



# HOW TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH PARAPROFESSIONALS: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

# HOW TO WORK WITH PARAPROFESSIONALS

## 1. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Developing relationships with the paraprofessional staff is essential to the success of working together. It is vital that school psychologists take the time to get to know the paraprofessionals they work with on a personal level. This will help build trust and mutual respect, which are essential for an effective working relationship.

Some tips for getting to know your paraprofessional staff:

- Join them at lunchtime to get to know them on a personal level.
- Go out of your way to tell them how valued they are and provide shout-outs for good work.
- Ask them if there is anything they need assistance with.
- It is also important to keep the lines of communication open between you, the paraprofessional, and the student's parents. Schedule regular check-ins with the paraprofessional to ensure that things are going smoothly and that the student is making progress.
- Collaborate with the paraprofessional on goal ideas, monitoring progress, and strategies for success. They are the ones who work with the students daily and they may have valuable ideas and suggestions.



## 2. ESTABLISH PROCEDURES AND DEFINE ROLES

If your district doesn't already have a written document, make one now. See our sample document attached at the end of this guide as an example. The role of the paraprofessional should be clearly defined and communicated to all team members. Be sure to delineate expectations for the special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

*The paraprofessional should be viewed as a valuable member of the team, not just as an extra set of hands.*

### **When a paraprofessional will be supporting the entire class...**

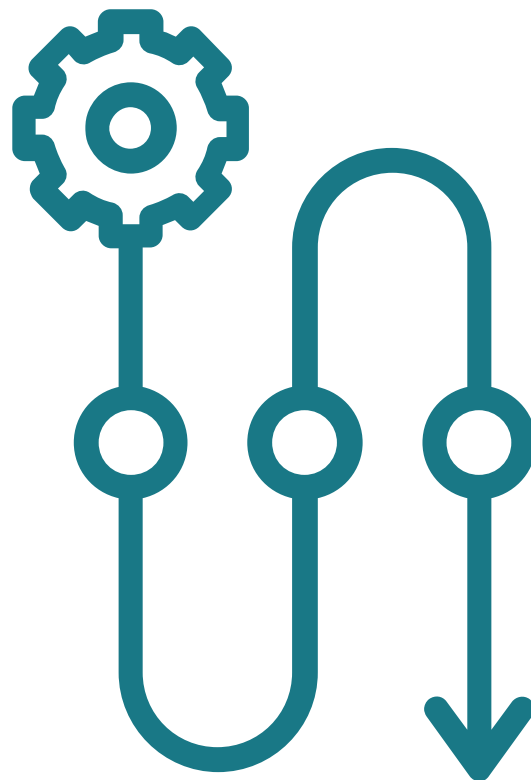
- Be sure that both the teacher and paraprofessional know all of the expectations for supporting that classroom. This might include making copies for the teacher, grading homework, helping with a math intervention, decorating the classroom, assisting with classroom management, and supporting all students in the class.
- Get to know the paraprofessional's strengths and use them! Some are more comfortable with paperwork jobs vs. behavior management.
- Encourage communication so that the needs of the classroom teacher and paraprofessional are both being met.

### **When a paraprofessional will be supporting one student in your class...**

- It is important to help IEP teams determine the level of support that the paraprofessional will provide this student. The goal is to foster independence and fade out support whenever possible.
- To do this, you can create a paraprofessional planning tool that will help you determine what goals the paraprofessional will be supporting the child with and to what degree. Check out these tools to help you decide the best level of support for each student you work with.
  - Needs Matrix- To determine the level of support
  - Output Method (Word document)

CLICK HERE

[https://www.gvsu.edu/schedule\\_matrix\\_8-16\(6\)](https://www.gvsu.edu/schedule_matrix_8-16(6))



### 3. ENSURE PROPER TRAINING

Remember that special education is a highly specialized field. It is not only governed by law, it has its own (very complicated) language. In addition to learning the basics of an IEP, paraprofessionals need to understand the disabilities their students face.

Consult with the paraprofessional regularly, at least once a week. This will help ensure everyone is on the same page and allow you to troubleshoot any issues that may arise. Topics that may come up could include understanding a student's IEP, addressing barriers in the classroom, understanding behavior intervention plans, the importance of taking data and how to take it, and providing academic support to struggling students.

Paraprofessionals work with a wide range of students with different disabilities. Having a good understanding of the student's disability is essential to providing ethical support. Reviewing each of the disability categories is a great way to help paraprofessionals feel more competent and know how to properly support individuals with specific disabilities. Review the guide on Understanding IDEA disability categories.

#### ***What to do when a paraprofessional needs ongoing support?***

Consider 30-minute check-ins with the paraprofessional weekly until support is no longer needed. Behavior skills training is an effective intervention that can be used to train paraprofessionals.

Behavior skills training includes 4 steps:

- **Provide instructions.** This may be reviewing the IEP or behavior plan or identifying a specific skill you want them to improve on, such as checking a student's work daily or running fluency drills with a student three times a week.
- **Model.** Demonstrate what the skill should look like with the student. Provide examples and nonexamples of what the skill would look like. Be sure to discuss how to respond to barriers. School psychologists can also create videos of the skill being performed with students as an example for the paraprofessional to watch.
- **Practice.** Have the paraprofessional practice being the student and the paraprofessional and switch roles. You might even consider having the paraprofessional practice the skill with the student in front of you.
- **Feedback.** Then provide feedback on the paraprofessional's performance with the skill in the natural environment. Be encouraging and constructive when needed.

Self-monitoring systems are also effective strategies that can be used with the paraprofessional.

- Create a goal with the paraprofessional on the skill they want to improve on.
- Make sure proper training has been done and they feel comfortable performing the skill without support.
- Take data daily on whether the skill was performed. The school psychologist may want to observe the first few days to make sure that both the school psychologist and paraprofessional agree on the data.
- Provide rewards or incentives for reaching their goal. Check in with the school administration for help with ideas on rewards or incentives.

When observing paraprofessionals, let the paraprofessional know that you are there to observe them and help them. Observations should not feel punitive.

## 4. PROVIDE A COPY OF STUDENT IEPs

This may seem like a no-brainer, but sadly, it's not. Unfortunately, many paraprofessionals are left in the dark regarding the plan they were hired to support.

Provide a copy of the student's IEP to the paraprofessional, or create a reader-friendly "cheat sheet" that lays out the student's goals, accommodations, modifications, services, and/or behavior plan, etc. If a student has a behavior plan, train and provide a step-by-step guide on how to respond to appropriate behaviors and problem behaviors if one has not already been created.

## 5. HAVE A PLAN FOR PROGRESS MONITORING

While paraprofessionals are often responsible for carrying out portions of student IEPs, ultimately it's the special education teacher who is responsible for progress. Be sure that paraprofessionals know what to monitor and how to monitor it. Provide them with the necessary training and tools.

- Teach them how to track student goals.
- Show them how to use progress monitoring software to help with tracking the progress of all students in their class.

Use data to drive your decisions about working with the paraprofessional. Check in regularly to see how things are going and make adjustments or suggestions based on the student's progress.

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARAPROFESSIONAL

## SAMPLE DOCUMENT

Form completed by: *(should be para and sped teacher)*

Class: *(insert class that para will be supporting in)*

Para strengths and interests: *(insert para reported/observed strengths and interests)*

This document lays out the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional and teacher in this classroom. Please refer to this document when assigning tasks or when engaging with students in the classroom. If a task comes up that is not on this document, discuss the task and add it to the document.

Who: *(insert tasks below)*

1.Delivers instructions to the whole class	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
2.Delivers consequences to students	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
3.Implements IEP accommodations	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
4.Delivers praise to students and rewards	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
5.Grades papers	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
6.Communicates with parents of Sped	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both

Students.

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 3. |
| 2. | 4. |

Notes:

---

---

---

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Classroom teacher)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Paraprofessional)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Administrator)

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARAPROFESSIONAL

Form completed by:

Paraprofessional: \_\_\_\_\_

SpEd Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Para strengths and interests: \_\_\_\_\_

This document lays out the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional and teacher in this classroom. Please refer to this document when assigning tasks or when engaging with students in the classroom. If a task comes up that is not on this document, discuss the task and add it to the document.

Who:

1. _____	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
2. _____	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
3. _____	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
4. _____	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
5. _____	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both
6. _____	GenEd Teacher	Para	Both

Students.

1. _____	3. _____
2. _____	4. _____

Notes:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Classroom teacher)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Paraprofessional)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Administrator)