

Paraprofessional Handbook

Everything you wish you had time to explain in August.

Roles, expectations, prompting, data collection, confidentiality, and a page to write in your building's own behavior-response plan — written for the paraprofessional, not about them. Hand it over on day one and stop re-explaining the same six things all year.

Role & Expectations

What the job actually is

Prompting Guide

Least-to-most, and how to fade

Data Collection

How to fill in a sheet correctly

Confidentiality

What can be said, and where

Behavior Response

Your building's plan, written in

Onboarding Forms

Schedules, sign-offs, and check-ins

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SECTION ONE

Welcome & The Job

What this work actually is, why it is hard, and what success looks like in it.

The Five Things That Matter Most

If you do these five, you will be excellent at this job even on the weeks when nothing else goes right.

Show up the same way every day

Students with disabilities are reading you constantly for whether today is safe. Consistency from you does more regulating work than any strategy.

Wait longer than feels comfortable

Many students need eight to ten seconds to process a direction and respond. Most adults wait two. Counting silently to ten changes outcomes more than any other single habit.

Prompt as little as you can get away with

Every prompt you give is a prompt the student will come to expect. Start with the least help that could work and add more only if you need to.

Say what you see, not what you think it means

“He was being defiant” is a guess. “He put his head down and did not respond to three directions” is information the team can use.

And one more

Tell the teacher when something is not working. You are with these students in moments the teacher never sees. Your observation is not an interruption — it is often the most useful data in the room.

Filled in by the teacher.

TEACHER NAME

NEAREST RESTROOM

ROOM NUMBER

OFFICE LOCATION AND EXTENSION

PROGRAM TYPE

NURSE LOCATION AND EXTENSION

GRADES SERVED

WHO TO FIND IN AN EMERGENCY

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

WHERE THE EMERGENCY FOLDER LIVES

NUMBER OF PARAPROFESSIONALS

WHERE STUDENT BELONGINGS GO

How this room is set up

Work areas, calm corner, sensory space, small group table, exits.

Words we use here

Our specific language, so everyone says the same thing.

Helping vs. Doing It For Them

The most common way a well-meaning adult accidentally makes a student less independent.

THIS CREATES DEPENDENCE	THIS BUILDS INDEPENDENCE
Cutting out the shapes because it is faster	Starting the cut and handing them the scissors.
Reading every word of the passage aloud	Reading the first sentence, then pointing to where they take over.
Answering for a student who is slow to respond	Waiting ten seconds, then offering two choices.
Standing directly beside them all period	Setting them up, stepping four feet away, and coming back.
Telling them the answer when they hesitate	Asking “what could you try first?” and waiting.
Packing their bag so dismissal goes smoothly	Handing them a checklist and letting dismissal take three minutes longer.
Speaking for them to another adult	Standing beside them while they speak, and only filling gaps.

One per student. Filled in by the teacher, kept confidential, and never carried around the building loose.

Student (first name or initials)

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How they communicate

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What works with this student

Motivators, preferred activities, phrases that help.

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What does not work

Triggers, demands to avoid, things that escalate.

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Accommodations you must provide

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Safety notes

Allergies, seizures, elopement, medical equipment.

.....

Most hard moments are not emergencies. These are.

1 A student has left the room or the building

Say it out loud so every adult hears. One adult follows at a distance, does not chase. Call the office immediately.

2 A student is hurting themselves or someone else

Move the other students. Call for the crisis team by name and follow your building's plan; nothing here decides what happens next.

3 A medical event — seizure, allergic reaction, injury, unresponsiveness

Call the nurse and the office. Stay with the student. Note the time it started.

4 A student discloses abuse or says they want to hurt themselves

Listen. Do not promise confidentiality. Tell the teacher, counselor, or administrator immediately and follow your district's reporting policy for your role.

5 You are alone and something is going wrong

Get another adult. Send a student to the nearest classroom, use the radio, or open the door and call out. Never manage an emergency alone to avoid making a scene.

Prompt Level Key

The most common sheet you will be handed. Record the least help the student needed.

CODE	MEANS	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
I	Independent	You gave the direction and waited. They did it with no further help.
V	Verbal	You said something beyond the original direction.
G	Gestural	You pointed, tapped, or looked at what they needed.
M	Model	You showed them the step and they copied it.
PP	Partial physical	A light touch to start the movement.
FP	Full physical	Hand over hand for the whole step.

Score the least, not the most

If a student needed a point and then did the rest alone, that is a G, not an FP. Recording the highest level of help you gave at any moment makes every student look less independent than they are.

Thank you for using this resource

Everything here was built for the teacher who has thirty minutes of planning time and twelve students who each need something different. If it saved you an hour, it worked.

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