Facilitated communication has renewed hope for many parents and caregivers of individuals previously unable to communicate, but recent controversy has raised concerns about its legitimacy. While some avidly support the use of these techniques, others continue to call for scientific evaluation to determine the validity of messages communicated through facilitators. Heated debate on both sides continues with each side apparently becoming more entrenched in its position.

In the past 2 years, reports of apparently low-functioning children demonstrating the ability to read and produce sentences expressing sophisticated ideas and feelings through facilitated communication have caused excitement among parents and caregivers. These reports have generated considerable controversy in the academic literature (Biklen, 1990; Cummins & Prior, 1992; Prior & Cummins, 1992; Rimland, 1990, 1991), on television (Australian Broadcasting Commission, "60 Minutes," June 1991; Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Fifth Estate," November, 1991), and in the press (Melbourne Age, March 1991, February 1992; Toronto Star, December 1991). There are concerns that the alleged success of facilitated communication is due to the Ouija Board phenomenon whereby facilitators unintentionally influence the communication (Rimland, 1990).

The continuing belief in facilitated communication without empirical evidence to support its reliability or validity reflects the need of some par-
ents, caregivers, and educators to create what Toch (1971) has called "a more satisfying reality." However, as Mirenda and Iacono (1990) emphasize, "merely believing that communication occurs and can be reciprocal will never be sufficient to make it so" (p. 3). Although calls for independent evaluations of facilitated communication techniques (Cummins & Prior, 1992; Minnes, 1992; Rimland, 1991) have been strongly resisted by its proponents, recent cases of alleged abuse communicated through facilitated communication (Rimland, 1992) have increased the need for such assessments. Reliable and independent evaluation procedures have been developed (Hudson, Melita, & Arnold, 1993). However, many parents and caregivers who struggle to sustain hope may not permit such assessments to be conducted or believe the results of such assessments if the results do not validate facilitated communication.

In such instances, professionals face a dilemma. They have a responsibility to ensure that the disabled child is protected not only from the alleged abuse but also from potential abuse from trusted facilitators who unwittingly or otherwise may be influencing the child's alleged communications. At the same time, professionals are responsible to parents who may be particularly vulnerable to the appeal of media coverage regarding such alternative approaches (Schopler, 1986) but who also may be accused of abuse in messages communicated through paid caregivers acting as facilitators.

The growing need to develop parent–professional partnerships has been emphasized (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990) in order to overcome some of the frustrations, dissatisfaction with available assistance, and feelings of abandonment experienced by parents (Akerley, 1975; Baxter, 1989; Roos, 1978; Sullivan, 1979). Since the introduction of facilitated communication techniques, this partnership has been jeopardized by what parents and caregivers see as the unwillingness of professionals to listen to their needs and concerns and to learn from their experiences with facilitated communication. While the factual or rational approach frequently adopted by professionals may pose a threat to the hope of some parents and caregivers, the apparent preference of some parents and caregivers for untried techniques and intervention strategies may pose an equal threat to the sense of control and self-esteem of professionals. Unfortunately in many cases, communication between professionals and parents has broken down completely and a power struggle has ensued.

To move toward resolution of this conflict, the focus needs to be changed from competition to cooperation, from win–lose to win–win solutions based on common interests rather than on power (Littlefield, Love, Peck, & Wertheim, 1991). This should not be so difficult given that all individuals involved in the debate ostensibly have the common goal of find-