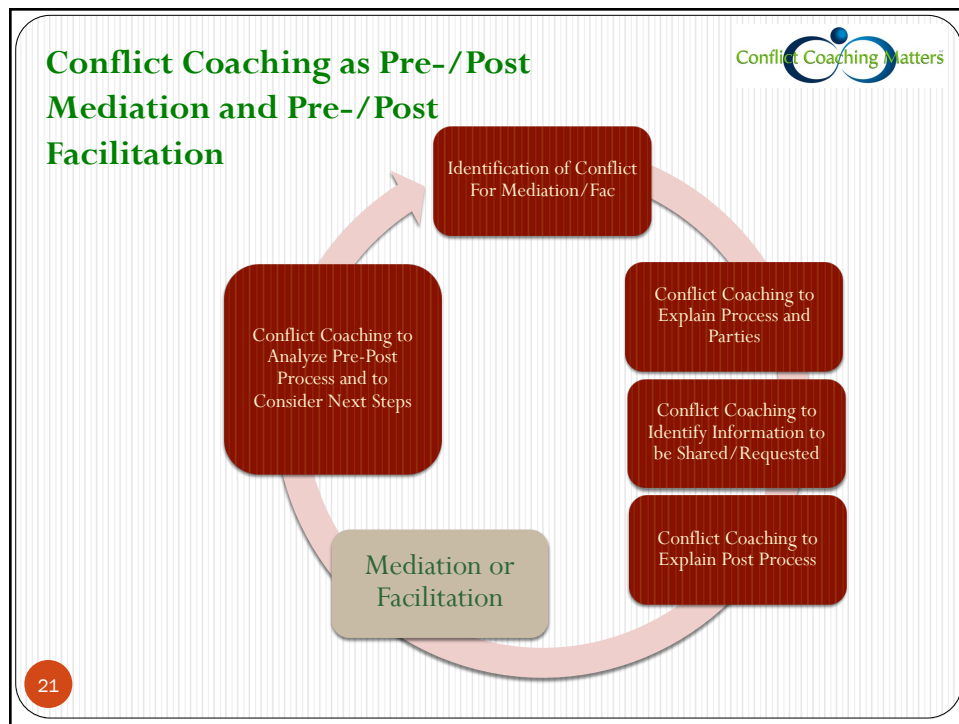
arbitration

adjudication

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How Can Conflict Coaching Support These Special Education Processes?

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- IEP Facilitation
- Mediation
- Resolution Meeting
- Due Process Hearing
- OTHER PLACES?

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When is Conflict Coaching Helpful?

- When people are entering special education processes
- When people are transitioning between schools/with new service support teams
- When things haven't gone well; relationships/trust needs rebuilding
- In preparation for IEP Facilitation, Mediation, Resolution Hearings, etc.
- Attractive when one or both parties do not want to engage in informal mediation
- Valuable for parties "stuck" in conflict
- When teams or groups are in conflict that is interfering with effective service

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CONFLICT MAPPING and VISION MAPPING

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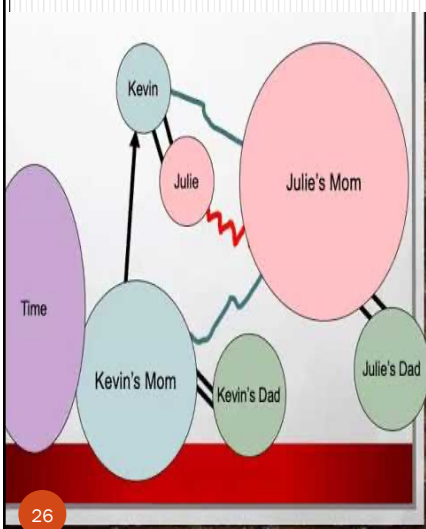

Focusing on Relationships – Stage One

- Who
- How Are They Related?

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Conflict Mapping – The WHO – The Relationships



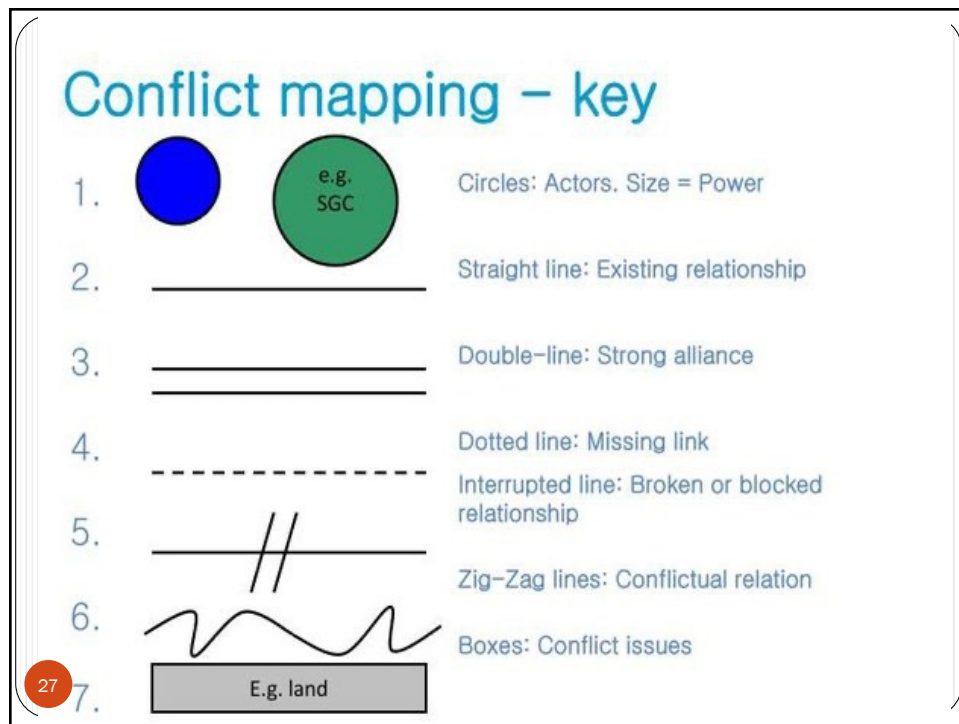
- Who is relevant?
- How are they related?
- Where are the tensions?
- Where are the alliances
- What are their roles or relevance in the conflict?

Thanks to Julie Marie Hyde

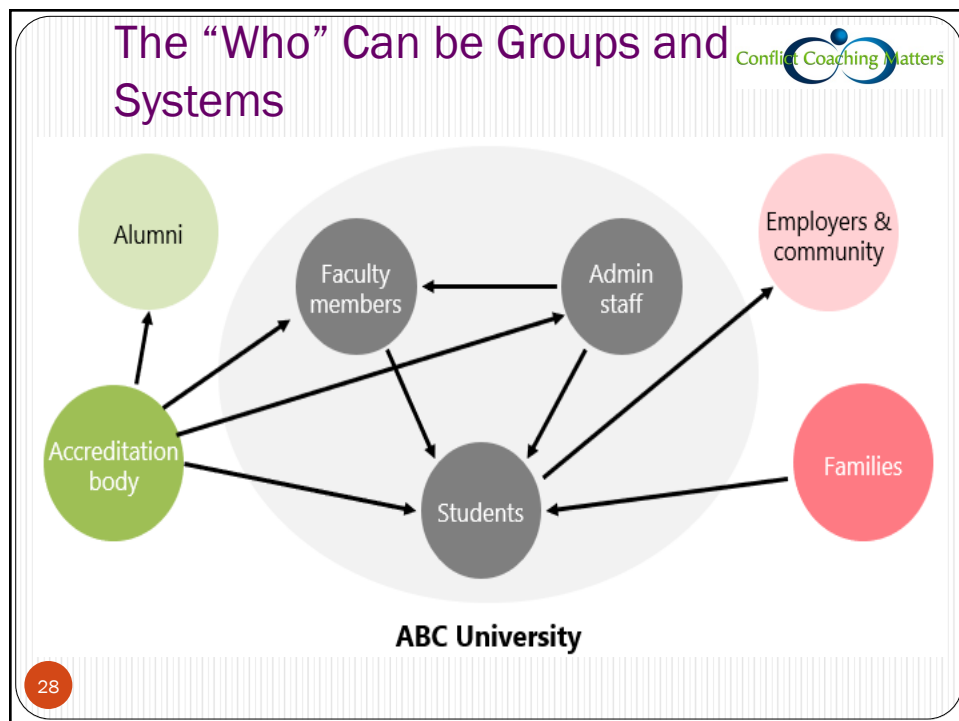
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iywM-o-ym1Y>

Conflict Mapping

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A Hypothetical Situation

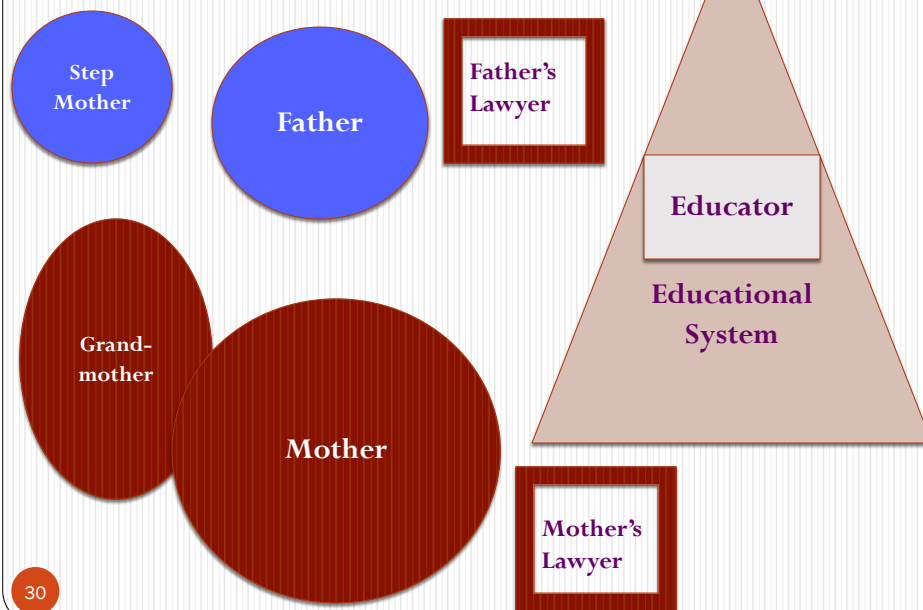


Sara and Dwayne have a 10 year old son, DeJahn, (their only child) who has been identified as having severe ADHD and moderate autism. Sara and Dwayne divorced four years ago and tensions of supporting their son contributed to the divorce. In addition, there was domestic violence that resulted in restraining orders which limited contact. Since the divorce Sara has had sole custody and has been the primary caretaker. She has a relatively stable and constructive working relationship with DeJahn's elementary school and his district. They have been strongly supported emotionally and financially by Sara's mother. Last year Dwayne married Tanya and both have now been granted shared custody but with limitations. Dwayne and Tanya believe that the school has not been providing adequate support and intervention for DeJahn and want to have him receive more. They are threatening to escalate the case against Sara and the school district.

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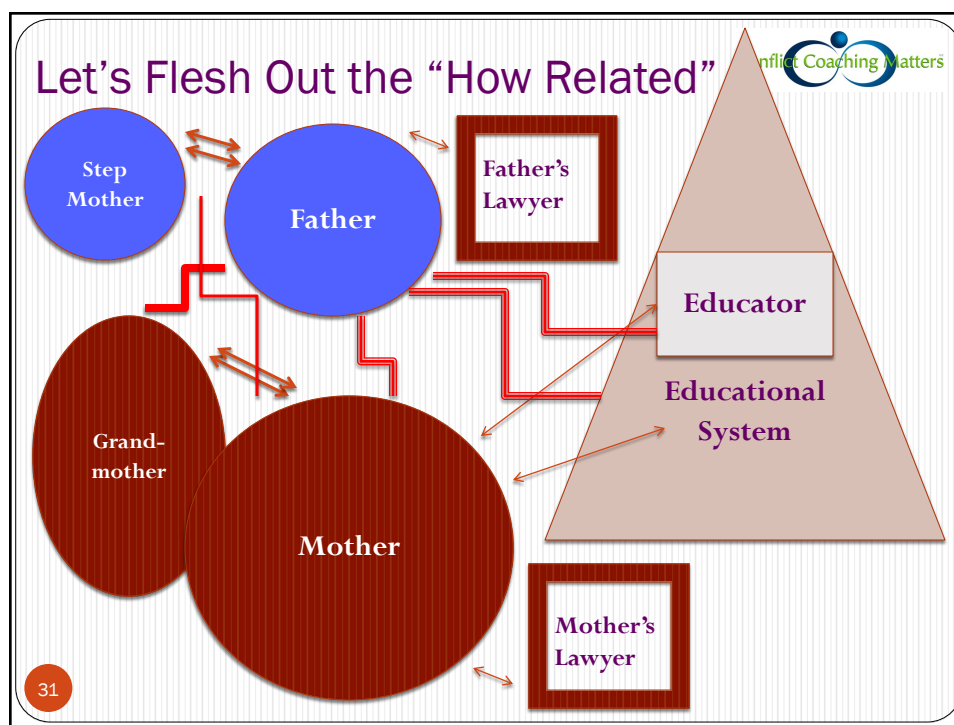
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Let's Flesh Out the Who



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Based on This Conflict Map. What General, Refining and Testing Questions Would You Ask as a Conflict Coach?

- What General Questions Would You Ask?
- What Refining Questions Would You Ask?
- What Testing Questions Would You Ask?

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Does This Map Change Per Issue?

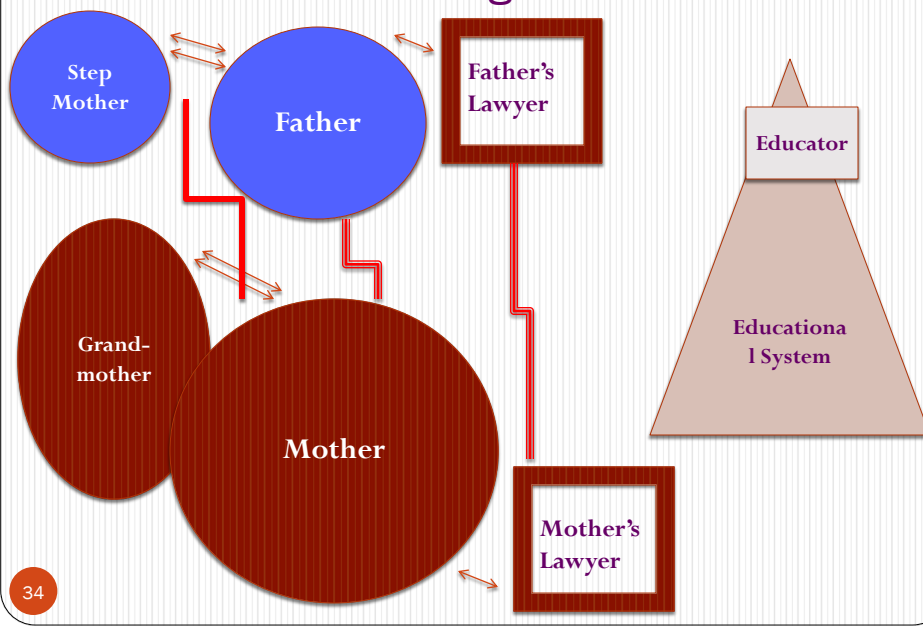
Assume there are two key issues in the conflict:

- 1. The role of the father in shared decision-making in DeJahn's education
- The interventions desired by Sara and Dwayne/Tanya

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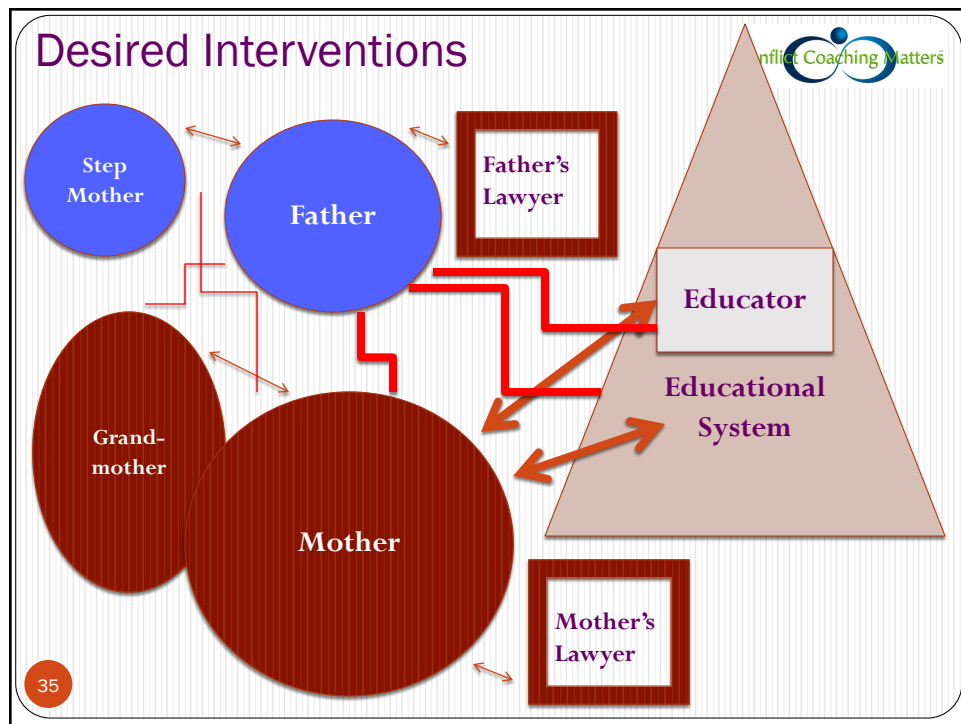
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Shared Decision-Making

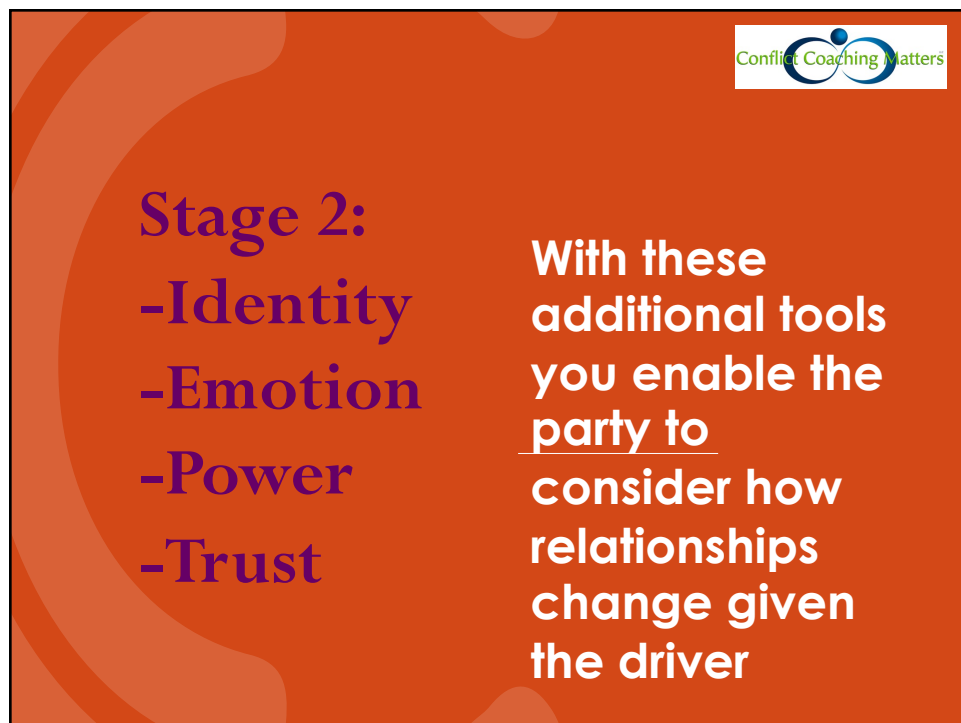


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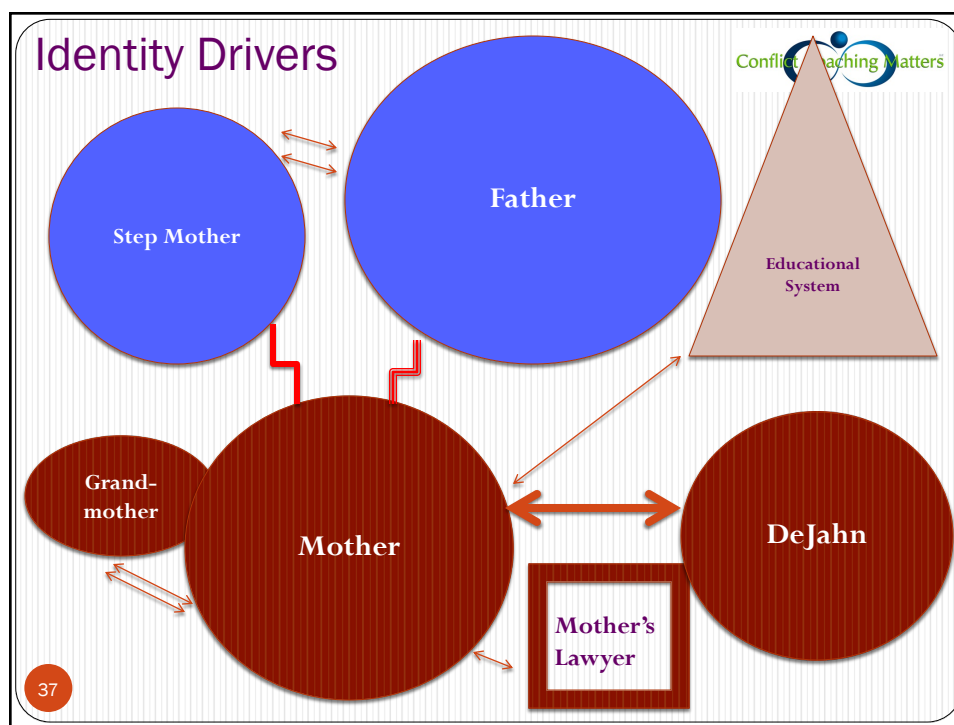
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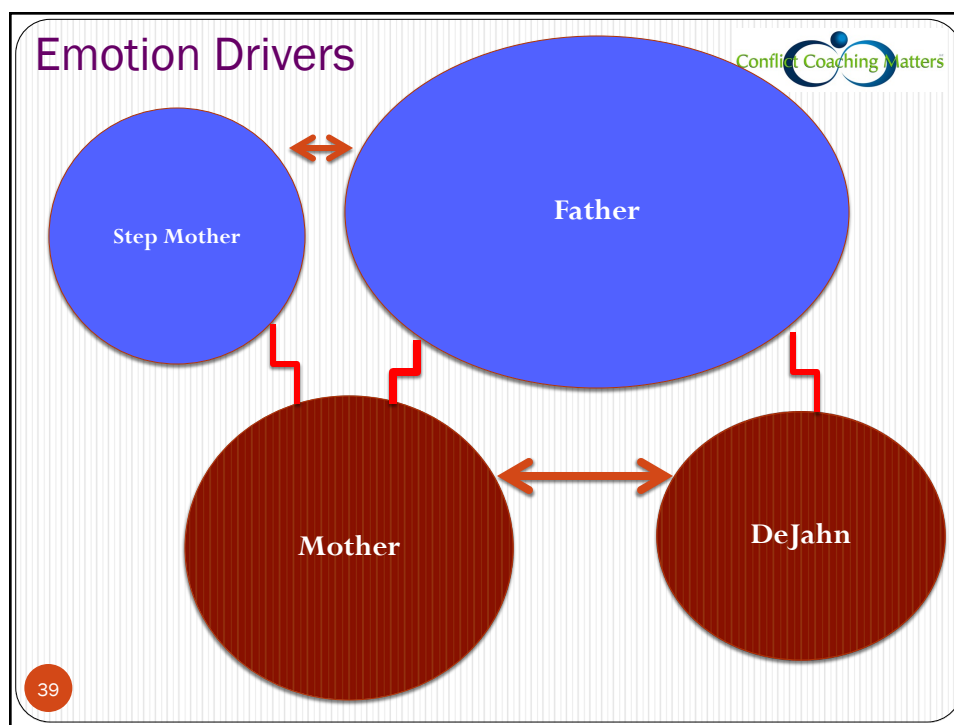
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Identity Questions That May Arise

- How does your role as mother/father change in this situation with shared custody?
- How well can you be “mother/father/stepmother/grandmother” to DeJaun if the legal battles take precedence?
- What does the struggle now mean to the possible ability to be your best self in the future? Their ability to be their best selves?
- **OTHER?**

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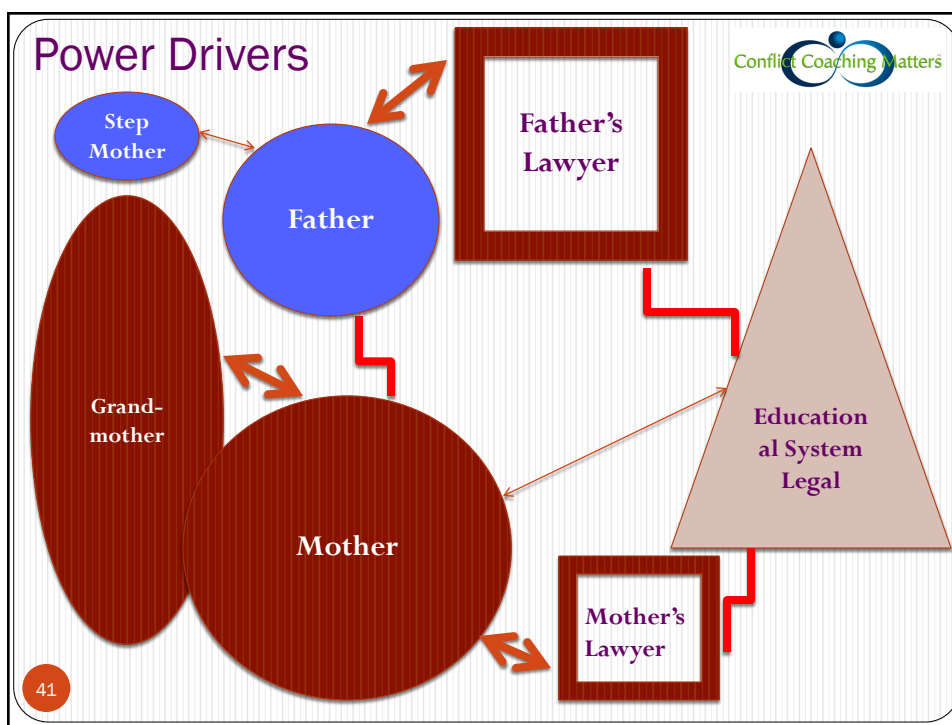
Emotion Questions That May Arise

- How are you feeling about this conflict now concerning possibility of shared custody? How are they?
- What are these “new”/additional emotions causing you to do or not do? Them?
- How are these behaviors coming from emotions undercutting or supporting your desired identities and power/influence/agency?
- **OTHER?**

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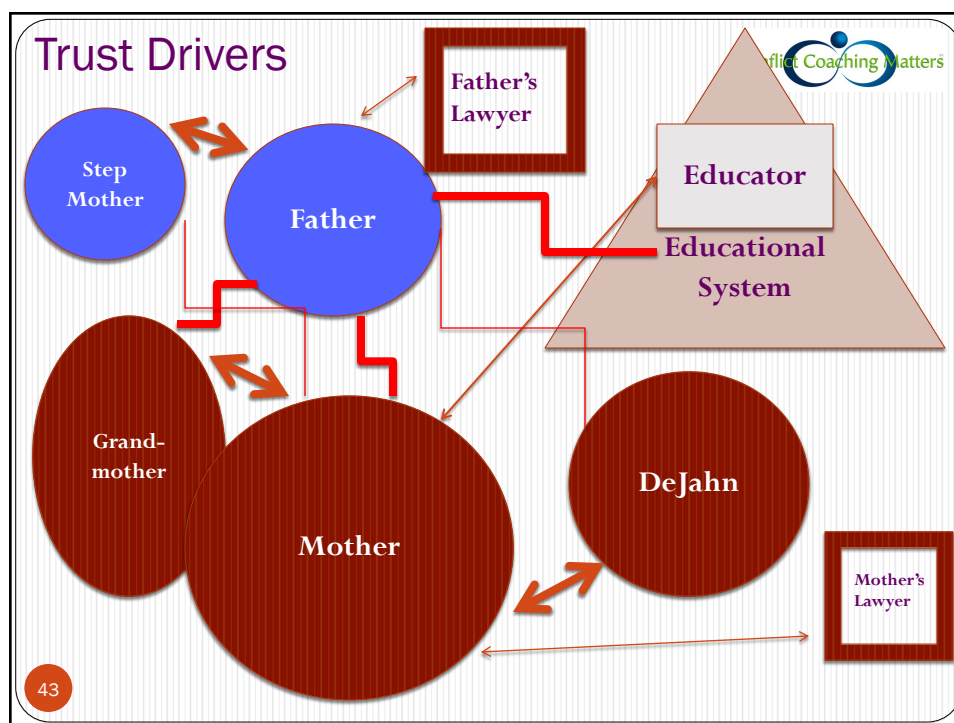
Power Questions That May Arise

- What are the advantages/disadvantages of the emphasis on legal strategy as a means to power? For you? For them?
- What kind of power would it be good for you and Dwayne to share? Why?
- What do you know about the educational system's power that supports your power struggle with Dwayne/Sara?
- What don't you know about the educational system's power that can hurt you?
- **OTHER?**

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Trust Questions That May Arise

- What is the trust history that explains this map? Particularly trust peaks and valleys in the key relationships?
- Where is the distrust and why?
- Where do you have moderate or high trust in the key parties?
- What could you learn that would affect your current trust relationships?
- **OTHER?**

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**Stage 3:
What would the
future look like?**

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**-How Are They
Boxing
Themselves In?
-How Can You
Help Them Out
Of The Box?**



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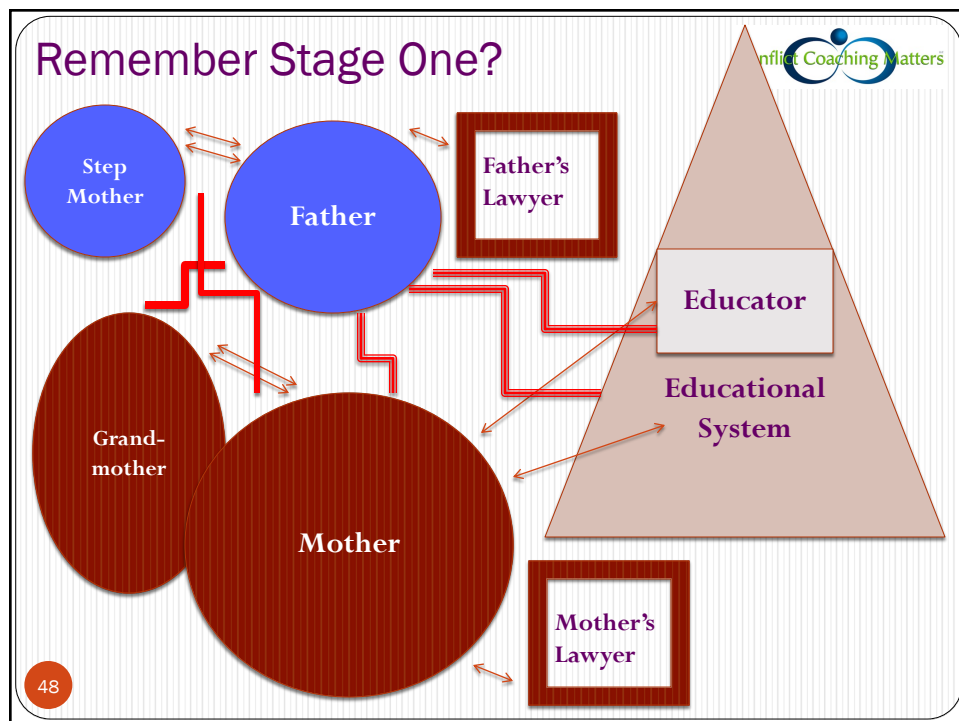
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Stage 3: Crafting the Best Story

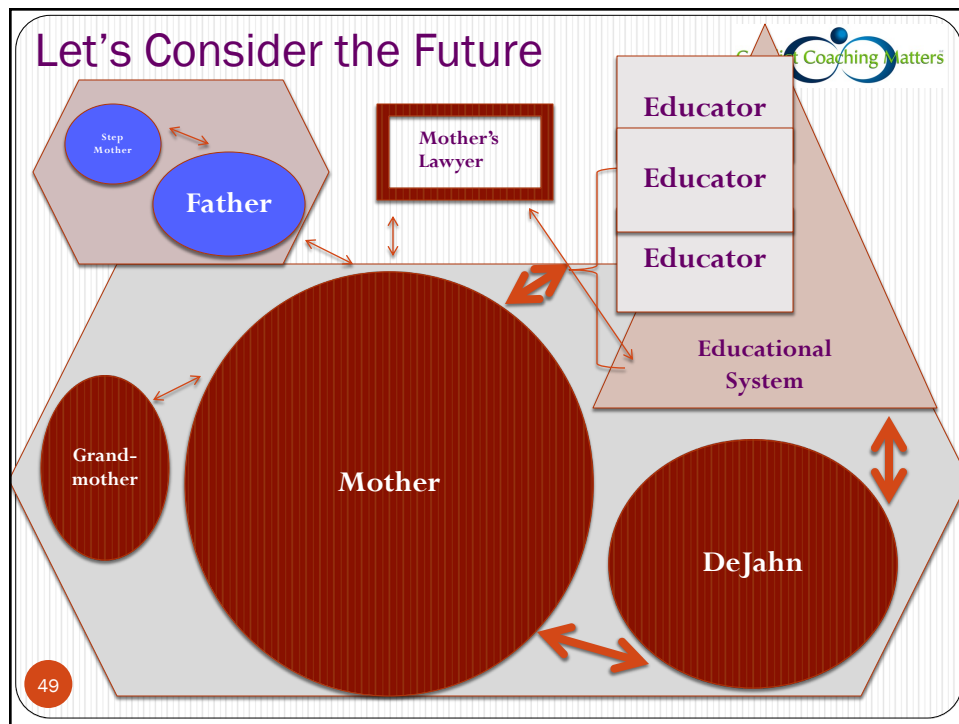
- The coach helps the party identify and elaborate a vision -- different levels of this future can be explored to fit their need.
 - an “ideal” future – what they ideally would want to have
 - a “real”(istic) improvement – the best they realistically think they can achieve given the system in which they work
 - a “needed” improvement – what they need in order to be able to cope with the conflict, decrease the discomfort

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What Is Your Trust Vision?

- Ideally what will be the trust relationship if you move forward as desired?
- What will remain the same?
- What will be different (what when where and how of trust behaviors?)
- What protections will be in place (in the case of distrust)?
- What accountability will be in place?
- What will help make that a reality?

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Common Skills Needed

- Engagement
- Apology
- Feedback
- Conflict Styles
- Interest-Based Negotiation
- Using other ADR
- Nonverbal Communication
- Defensiveness
- Communicating Respect
- Dealing with Disrespect

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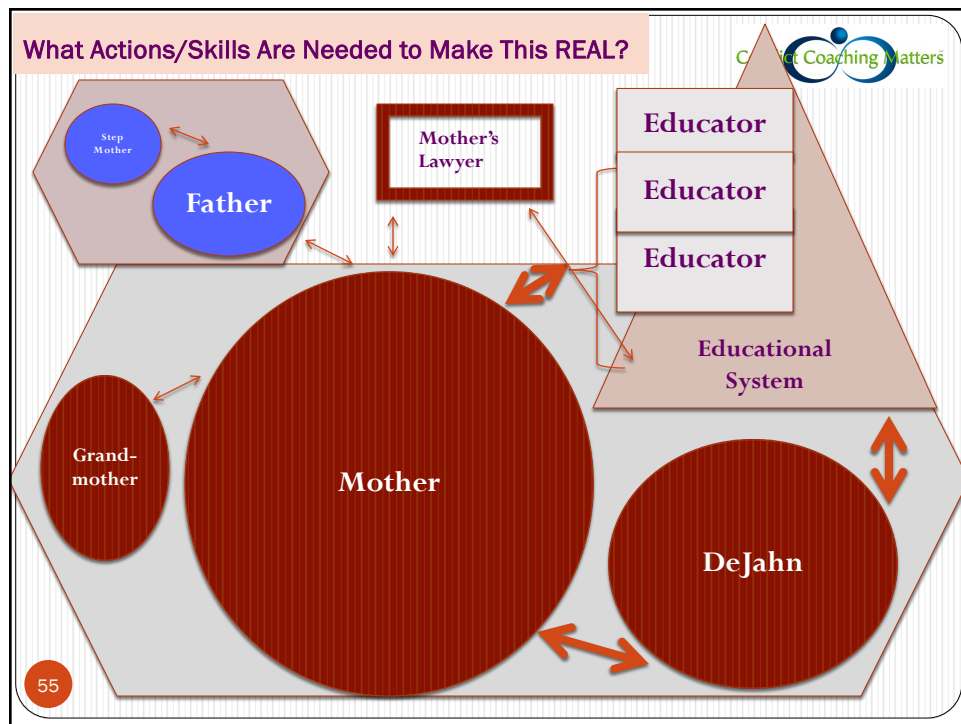


Transitioning to Stage 4

- **Summary:**
Transitioning starts with the coach summarizing the best/realistic/needed story the party has articulated
- **Action Steps Needed**
The coach asks the party to step up or step down the action steps that would need to happen to get “from here” to “there” – from the current situation to the desired situation
- **Skills or Behaviors Needed**
The coach asks the party to identify critical skills needed to enact the action steps or make the best story happen
- **Set Skills Development Agenda**

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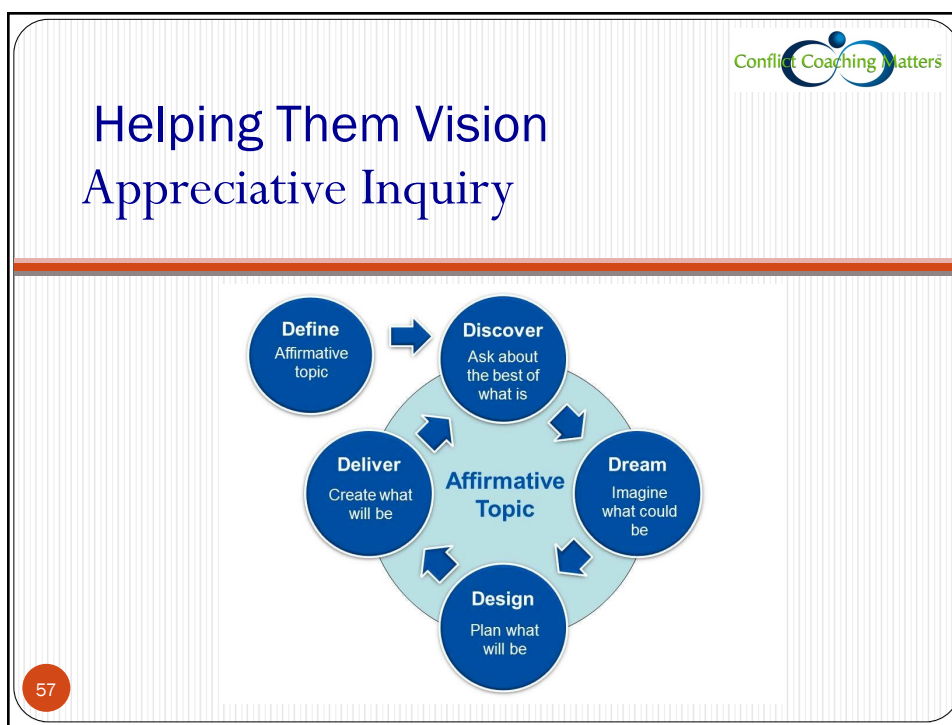
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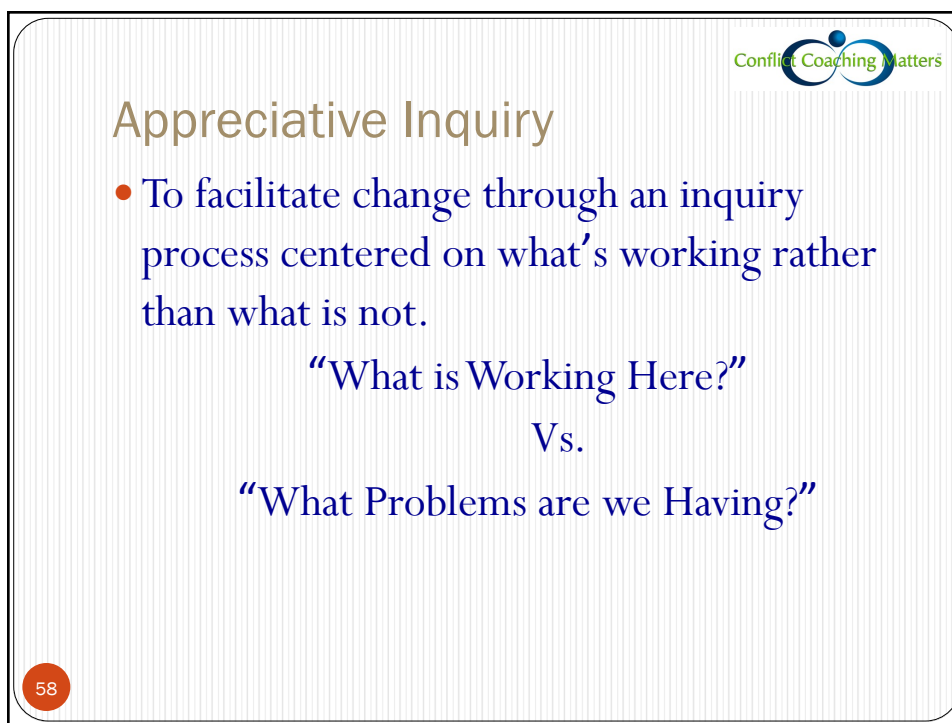
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Appreciative Inquiry for Teams
Focusing on
“What Works”
rather than
“What’s Wrong”
Building a Future
Vision and Action
Strategy

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Appreciative Inquiry Process

- **Discover**—The best of what is, explore what is going right, where you succeed
- **Dream**—Imagine what could be, envision the ideal future
- **Design**—Plan what will be, bridge what is with what might be
- **Delivery/Destiny**—Create what will be by innovating and improving ways to create the desired future

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Discovery: Identify Strengths

- Describe a time when you were proud about the work you do. Why were you proud?
- What do you value most about being a member of this group? Why?
- What characteristics of this group do you want to make sure are retained through the change?
- What characteristics of this group do you want to enhance through this change?

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Design: Provocative Propositions

- Provocative Propositions are statements that describe an ideal state. They keep 'the best' at a conscious level.
- Provocative Propositions describe the idealized future as if it were already happening.
 - "Our staff have the strongest credential and professional development in the field."

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Design: Provocative Propositions

- Focus on what the organization/team is currently doing to fulfill the Provocative Proposition
 - What are we currently doing that get us there?
 - What are we not doing that gets us there?
 - What are we currently doing that blocks us from getting there?
 - What are we currently not doing that blocks us from getting there?

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Coaching Questions Examples

- **Discover**
 - When you talk about your organization/team, what do you brag about?
 - What is it about your organization/team that makes you or others look at the world differently?
 - What surprising successes have happened in your organization/team?
- **Dream**
 - What are your wishes, hopes and dreams for a better organization/team?
 - What would the title be of the ideal future?

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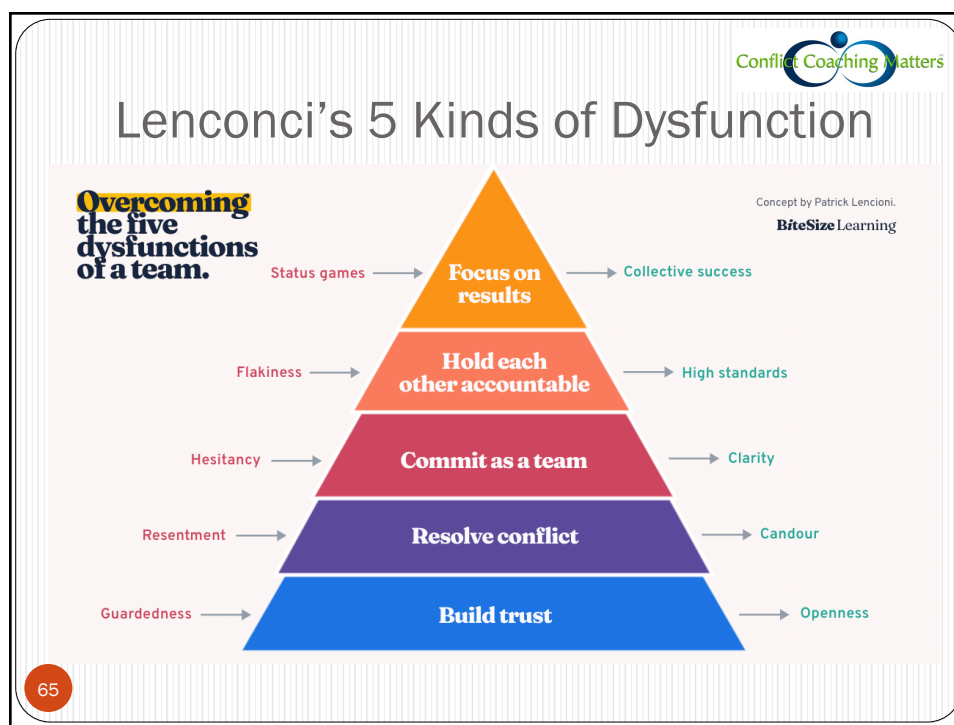
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Coaching Questions Examples

- **Design**
 - Imagining a future that bridges the best of what is (Discovery) with the ideal (dream):
 - How is your organization different from your competitors?
 - What would you include in your annual report to stakeholders?
- **Deliver**
 - What action steps are needed to make these propositions reality?
 - Whose buy-in and support do you need to create this new reality?

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+ Coaching the 5 Dysfunctions within a Team

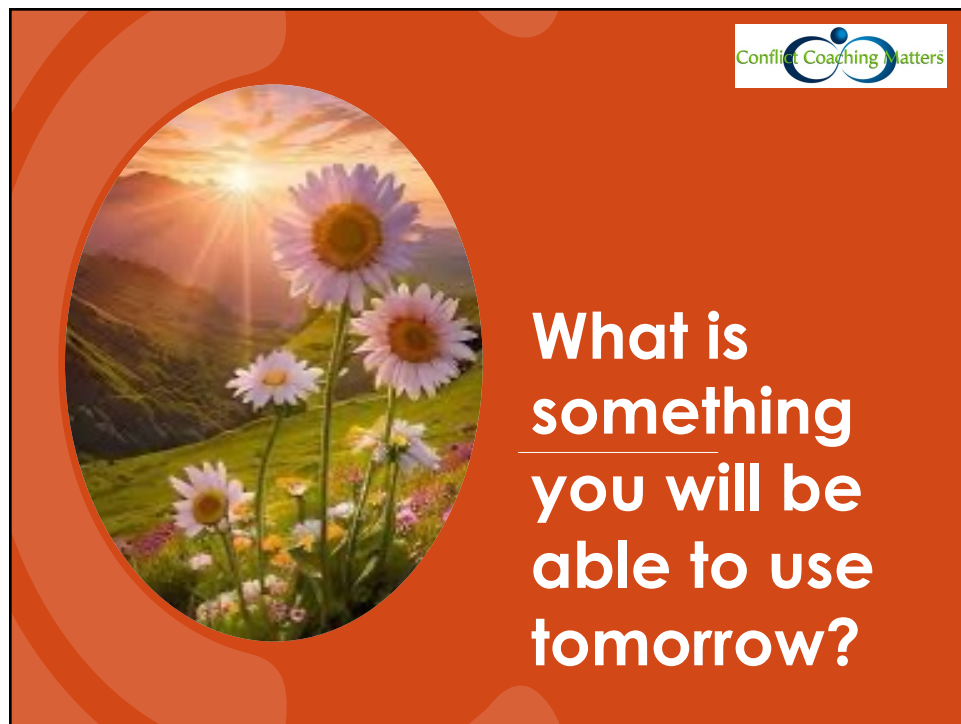
Conflict Coaching as an individual or collective intervention:

- Do we trust each other?
- Is it safe to disagree?
- Are we all on the same page?
- Are we keeping our standards high?
- Do we put team results come before our personal status?

If the answer of any of these is no, conflict coaching can facilitate improvement

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