

Effectively Utilizing and Supporting Paraprofessionals



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Table of Contents

Section 1: Paraprofessional Support

- 1) Assessing the need for a paraprofessional
- 2) Hiring paraprofessionals
- 3) Paraprofessional assignments
 - a) Initial Assignments
 - b) Re-Assignments
 - c) Rationale for paraprofessional reassignments

Section 2: What Is a Paraprofessional?

- 1) Definition and job description
 - a) Philosophical perspective
- 2) Characteristics of a good paraprofessional
- 3) Ethics and Confidentiality
 - a) Job responsibility guidelines
 - b) Following directions from the professional team
- 4) Common tasks of a paraprofessional
 - a) Determining the paraprofessional's daily schedule
 - b) Developing rapport with the student with ASD
 - c) Advocating for the student in the school
 - d) Monitoring student stress and responding to behaviors
 - e) Using tools with ASD students
 - f) Helping the student with organization
 - g) Responding to behavior of the student with ASD
- 5) The paraprofessional in the school

Section 3: Support and Supervision of Paraprofessionals

- 1) General philosophy
- 2) Supervision
- 3) Working with teachers
 - a) Role of supervising teacher
- 4) Paraprofessional role on a multidisciplinary team
 - a) Communicating with team members

Section 4: Paraprofessional Relationships

- 1) The relationship of the paraprofessional to the parent**
- 2) Paraprofessional role with peers of the student with ASD**

Section 5: Tools and Techniques

- 1) Understanding ASD**
- 2) Communicating with the student with ASD**
- 3) Visual supports**
- 4) Prompt Hierarchy**
 - a) Knowing how to fade prompts**
- 5) Task analysis**
- 6) Responding to power struggles**
 - a) What is a power struggle?**
 - b) Waiting as a tool**
 - c) “Get in, get out”**
- 7) Dealing with cognitive inflexibility**
- 8) Responding to student meltdowns**
- 9) Incompatible behaviors for paraprofessionals**
- 10) Academic accommodations**
- 11) Data collection on a target behavior**
- 12) Preparing for the absence of a paraprofessional**

Section 6: Paraprofessional Self-Advocacy

Resources for Advanced Training

References

Section 1: PARAPROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

1) Assessing the Need for a Paraprofessional

Appropriately supported students with disabilities may have a number of supports and services to assist them to participate successfully in their school program. One of those supports may be a paraprofessional. *A variety of checklists are available to assist educators in determining when a student needs paraprofessional support.* One technique for doing this is to evaluate the student's performance throughout the school day, like in what situations is the student able to be independent?

For example, Joe is a student with ASD who loves math. During math he works well on his own and is often the first student to complete his work. By contrast, Joe gets frustrated when asked to complete long writing assignments. He often refuses and has even been loud and disruptive when his teacher reminds him to begin writing. First the staff should attempt to utilize a strategy that might help Joe during writing tasks, such as utilizing a word processor or some other output method. If these strategies are not effective or if Joe needs support to learn these strategies, he may benefit from adult support during such tasks. He can still participate independently during math or another non-writing activity

Often, the time in the school day when there are no academic demands on the student can be overlooked in evaluating a student's need for support and supervision. Those "unstructured" times often have the most social and sensory challenges for students who have ASD. They include lunch, P.E., recess, and for older students, time in the hallway between classes. While the student with ASD may perform well independently during structured academics, that student may need the most guidance when there is less structure and there are more social demands.

Questions to consider:

How can the classroom teacher make herself available to offer individual help if needed?

Mrs. Smith routinely gives directions to all of the students. When they start on an assignment she always makes a point to check directly with Ed, a student with ASD. She clarifies the directions and supervises his response to the first lesson item. Ed is reluctant to write answers, and Mrs. Smith usually writes part of his responses as he tells them to her. Mrs. Smith also incorporates sentence starters that assist Ed in getting started in his writing and allows him to be more independent as well. Technology that allows Ed to provide alternative ways to output information also are utilized.

Are there times when peer support may enable a student to accomplish his goals?

Bill's sixth grade science class works in groups. Bill knows science. His role in the group is to find answers to the end of chapter questions. His assignment partner, Tom, usually is the scribe, and they both benefit from the partnership because Bill's science knowledge often exceeds Tom's.

Most students who need paraprofessional support do not require full time, all day assistance. It is critical for everyone's perception of any student that a paraprofessional not be placed with them at every moment of their school day.

Over-assigning paraprofessionals creates problems and interferes with the goals of independence and socialization. Paraprofessionals who are constantly beside their student actually present a barrier to teachers and peers because most of the interaction goes through the paraprofessional. Teachers may assume less responsibility for a student with a full time paraprofessional, and students with unremitting help perceive themselves to be less competent.

Historically, many schools routinely assigned a paraprofessional to any student who was identified with ASD. This was a backward approach because only after the paraprofessional began working with the team did the paraprofessional receive specific direction regarding how to provide support to the student with ASD.

A more efficient method of determining the need for a paraprofessional is shown below. Using this approach the team reviews how the student currently performs in the various activities of his school day. Then the team determines the tasks a paraprofessional would do and how paraprofessional support would facilitate increased participation in the inclusive classroom. Most importantly, the team

decides how paraprofessional support would enable the student to become more independent. After the team decides the specific tasks that the paraprofessional will perform, the paraprofessional is hired and directed to begin working with the student with ASD. (Refer to form #S1.1 in Forms Appendix.)

ASSESSING THE NEED FOR PARAPROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Activity	What Is the Student Doing Now?	What Specific Task Will the Paraprofessional Do?	How Will The Paraprofessional Support Lead to Independence?
Entry Routine	Jim arrives agitated and stands in the classroom while his peers take care of outer clothing and manage backpacks, notes to teachers and lunch.	The paraprofessional will create a mini-schedule with the steps to the entry routine and teach Jim to refer to it and move the schedule cards to the ALL DONE pocket as he completes each step of the routine. There will be a highly preferred activity at the end of the routine completion.	The paraprofessional will fade prompting and maintain a reinforcing activity to occur at completion of the entry routine. The student will complete the mini-schedule activities independently.

2) Hiring Paraprofessionals

The process of hiring a paraprofessional should include a personal interview and a writing sample. The following questions were developed to create a conversation regarding issues related to the work of a paraprofessional:

1. When you work with a student with ASD there are usually several team members assigned to help them. A speech therapist, an occupational

therapist, the teacher, and a social worker may be included in those working with your student. The OT may say that your student needs sensory breaks four times during the school day. The teacher may say that four breaks are too many because it will interfere with academics. How do you handle that situation?

2. You are in Meijer and your student's Uncle Joe walks in. He asks, "Is Bill still kicking the other boys and girls in his classroom? Also, that math teacher of Bill's does a very poor job of teaching math. No wonder Bill is failing. What do you think of the math teacher?"

3. Most children misbehave and break rules or ignore directions at times. Why do you think children misbehave? What is your philosophy about how children should be disciplined?

4. You are assigned to Joe, a behaviorally challenged student who has a history of aggressive behavior toward his peers. You walk into the teachers' lounge at lunch and a teacher asks, "Don't you have the worst job in the school? And his parents, do they help at all?" How do you respond?

5. Bobby is an eight year old second grader who has autism and uses a picture board to communicate. His school work is modified so he checks "yes" or "no" for most paperwork and does not have to write out all of his work like his classmates do. What do you think about including students who need specialized help in classes with general education students?

Answers to the above questions elicit attitudes about teamwork, communication, discipline, confidentiality, gossip and inclusion. Using the answers to these questions to discuss important work related topics will assist those hiring paraprofessionals to evaluate their readiness to work with students who have disabilities.

A writing sample provides information about the grammar and spelling of the applicant. It is important that a paraprofessional, who may be expected to offer writing assistance to the student, have adequate written communication skills. Refer to *Interview Essay Form #S1.2* in Forms Appendix.

3) Paraprofessional Assignments

- ***Initial Assignments:***

Paraprofessional skill, experience, and preference should be evaluated to determine assignments. A question to consider is the paraprofessional's comfort with students at different ages. Some paraprofessionals may feel that they relate more readily to students of specific ages. A paraprofessional who has experience with PECS can be a benefit to a student who cannot talk. When at all possible, an inexperienced paraprofessional should not be assigned to a severely challenged student. Sometimes this is unavoidable. It often occurs during the middle of the school year when a student who has severe challenges will be identified with ASD. In that situation a new staff member may have to be hired. That circumstance demonstrates the critical need for paraprofessional training, support and supervision. A newly hired, inexperienced individual who has no training cannot provide the intervention necessary for a severely challenged student with ASD. It is obviously advantageous in planning assignments to take the preferences and experiences of each individual into consideration.

The importance of thorough and consistent training for paraprofessionals cannot be over-stated when assignments are considered. Instruction increases the ability of the individual paraprofessional to be effective, and more importantly successful paraprofessionals have greater job satisfaction. When all of the paraprofessionals learn the same information, it creates an opportunity for them to have a common bank of skills. Ideally, well trained paraprofessionals should be *interchangeable*.

- ***Re-Assignments:***

Administrators should establish a specific policy about the length of any paraprofessional assignment. The supervisor should set a maximum benchmark that indicates the longest assignment a paraprofessional will have with any given student. Some administrators utilize a 9 week or 3 month rotation, while others may opt to have more or less frequent rotation. This rotation is critical because otherwise there is often resistance when reassignment occurs. Opposition to changing paraprofessionals who are assigned to specific students and classrooms may come from teaching staff as well as from parents. Much of the resistance is the natural reluctance many people have about accepting change. Our experience has been that there is often more reluctance to accepting a change when the paraprofessional relates very well to their assigned student or works very successfully with a particular teacher.

In order to successfully reassign staff, a paraprofessional transition process should be established. The process should include the following:

1. Newly assigned individual observes current paraprofessional for 2-3 days working in assigned role when possible.
Observing paraprofessional uses *Paraprofessional Observation Form* (Refer to Form #S1.3 in Forms Appendix) to note the techniques and tools that are used.
2. Outgoing paraprofessional observes as new staff works with student and offers opportunity for questions and feedback at the end of the day.
3. Outgoing paraprofessional presents the student(s) with a transition story that explains that the new paraprofessional will help the student in school.

While there can be opposition to changing paraprofessional assignments, experience demonstrates that in the long run both the student and the paraprofessional benefit from regular change of paraprofessional assignments. A lack of variation can be stifling to both the adult and to the learner. Changing staff prevents boredom and it enables the student with ASD to adapt to new people. Re-assignment of paraprofessional staff also avoids the problem of the paraprofessional taking on "full ownership" of the student. Creating the opportunity for paraprofessionals to work with a variety of students also builds their skills.

Mrs. Duke was an experienced and skilled paraprofessional who worked with Joseph, a student who had significant communication and behavior challenges related to an autism spectrum disorder. She began working with him when he was six years old and was still assigned to him in middle school. At that point it was apparent to consulting staff that Mrs. Duke was reluctant to accept new ideas about how to help Joseph. When given a suggestion she'd respond, "He can't do that...he won't like that." Teachers and parents worried that Joseph would regress with a new paraprofessional. A transition was planned and Joseph's new paraprofessional began working with him in seventh grade. Joseph benefited from the novel approach of Mrs. McGee, his next paraprofessional. He made more persistent efforts to communicate with her because she did not understand him as readily and Mrs. McGee was willing to try lots of new tools and activities with Joseph because she had no pre-conceived ideas about what he was capable of.

- **Rationale for Paraprofessional Reassignments**

Paraprofessionals are reassigned to accomplish the following program goals:

Student Goals:

- Increase level of independence
- Appropriate boundaries in relationships with adults to enhance development in these areas:
 - Academic
 - Emotional
 - Social
- Improve student's adaptability
- Improve student's assertiveness and self-advocacy skills:
 - To respond without prompting or adult reassurance
 - To initiate requests for help
 - To have adequate time to process information and develop a response without interruption by an adult
- Increase the student's skill level; gain additional skills from the different methods of teaching that individual paraprofessionals have to offer

Paraprofessional Goals:

- Enhance rapport building skills
- Increase opportunity to learn in several settings
- Improve skill level(s)
- Increase abilities to work with different personalities
- Increase confidence related to student support
- Increase awareness of resource people possessing various levels of expertise
- Challenge their potential
- Maintain optimal energy and enthusiasm
- Retain appropriate boundaries and professionalism in interactions with students

Refer to printable form #S1.4 in Forms Appendix.



TIP

It is important to institute a policy about paraprofessional re-assignment that establishes the maximum time an individual will work with a specific student. The policy should include a transition process for the incoming paraprofessional.



TRAP

Allowing one paraprofessional to remain in an assignment too long creates problems for the student and staff. "Full ownership" by the staff and "learned helplessness" by the student are two examples of these problems.

Section 2: WHAT IS A PARAPROFESSIONAL?

As indicated earlier, the job of a paraprofessional for students with ASD requires a specific skill set. While individuals may already possess traits that enhance their effectiveness as paraprofessionals, such as an easy rapport with children, training about the role of paraprofessional is necessary for successful support of students. The education of paraprofessionals should consist of specific instruction and of observations, modeling, and feedback about interactions with learners. The following are necessary components of paraprofessional training:

1) Definition and Job Description

A Paraprofessional works under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher to enhance the participation of a learner with ASD in the school community.

Paraprofessionals assigned to students with ASD have the broad goal of enabling the successful inclusion of students assigned to them. This means that they facilitate students' participation in the regular classroom. They also monitor student behavior and stress to minimize disruptions in the classroom. This includes assisting with instructional modifications and accommodations, implementing sensory support as directed by an occupational therapist, employing ASD visual supports, assisting with communicative programs and facilitating social relationships with peers.

Paraprofessionals have become increasingly valued in the past twenty years as inclusion has been acknowledged as best practice for educating students with special needs. Paraprofessionals are individuals who work under the direction of licensed teachers. They may be assigned a variety of roles in support of a specific student or a group of students. The activities a paraprofessional assists with may include monitoring behavior, helping with academic accommodations and modifications, and facilitating social interaction. The goal of the paraprofessional's work is to enable the student to become independent. The paraprofessional does this by using strategies and tools that are useful for students with ASD.

In her book *Understanding the Nature of Autism*, Janice Janzen refers to those who assist individuals with ASD as "interpreters." This means that the paraprofessional clarifies key information as necessary and helps others understand the student.

The ASD paraprofessional is an observer who is aware of environmental events that may be difficult for the student with ASD. Janice Janzen describes the interpreter as an individual who...

“Highlights critical information and directs efforts...Is alert to the things, people and events in a situation that are likely to be confusing to the person with ASD.”

More than anything paraprofessionals need to be great anticipators. To be maximally effective they should consider in advance how the student with ASD will interpret and respond in the variety of situations in a day. When there are new events, such as assemblies and field trips, they should research the event and prepare the student with the schedule and the behavioral expectations at the event. Paraprofessionals need the cooperation of the classroom teacher to know the curriculum activities in advance so that the proper tools or strategies are in place for the student with ASD in the classroom.

Mrs. Hill has prepared Mitchell to participate actively in the kindergarten circle time discussions even though he has very limited verbal skills. The general education teacher made a “Circle Time Book” with activity pages that match the topics of the kindergarten group circle activities. For example, there are interactive calendar and weather pages so that he can respond to those related questions. Mrs. Hill anticipated Mitchell’s needs and planned ahead. She utilized the Circle Time Book to enable Mitchell to participate actively in the classroom.

- **Philosophical Perspective**

Paraprofessionals have been working in schools for many years as teacher assistants who help during non-instructional times, copy materials and assist “behind the scenes.” They are increasingly being employed to work directly with students in a co-teaching role. Paraprofessional help should be considered in the discussion of supports that the student with ASD needs to accomplish the goals of independence and socialization. When working with the student with ASD, paraprofessionals support them in a variety of ways. They may provide support strategies to help students direct their attention, and implement accommodations and modifications and other strategies developed by the student support team

that maximize the student's participation in the general education curriculum. Paraprofessionals for students with ASD have become integral members of the student's educational team. They may be requested to contribute observations in team meetings, collect data, and most importantly, carry out the recommendations of the team.

The traditional perception has been that the paraprofessional should maintain a "custodial" relationship with the student, controlling his behavior and preventing disruptions. This belief is outdated. Today paraprofessionals are hired as part of a continuum of supports and tools that enable students with ASD to participate in educational settings with their typical peers.

2) Characteristics of a Good Paraprofessional

Personal qualities that may enhance the impact of a paraprofessional's efforts include a sincere desire to help children and an interest in learning about ASD. Another important personal quality is the willingness to be part of a *team* and an awareness that it is through the efforts of the team and the directions that they offer, that the learner with ASD becomes independent.

A variety of "learning support assistants" in the United Kingdom were interviewed about what they felt were essential qualities they needed to have to be successful in their work with students. They responded with the following list:

- Interest in helping children
- Ability to work cooperatively
- Flexibility
- Communication skills
- Positive attitude
- Consistency
- Friendliness
- Patience
- Sensitivity
- Enthusiasm
- Being hard to shock

In *A Handbook for Learning and Support Assistants* by G. Fox

Successful Paraprofessionals also have the ability to "think like a child" and a good sense of humor.

Paraprofessionals who tend to be successful have three abilities in common. First, these paraprofessionals are enthusiastic about embracing the perspective of their students. "Thinking like a child" is a crucial skill for those individuals who want to be successful with the student with ASD because it means being able to see situations the way the student does. Second, these paraprofessionals are capable of and interested in learning skills related to helping students with ASD. And finally those paraprofessionals who are most successful are willing to follow directions from the student's team.

When the paraprofessional takes the student's perspective into consideration it is easier to solve problems. With a student with ASD some unique considerations help the paraprofessional understand the student's behavior. For example, the very reactive nature of the sensory responses of the student with ASD can lead to unusual and confusing behaviors.

This occurred with Blake and his paraprofessional Ms. Lee. Although Blake liked Ms. Lee there were several days when he would abruptly say to her, "Get away from me." Ms. Lee was perplexed by this for quite some time until she recognized that there was a pattern to the times Blake would make the negative remarks to her. He consistently told her, "Get away" on days when she wore a particular perfume to work. Blake was unable to verbalize why he behaved as he did but when Ms. Lee stopped wearing the perfume Blake's rude verbal comments to her ceased.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>A willingness to learn information and strategies about Autism Spectrum Disorders enables the paraprofessional to develop skills that will help them become successful in supporting the student.</p>	<p>Paraprofessionals who rely too heavily on past assumptions about why learners behave in a particular manner may have difficulty accepting the perspective of a student with ASD whose behavioral difficulties stem from communication, social, thinking and sensory differences.</p>

3) Ethics and Confidentiality

It is imperative that paraprofessionals are educated about the laws regarding what is protected information and what may be shared.

“Privileged information” is that which is legally protected and there are specific rules about who that information is shared with. The following examples of privileged information should be discussed with paraprofessionals:

It is illegal to discuss student information with those not professionally involved with the student. That means that discussions about a student’s behavior plan, in the staff lunch room, among all of the teachers, is unethical. Only the staff that has a working relationship with a student should be privy to discussions about that student’s progress in school.

- Information about health and disability is protected
- Team meeting information
- Written IEP information
- Verbal information from IEP meetings
- Family information
- Talking about student to peers requires parent permission

Paraprofessionals should be informed of their obligation regarding suspicions of child abuse. Educators have the legal obligation to report suspected child abuse. If a paraprofessional is concerned about child abuse the supervising teacher should be informed immediately. As required by law, he suspected abuse will then be reported to Child Protective Services by professional staff.

Legally Protected	Public Information
Information that identifies a student	NO STUDENT INFORMATION IS PUBLIC
Information about the student’s disability	
IEP information	
Information from team meetings both verbal and written	
Evaluation information	
Behavior Reports	
Test results	
Health information	
Student’s personal family information	

An important note about confidentiality: It is not just the information about the students with disabilities that is protected. The following example illustrates how easily confidentiality can be breached.

Mrs. Jones was a paraprofessional assigned to a fifth grade class of which Judy, her daughter's best friend, was a member. The teacher often asked Mrs. Jones to correct the tests of the students. After Mrs. Jones scored a specific math quiz she commented to Judy about her errors when Judy was visiting her daughter. This was confidential information and it violated the ethics of her role as a paraprofessional in the classroom.

- **Job Responsibility Guidelines**

Paraprofessionals need to know the parameters of their responsibilities toward students and specifically how their role with students differs from that of the teachers. The task of establishing what instruction occurs in the classroom belongs to the classroom teacher; the paraprofessional has the role of following the direction of the teacher and offering feedback about the student's responses to that instruction.

Ethical Points to Remember:

1. Paraprofessionals work under direction and supervision of professional staff.
2. Professional staff is responsible to develop curriculum, plan instruction, evaluate academic and behavior progress, develop goals and objectives, and to communicate progress to parents.
3. The Professional Staff sign the I.E.P not the paraprofessional
4. It is important to instruct paraprofessionals that there are limits to the accepted duties that they can ethically perform. It is not uncommon that the requests made of a paraprofessional are beyond their defined role. For example, paraprofessionals are frequently asked to provide curriculum and to make decisions regarding appropriate modifications. Paraprofessionals who are prepared in advance for how to handle this situation when it occurs are empowered and they are able to maintain a

good relationship with professional staff because they know how to be assertive without being confrontational. The suggestion is that the paraprofessional respond with an "I" message. For example, "I am uncomfortable being responsible for curriculum decisions because I do not have training in curriculum." This can prevent the paraprofessional from being left to single-handedly assume the responsibility of the education of the special needs student assigned to their care and from violating the boundaries of her role.

5. Paraprofessionals need to avoid assuming the role of student expert. The supervisor, the teacher, and the student's team have an influence on the degree to which this happens. This can occur because the paraprofessional, working intimately with the student, will know his skills and his stressors extremely well. It might seem to follow that a person who works so closely with a student should have "veto power" about suggestions from the team. Paraprofessionals need to be informed about the value of being members of a "team" that assists a student. The professional team, including the teacher, has education and experience, which gives them a different perspective, that make their input into a student's program very important, even when they have less direct contact with the student than the paraprofessional.
6. The problem of "full ownership" occurs when the paraprofessional assumes the bulk of responsibility for the success and the decisions about their student.

Ms. Adams had worked with the student, Evan, for three years. Evan made significant improvements during those three years and Ms. Adams was understandably proud of Evan. Initially, Ms. Adams worked well with the professional team, offering observations and input and responding favorably to suggestions. The longer she worked with Evan, the less receptive Ms. Adams was. By the third year she became resistant. She responded for Evan when others tried to talk to him. "He can't understand that" or "He can't learn that" became common expressions.

7. Paraprofessionals need to be trained and supported in dealing with the everyday issues that can occur in a school. One of those issues can be gossip among staff. It is worthwhile to discuss how to deal with gossip

early in training. During this portion of paraprofessional education it should be clarified that talking negatively about co-workers will lead to interpersonal conflicts and a lack of trust.

Mr. Gregg was a paraprofessional who supported Jim and Steve, two students with ASD, who were in a middle school P.E. class. Mr. Gregg did not like the way the Physical Education teacher taught her class. He felt it was too unstructured and the students needed more supervision and direction. He complained to his students' parents about the class and he also complained about the class in the teachers' lounge at school. This resulted in Mr. Gregg and the P.E. teacher having a poor relationship that was characterized by a lack of trust.

8. It is also necessary for paraprofessionals to recognize how essential it is for them to make an effort to become part of the school "team." To do this successfully they need to volunteer to participate in the activities at the school where they work. They should also adhere to local school policies, such as, the school dress code policy.

Teacher Responsibility	Paraprofessional Responsibility
Plan and supervise student instruction	Support the student to participate in instruction
Keep the same frequency of interaction with the learner with ASD as with his typical classmates.	Maintain proximity to the student with ASD only as much as needed in the classroom.
Supervise modifications to the regular curriculum.	Ensure that accommodations recommended by the student's team are provided.
Comment regularly to the paraprofessional about interactions with the student with ASD.	Be responsive to the suggestions of the teacher about interactions with the student.
Report on student progress in terms of academics, behavior, daily living and socialization	Refer questions about student progress to professional staff.
Develop a relationship with parents of the student with ASD that is consistent	Refer conversations about the student to the teacher. Be mindful that it is the

with relationships that are developed with parents of all students in the classroom.	classroom teacher's responsibility to develop a relationship with the parents of the student with ASD.
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- **Following Directions from the Professional Team**

The paraprofessional must work specifically as directed by the professional team and not as an independent agent. This cannot be over-emphasized in paraprofessional training. It is not unusual for a paraprofessional who has good student rapport building skills to become highly valued by the team and then left on her own to support the student with ASD. This is a terrible mistake. Paraprofessionals require specific direction and supervision to be effective. Paraprofessionals who are abandoned by professional staff are left to rely on their own instincts. This inevitably isolates the student from others and causes over-reliance on the paraprofessional. This can also result in the paraprofessional trying to develop an inappropriate emotional bond with the student with ASD. The challenges associated with having ASD (e.g. inability to organize environment, difficulty communicating, difficulty with social interactions, etc.) result in the student needing a paraprofessional, and that is where the support of the paraprofessional should be directed. The role of paraprofessional is explicit. The paraprofessional has the responsibility to follow the directions from the team to provide the supports that lead to independence and socialization.

4) Common Tasks of a Paraprofessional

- **Determining the Paraprofessional's Daily Schedule**

The first duty of a newly assigned paraprofessional is to clarify with the teacher exactly how the paraprofessional will provide support to the student with ASD during the course of the school day. In her book, *The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom: A Team Approach*, Mary Beth Doyle advocates that the team should proactively determine the typical responsibilities of the paraprofessional during each activity of the school day. Below is a sample of a paraprofessional daily schedule. Refer to *Paraprofessional Schedule Form #S2.1* in Forms Appendix.

Activity	Paraprofessional Support
Entering routine	Has prepared mini-schedule to enable student to complete entry routine
Daily journal	Under direction of teacher, the paraprofessional routinely provides a choice answer format to the student with ASD for completion of journal
Science	Paraprofessional has made student schedule color coded to match science book and science folder. Paraprofessional supervises as the student with ASD and his group complete science experiments.

- **Developing Rapport with the Student with ASD**

It is important for paraprofessionals to approach the relationship with the student with ASD with the proper mindset. The purpose of hiring a paraprofessional to support a student with ASD is not so that the paraprofessional can “bond” with the student. In other words, this is not a friendship or a “Big Brother/ Big Sister,” or a foster grandparent role. Paraprofessionals are not substitute parents in the school. The purpose of using paraprofessional support is *specific and limited*. It is to enable the student to participate in the school community successfully. The goal of paraprofessional support is always that the paraprofessional helps the student with ASD by using strategies that ultimately lead to independence.

Paraprofessionals need to be thoughtful in developing a relationship with a new student. In the process of getting to know a student it may help the paraprofessional to approach the relationship by keeping in mind the concept that each interaction contributes to a series of emotional memories that they are creating with the student with ASD. When the early contacts are characterized by demands or criticism, they create negative feelings. Teach the paraprofessional to recall the positive emotional memories they have of a favorite teacher, relative or coach. Ask them to remember the qualities that person brought to the relationship that made the experience a positive one. The paraprofessional can use what they learned from those recollections as a basis on which to model how they build a rapport with the student who has ASD.

When beginning a relationship, the initial goal is to understand the perspective of the student with ASD. That is the first step to being able to support them.

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey describes emotional “bank accounts” that people create with one another. Paraprofessionals building a rapport with their student need to think about making deposits in the emotional/relationship bank account of their student. What that means is that the strategies the paraprofessional uses should reduce the student’s frustration and anxiety and increase the student’s self-esteem.

“Don’t ask anything until you have offered something” is a good motto for the paraprofessional who is beginning interactions with the student with ASD. The paraprofessional should also consider what behaviors by a paraprofessional would be withdrawals in the emotional bank account with their student and those behaviors need to be avoided. Behaviors that paraprofessionals should avoid include criticism, impatience, over-helping, and power struggles.

Many paraprofessionals have the mistaken impression that they have to *control* the behavior of the student with ASD to be successful in their job. Can anyone really control the behavior of anyone else? The actual role of the paraprofessional should be to provide the student with the tools and strategies that they can use to control themselves.

Paraprofessionals who begin the relationship with the student with ASD with the goal of “making” them do work or comply with directions, may experience resistance and failure. Sometimes a control approach works well initially, but in the long run those relationships with students eventually lead to “counter-control” behavior from the student. That behavior is likely to be characterized by resistance and resentment.

One positive way for a paraprofessional to begin the relationship with a student is to learn about the student’s preferences ahead of time. The knowledge of student preferences can be used to let the learner with ASD know that he is appreciated for who he is. Refer to *Getting To Know You Form #S2.2* and *Staff Letter of Introduction Form #S2.3* in Forms Appendix.

Mrs. White is an experienced paraprofessional who was recently assigned to work with Robert. Mrs. White learned from Robert’s team that he is fascinated by John Deere tractors. She copied a tractor picture from the Internet and made an “About Mrs. White” booklet with a John Deere tractor cover. Robert was obviously very interested in the booklet. This expression by Mrs.

White of an awareness of Robert's interests resulted in his being relaxed in his first interactions with Mrs. White.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>In order to develop a rapport with a student the paraprofessional needs to begin the relationship by getting to know him and expressing awareness of the student's interests and preferences.</p>	<p>Paraprofessionals should learn that their success with a student is not defined by their ability to get him to follow directions. Success is better defined by being able to take the student's perspective.</p>

Access to important student information will be beneficial to the paraprofessional. Knowledge of student preferences and aversions is critical. It is also important that information about the student's sensory needs is shared with the paraprofessional. This information should be retained in a transition file that is shared with all of the team and continually revised as it changes.

Joseph was a fourth grade student with ASD who sometimes felt panicked and claustrophobic in school assemblies that were held in the dark. Joseph was often disruptive on assembly days. The new paraprofessional assigned to support Joseph, Mrs. Apple, was well informed by his team. Mrs. Apple got the agenda for the first assembly from the office. She used the agenda to make a mini-schedule for Joseph. Mrs. Apple then prepared an "assembly plan" for Joseph. The plan enabled Joseph to sit in a chair next to the exit. He was given a "break" card that he could use at any time to request to leave the assembly. He was also given a favorite comfort item, a laminated wallet size photo of his dog. The plan was in writing and it was clear. Joseph could "try" to sit in the assembly, but he was given control related to when he could leave. Mrs. Apple responded to her knowledge of Joseph's aversions and prepared him to relax on assembly days.

Janice Janzen, in *Understanding the Nature of Autism*, has re-printable forms for documenting student preferences and aversions, and for delineating critical information about the student with ASD.

- **Advocating for the Student in the School**

The way a paraprofessional communicates about the student(s) she works with has an influence on how the student is perceived by others in the building. When the paraprofessional has empathy for the learning difficulties and behavior problems the student experiences and can convey that the student is likeable, then others who work less directly with the particular student are more likely to be accepting and understanding of the students.

Mrs. Upton and Mr. Wells are examples of how a paraprofessional can impact how others feel about a given student. Although the challenges faced by their students were similar, their responses to those students were dissimilar. Mrs. Upton usually looked exhausted and irritable at the end of the school day after working with the student with ASD. When co-workers would express sympathy for her very difficult job, "working with Jeff," she often added complaints about how difficult the job really was. By contrast, Mr. Wells unfailingly had a humorous comment or incident about his student and would often tell others how much he learned from his student. The impact of the two different styles had a big effect on the staff in the building, and obviously the impressions of Mr. Well's student were more favorable.

- **Monitoring Student Stress and Responding to Behaviors**

A vital skill for an ASD paraprofessional is observing and monitoring the stress level of the learner.

In *Navigating the Social World*, Jeannette McAfee outlines the process of "Stress Tracking." The ability to recognize the underlying or hidden triggers as well as precipitating events that contribute to stress and behavioral difficulties is essential to successfully assisting a student with ASD. The paraprofessional needs training from the team or supervisor to do this task. What behaviors suggest stress for the student and how should those behaviors be noted? Those are

questions that the paraprofessional needs supervision and direction to answer. The paraprofessional needs to learn the individual signs that indicate that the student is escalating. These may include behaviors such as pacing or talking under one's breath or they may be physical signs such as a reddened face or sweating. The paraprofessional should be given direction about what strategies are appropriate for the variety of behaviors that suggest a student is escalating. The purpose of monitoring stress and utilizing intervention is that doing so prevents increased irritable behavior that becomes disruptive to the student with ASD or the students in their class.

- **Using Tools and Strategies with ASD Students**

In the past twenty years there has been an abundance of information developed about strategies that educators can use to educate students with ASD. The TEACCH program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill developed the "structured teaching" approach and it followed from that well organized, visual approach to teaching those with ASD, that other related strategies were developed. For paraprofessionals to optimally assist learners with ASD they need instruction and supervision about the many tools and techniques that will help their students. Refer to *Tools Used to Support Students with ASD Form #S2.4* in Forms Appendix.

- **Helping the Student with Organization**

Assisting a student with ASD with organization is another of the common tasks of the paraprofessional. Students with ASD often have poor executive function skills characterized by poor organization, difficulty with initiation and working memory. Help with organization can reduce stress and enable a student to accomplish more academically. An essential organizational tool for every student with ASD is an individual schedule. This should be personalized to the age, comprehension level and interest of the student. Calendars are also organizational tools that paraprofessionals should learn to provide for their students who have ASD. The paraprofessional should consider simple visual organizational strategies to assist their students as well. One paraprofessional used sticky notes that said, "Do first" and "Do second" and attached them to corresponding pages in the student's language arts book. A two pocket homework folder can be labeled "take home" and "turn in." Notebooks may be color coded to match text books. Other organizational strategies may include checklists that denote what items need to be brought to

individual classes and locker reminder lists. Timers and clocks also help with organization because they help the student understand how long they are expected to focus on a particular task. Paraprofessionals who learn to use the principle of the Premack schedule recognize that student's whose schedules alternate between low preference and highly preferred activities are usually more motivated to stay on task during their more difficult academic activities. Michelle Garcia-Winter's book, *Strategies for Organization: Preparing for Homework and the Real World* is an excellent resource to help paraprofessionals understand the organizational needs of the student with ASD.

- **Responding to Behavior of the Student with ASD**

Many students with ASD who have paraprofessional support do so in part because they have a history of behavior that has been disruptive to their own learning and has interfered with the learning environment of the classroom. Paraprofessionals should be instructed to request a behavior support plan from the team when their student is habitually disruptive or aggressive. Paraprofessionals must learn to seek the assistance and direction of the professional staff to manage serious problem behaviors. It is extremely important that paraprofessionals do not try developing a response plan to serious behaviors without the guidance of the professional team. This applies to developing reward systems as well as to attempting to use consequences. Paraprofessionals who are not well trained or supervised may have the impression that they are hired to control the behavior of the student. This can lead to under-reporting problem behaviors. The paraprofessional may also be reluctant to ask for the support of the team if she does not correctly understand her role in managing the behavior of the student.

Mrs. Prince worked with a middle school student, Jacob, for two years. Jacob began turning over waste-baskets in the school hallway. Mrs. Prince developed a reward system for Jacob. He earned a can of pop for every school day when he did not tip a waste-basket. Jacob responded by avoiding the waste-baskets but then he went in and out of classrooms turning lights on and off. When the team did a functional behavior assessment they concluded that Jacob needed more space and more choices in his school day. The reward system developed by Mrs. Prince was well-intentioned but it did not properly address the issues that resulted in Jacob's disruptive behaviors.

Paraprofessionals need to learn that the team is responsible for developing the strategies that lead the student to control his own behavior, and the role of the paraprofessional is to help implement the strategies the team plans for the student.

5) The Paraprofessional in the School

Paraprofessionals need knowledge of the policies and procedures in the school building where they are assigned. They should be offered a school handbook and be required to review it. They need to be familiar with the rules about student discipline and how in general to respond to problem behavior. Questions about who to notify when they are unable to attend work and what time they should call the local building should be answered. They also should be informed about the role of supervisors at the local level. Typically the classroom teacher and the principal are supervisors in the building. Also, when there is an ASD coach or case manager, that individual will be available to provide information and feedback on the progress of the student with ASD. In that capacity the ASD coach/case manager can also offer supervision to the paraprofessional.

Paraprofessionals who fit in well with their co-workers see themselves as members of the student/school team. While they have specific duties working with individual students they know that they are one of many individuals who contribute to the student's accomplishments. Student success requires a team approach that includes district professionals, the student's parents, and very importantly, the student's peers. When paraprofessionals keep this concept foremost in mind they work enthusiastically to develop good relationships with co-workers and the student's peers at school. Skilled paraprofessionals recognize the benefits their positive interactions with others have on the perceptions of the student in their school. Paraprofessionals who are well accepted members of the general school team enable their students to be well accepted.

Take the example of Mrs. Hill. She was a newly assigned paraprofessional who quickly became very active in her school. She volunteered to be on the decorating committee for Halloween, to help with the school book drive, and Relay for Life fundraiser. Mrs. Hill encouraged the student to be "social" at school. She generalized the social goal for the student, "greet others" to include the school secretary, the janitor, other teachers and the other children at school. When the student returned from sensory

breaks they made a point of stopping at the school office to say hello to the secretary. Students and co-workers enjoyed her because she was generally helpful and upbeat at school. As a result, teachers began requesting a special needs student if Mrs. Hill was the paraprofessional. Classmates wanted to be in work groups that Mrs. Hill supervised. The bottom line is that employees at a school who work well with co-workers will be more successful in all aspects of the assignment. By contrast, Mr. Lake was another paraprofessional assigned to a student with ASD in the same building. Mr. Lake declined requests to assist with lunch and recess duty, saying he was "too busy" with the assigned student. He had minimal interactions with co-workers and with the student's peers. His relationships with others in the school did nothing to enhance the involvement of his student's classmates with him, and he did not encourage the professional staff to get to know his student.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>Paraprofessionals who are assigned to a student with ASD will be more effective when they are cooperative with co-workers and are involved participants in the activities at their school.</p>	<p>Paraprofessionals should be careful not to separate themselves and their student from peers at school.</p>

Section 3: SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION OF PARAPROFESSIONALS

1) General Philosophy

Paraprofessionals need supervision and training to accomplish the goals of independence and socialization of the students whom they support. A paraprofessional is a support that costs minimally \$20,000 per year. With the proper training, feedback, and supervision, that is a worthwhile investment to the education of a student with ASD. With no training, the paraprofessional is a babysitter or bodyguard at best. Not only that, but without skills and training, paraprofessional support can be detrimental. The paraprofessional's efforts should be directed toward helping the student become self sufficient. Paraprofessional's who lack training, though well intentioned, may inadvertently create dependency and learned helplessness in their students.

Employing paraprofessionals as "shadows," that is, hiring adults to stand next to kids to keep them from being disruptive, will not help toward the goals of independence and socialization. It also cannot prevent a student intent on aggressive or disruptive behavior from being violent or unruly. Assigning a paraprofessional to be in close proximity with an aggressive student does not take the place of a well written functional behavior plan. Students who are volatile need a variety of proactive supports and preventative strategies. It places the paraprofessional and the student in danger to solely rely on the paraprofessional to physically intervene when a student becomes aggressive.

2) Supervision

The supervisor should have education in Autism Spectrum Disorders in order to provide proper training and direction to paraprofessionals. The supervisor needs knowledge of the array of tools and techniques that are effective with learners who have ASD. That means that supervisors should have the skills to oversee that a visual approach, social supports, and the necessary accommodations and modifications that facilitate inclusive participation are in place for the student with ASD. Finally, if they don't have the skills themselves, supervisors need access to those skilled in positive behavior support and in sensory processing in order to ensure that those techniques will be available to students.

The general education classroom teacher is a first line of supervision for the paraprofessional. She will monitor basic skills. Those include an evaluation of how the paraprofessional interacts with the student, whether there is too much or too little proximity and how accommodations and the behavior plan are implemented.

Maximizing the success of paraprofessional assistance requires continuous monitoring. One method of support and supervision that is extremely effective is the use of "mentors" or "lead paraprofessionals" who maintain regular contact with paraprofessionals. The mentors must meet with the paraprofessional supervisor on a scheduled, regular basis to discuss the progress of the paraprofessional. In those meetings the "Bi-weekly Communicator" completed by the paraprofessional, Mentor Contact Notes, and also Team Meeting notes are reviewed. The purpose of the mentor supervision meeting is to ensure that the support offered from the mentor is guided and reviewed by professional staff, and also to guarantee that professional staff maintain awareness of the progress and needs of each of the individual paraprofessionals who work with students with ASD.

This supervision of the mentor is critical because mentors are not technically professional staff. They are experienced paraprofessionals who have minimally five years experience working with students with ASD. Their experience should include working with several students with ASD, particularly those who have severe behavior and communication challenges. Mentors must demonstrate the ability to implement and make tools that have helped students accomplish goals. They have shown a clear awareness of the boundaries of the paraprofessional role in all aspects of their relationships.

Mentors must have outstanding communication skills. Not only do they need to be skilled reflective listeners, but they must be thoughtful verbal communicators who are considerate of the role and the responsibilities of other team members when interacting with them.

Mentors assume a number of responsibilities that improve the quality of the paraprofessional's work. The role of "mentor" may include the following duties:

- Orient Paraprofessionals to new buildings and new students
- Orient new Paraprofessionals to the role
- Assist Paraprofessionals in developing tools for students
- Observe and offer feedback on interactions with student
- Assist in orienting new students to buildings
- Offer support for managing stress

- Determine needs for information
- Meet with case managers/coaches to determine building needs and concerns and assist in scheduling team meetings
- Communicate student issues to team members such as OT, PT, SLT, SSW, lunch and recess staff
- Meet with Program Supervisor bi-weekly to discuss student/Paraprofessional progress. This includes reviewing *Contact Notes*, *Bi-Weekly Communicators*, *Mentor Checklist* and data collection forms. (Refer to Forms Appendix S3.1, S3.2, S3.3.)
- Maintain student contact records and data for intervention plans

Effective mentors have excellent communication skills. They are responsive to other team members, and the foundation of their efforts in working on the team is to offer support, assistance and technical information.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>Well educated paraprofessionals are a good investment because they learn skills that help students control their own behavior and ultimately lead to independence.</p>	<p>A paraprofessional who lacks training often creates increased dependency on adults rather than helping the student become independent.</p>

3) Working with Teachers

Communication and respect are necessary to the paraprofessional's relationship with the supervising teacher. There may be underlying dynamics that impact the relationship. For example, the paraprofessional may feel uncomfortable because she is less educated or thinks of herself as less skilled than the teacher. By contrast, the teacher may be accustomed to working alone without another adult in her classroom. Teachers who have not had a paraprofessional in their classroom sometimes feel initial discomfort and self-consciousness about the prospect of having another adult in their classroom.

Communicating with the teacher is imperative to ensure a good experience for both the teacher and the paraprofessional.

It is also necessary for the teacher to feel that she can trust the paraprofessional who has been assigned to her room. The following is an example of how the relationship between paraprofessional and teacher becomes problematic.

Mrs. Wilson worked in Mr. Fate's seventh grade class. She did not understand the approach Mr. Fate used to teach beginning algebra to his students, and because of her difficulty with it, she had trouble helping the student she was assigned to support in math. She complained about Mr. Fate's math teaching to other staff and to parents. When Mr. Fate learned that she had complained about his teaching to others he lost trust in her.

It is absolutely necessary for paraprofessionals to be instructed to communicate concerns directly to the teachers to maintain a trusting relationship with them.

A paraprofessional who is beginning to work with a new teacher should be directed to schedule an appointment with that teacher to discuss the pertinent information that will help them develop well-coordinated interactions in the classroom. Refer to *Initial Interview with Teacher Form #S3.4* and *Student Observation Notes Form #S3.5*.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>Paraprofessionals should elicit the teacher's preferences about classroom discipline, classroom rules and how to respond if the student's behavior is disruptive.</p>	<p>Paraprofessionals who do not communicate clearly with the teacher may lack specific information that will help their student participate optimally in the classroom.</p>

- **The Role of the Supervising Teacher**

The classroom teacher may be relieved that a paraprofessional has been assigned to support the student with ASD in her classroom. It is very important for the teacher to maintain the same level of ownership for the student with ASD as she does with all of the others in the classroom. The biggest drawback to

paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities is that teachers may unwittingly encourage and reinforce the paraprofessional to take on all the interaction with the student with ASD. This interferes with the student-teacher relationship and increases dependency on the paraprofessional for the student's learning. This can occur because the behavior of the learner with ASD seems unpredictable to the teacher. Student's behaviors are more understandable to teachers who interact frequently with them. The teacher's role and responsibility for a student do not change because that student has paraprofessional support. Paraprofessionals can avoid assuming the "teacher" role by maintaining communication with the classroom teacher and requesting her input about academic, behavior and social issues.

The supervising teacher is extremely important to the success of the paraprofessional assisting the learner with ASD. The input of the teacher is critical. Actually, the influence of the supervising teacher on the success of the paraprofessional's support to any student cannot be over-emphasized.

The following is a sample of a paraprofessional schedule that should be clarified and revised by the paraprofessional and the team to clarify when and what the paraprofessional support to the student is.

Student Schedule	Paraprofessional Support
Entering routine	Has prepared mini-schedule to enable student to complete entry routine
Daily journal	Paraprofessional makes a choice answer format for completion of journal

Supervising Teachers Can Enhance Paraprofessional Effectiveness By:

1. Developing a positive relationship with the student with ASD (*this is essential*).
2. Providing curriculum information ahead of time so that the paraprofessional can make preparations to support the student's participation.
3. Planning a regular time and a means of communicating with the paraprofessional.

4. Monitoring the student's performance in the classroom...maintaining awareness of how they respond to assignments

4) Paraprofessional Role on a Multidisciplinary Team

The paraprofessional's instruction should include information about their role on the team. For example, the paraprofessional needs to know what to do in an IEP meeting. The paraprofessional needs to understand the format of an IEP and the various responsibilities of all of the professionals as well as the parents who attend the meeting. Sometimes, the paraprofessional will be requested to report on their experience working with the student with ASD. The paraprofessional should not make placement recommendations. This includes suggesting a particular teacher in the school as well as making suggestions about program placement.

Paraprofessionals also should be informed about their role in team meetings. In a team meeting the paraprofessional will be asked to report about how the student is responding to interventions. Paraprofessionals also need to learn who each team member is and what they contribute to the student's program. Refer to *IEP Goals Checklist for Paraprofessionals Form #S3.6A & B*.

Paraprofessionals should know who to call when there is a question about the sensory program. They need information about who to talk to when there is a concern about how to help with the PECS program. Knowing the ways various team members help the student will enable the paraprofessional to more efficiently get the appropriate help for the student if needed. Refer to *Team Roster Form #S3.7* in Forms Appendix.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>It is crucial that the paraprofessional follow the direction of the team. To do this successfully, the paraprofessional should know the roles and responsibilities of all of the team members that provide support to the student with ASD</p>	<p>The paraprofessional should avoid assuming any leadership role in determining the manner in which the student with ASD is supported.</p>

- **Communicating with Team Members**

Good communication is twofold, it involves not only what an individual says but also it relates to how well the person listens. Learning to communicate well about sensitive or difficult information is valuable. It requires considering carefully the precise words that convey the intended meaning of the speaker and it also requires that the speaker has an understanding of the point of view of the listener. It is important to try to be direct. A technique that can be useful for paraprofessionals is to use "I" messages when the difficult information relates to the feelings of others. For example, "I felt confused when there were two different directions from the team members."

The paraprofessional needs to be an active listener, hearing the details and emotion in the comments of students, parents, professionals and support staff, and checking for the accuracy of what they believe is being communicated. An example of checking for accuracy is restating the statement of the speaker, such as "I heard you say that it is important that I tell you when my student needs a break."

Section 4: PARAPROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

1) The Relationship of the Paraprofessional to the Parent

Paraprofessionals are often extremely valued by the parents of the students with whom they are assigned to work. Sometimes parents are more comfortable with the paraprofessional than with the classroom teacher because they don't see them as an authority figure. The importance of maintaining a professional relationship with parents should be emphasized to paraprofessionals. It is not acceptable for the paraprofessional to develop a relationship with the parents of the student with ASD that supersedes the parent's bond with the classroom teacher. The paraprofessional should be instructed about the importance of the **parent/teacher** relationship. Just as paraprofessional support can become a barrier to the typical student/teacher relationship, if not monitored carefully, having a paraprofessional assigned to a student with ASD can interfere with the development of the classroom teacher's relationship with parents. It is an ethical responsibility of the paraprofessional to maintain a professional relationship with the parents of the student with ASD, and to be mindful of the teacher's role with that student's parents. For example, it is the teacher's responsibility, not the paraprofessional's, to communicate information about behavior and academic progress and problems to the student's parents.

Parents of a student who has limited communication skills or challenging behaviors can understandably be anxious about what happens with their child during the school day. It is important that they receive daily information about their child's experiences. That information needs to be objective and it should come from the student and/or teacher and peer to peer support students, not the paraprofessional. The paraprofessional may assist the student with ASD to complete the home/school communication form, but then the classroom teacher should review it with the student with ASD and sign it before the student takes it home. Linda Hodgdon in her book, *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication*, provides an example of a home/school communication form. That is a tool to notify parents about the daily experiences of their child with ASD, not to share information about problems, i.e., "Susie Smith had a birthday," "the school assembly was about volcanoes." A school to home and a home to school daily form is a means for sharing information that a student with communication challenges is unable to do otherwise.

Communication about behavior should be objective and it should never occur from a conversation with the paraprofessional.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>The best supervising teachers do two things that enable the student with ASD to be successfully included in the classroom. They provide the paraprofessionals with lesson plans ahead of time so they can prepare students. They also interact as frequently with the student with ASD as they do with the other students assigned to their classroom.</p>	<p>Teachers who allow the paraprofessional to assume the bulk of the responsibility and who fail to get to know the student with ASD well make an error that precludes the successful participation of the student with ASD.</p>

2) Paraprofessional Role with Peers of the Student with ASD

A paraprofessional who is working with a student with ASD will have frequent interactions with that student's peers. The paraprofessional will have many roles with the peers including facilitating interactions between typical students and the student with ASD. This is an important responsibility that is related to the goal of socialization. The paraprofessional should have specific training in how to facilitate those interactions so that they don't diminish the student with ASD in the eyes of his peers.

In part this may relate to how the paraprofessional perceives and represents the disability of the student with ASD. When the paraprofessional talks to peers about the student with ASD, they must consistently do so in a respectful manner. That means that the paraprofessional should never talk to classmates about the student with ASD as if the student were not there or would not comprehend. The paraprofessional also demonstrates respect for the student with ASD when they interact with the student in a manner that is comparable to the way they interact with the same age peers.

There are two approaches that the paraprofessional needs to consider in their interactions with the peers of the student with ASD. First, it is important that the paraprofessional avoid treating peers as if they are mini-adults in the relationship with the student with ASD. The peer should never be required to give directions or consequences to the student with ASD. Also, the most important role that the paraprofessional has is to offer support that facilitates friendship between the student with ASD and his peers.

Another role of the paraprofessional to the student's peers relates to the help the paraprofessional provides to peers. When the opportunity presents itself and it is needed, the paraprofessional will also help the classroom peers with their academic work and will help them manage the routine activities of a school day.

Section 5: TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1) Understanding ASD

Paraprofessionals require specific training by a professional knowledgeable in ASD. They need a basic understanding of ASD before they begin working with students, but that should never be considered sufficient training. Paraprofessionals need continuous access to new information about understanding the student with ASD and how to provide support that will assist the student. Paraprofessionals who appreciate how the students with ASD think have the key to successfully supporting them. Critical information for paraprofessionals includes awareness of the characteristics of an autism spectrum disorder and how ASD can impact thinking and behavior.

There are several videos available that may help the paraprofessional understand ASD. Sondra William's "Define Me," "A is for Autism," and Temple Grandin's video, "Sensory Challenges and Answers" are excellent accounts of ASD from individuals who experience it. Tony Atwood's "Asperger Syndrome" video and also, "Ask Me about Asperger Syndrome," are two other useful video's that provide good practical information that may help paraprofessionals understand ASD and techniques that help the student with ASD.

2) Communicating with the Student with ASD

Paraprofessionals will be more effective in their interactions with the student with ASD when they have specific training about how and when to talk with the student. There are a few important guidelines for this. First, the paraprofessional should adjust their language with the student to the skills of the student. For a student who does not talk, verbal communication should be brief and focus on key words. Most non-verbal students should routinely be offered pictures to help them understand what is being communicated. Students who have more advanced language skills will respond better to verbal input, but that can be very deceiving. It is important that paraprofessionals understand that a unique characteristic of student's with ASD is that in some cases, a student may have better *expressive* language skills than *receptive* language skills. Because of that characteristic, people tend to think that the student with ASD understands more than he does.

Even students who seem to have advanced language skills may struggle with conversation and those students often have difficulty grasping the meaning of social language, i.e., "interrupt," "ignore." Many students who appear to have good language also misunderstand information because they interpret it literally. "He'll talk your ear off!" may sound humorous, but to a student with ASD it can be anxiety producing.

It is important for the paraprofessional to avoid interrupting the student with ASD who is trying to process information. Often, the student may not respond automatically to a direction. The unskilled paraprofessional may instantly repeat the direction. This is a mistake. The paraprofessional should observe the individual student to learn how long it usually takes for him to process information and how quickly he is likely to be distracted when he is not responding to a task. Usually a visual rather than a verbal reminder is more useful to the student at those times.

When a student is experiencing escalating stress or anxiety the paraprofessional should avoid excessive talk. This may be a time to give the student space or to listen. Verbal requests to the escalated student are inappropriate. When information is directed to a student who has escalating stress it should be to offer support and usually it would be best presented visually.

The paraprofessional needs to be aware that often the student with ASD has very sensitive hearing. Because of this the paraprofessional should talk quietly to the student. Also, the paraprofessional should consider that even when whispered from across the room, the student with ASD may be able to hear what is said. It is important that the paraprofessional avoid talking about the student anywhere in his proximity.

Most importantly, communication by the paraprofessional should consistently reflect compassion and respect for the student with ASD. Criticism of the student must be avoided. Also, verbal behavior that may be perceived as punitive or authoritarian is unacceptable because it is diminishing to the student. The paraprofessional with little training can be tempted to behave in a dominating and angry manner when a student does not cooperate. This is counter-productive because it escalates the anxiety and the emotions of the student with ASD. The goal of the paraprofessional's communicative interactions is always to offer support, not control. A calm supportive approach to communicating with the student with ASD is vital.

3) Visuals Supports

Paraprofessionals should be informed that most often the student with ASD is a visual thinker and learner. That means that most students would describe themselves as Temple Grandin does when she states, "I think in pictures." Because the student with ASD is often a visual thinker and may require extra time to process information, using visual tools to augment verbal input is very beneficial to the student. Information that is presented visually is stable and speaks directly to the thinking style of the student with ASD. Adding a visual component to verbal information needs to be done at the skill level of the student. Younger or less academically skilled students may respond well to photographs or picture symbols while an older student or an early reader would benefit from written augmentation of verbal directions or instruction. Linda Hodgdon's book *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication* is an excellent resource for this.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>Visual supports are stable, which means they don't go away. They enable the student with ASD to maintain a focus on the information. Using visual communication supports the way the student with ASD thinks.</p>	<p>The level of understanding for verbal information a student with ASD has is easily over-estimated by the paraprofessional who does not recognize the unique language characteristics of the student with ASD. For some students with ASD, <i>expressive</i> language skills are higher than <i>receptive</i> language skills.</p>

4) Prompt Hierarchy

Well-trained paraprofessionals recognize that the least amount of support that results in the goal behavior is optimal. It is important for paraprofessionals to maintain awareness of how much help they provide a student during any activity. Levels of prompting are as follows:

1. Full physical prompt- hand over hand help for the student

2. Partial physical-touch wrist or elbow to assist the student
3. Modeling-show the student by demonstrating the correct response
4. Gesture-point toward the correct response
5. Direct verbal/visual- tell or present visual cue to the student
6. Indirect verbal/visual - give a less direct verbal or visual cue such as "What are you supposed to do next"?
7. Independent- the student responds without any assistance

There are two methods of prompting: "most to least" and "least to most" prompting. It is common to use "most to least" prompting when teaching a new skill. This is called errorless learning. When a student is reviewing a previously acquired skill the "least to most" approach to prompting should be used.

- **Knowing How to Fade Prompts**

Fading prompts can be done in the same progression as above. It is important for paraprofessionals to be directed to gradually fade prompts and to be aware of making students "prompt dependent" by continuously offering information and help without allowing the student the opportunity to engage in activities on their own.

5) Task Analysis

Learning new skills is often difficult for students with ASD, particularly when those skills are complex. Task analysis is the process of breaking a complex skill or task into its component parts. Doing so makes the task easier to learn. The greater the complexity of the task, the smaller the steps will need to be. For example, washing hands may involve 15 or more steps that need to be performed in a specific sequence (e.g. turn water on, adjust temperature, put soap on hands, put hands under water, rub hands, rinse off, etc.). Helping the student to learn each step in a task will lead to mastery and independence. It is important for the paraprofessional to have an understanding of this process; however, it needs to be done under the direction of supervising staff.

6) Responding to Power Struggles

In a team meeting about the student, Mark, who was often agitated and aggressive, his paraprofessional, Mrs. Howe, described how she had to "...Grab the book from Mark's hand" because otherwise he might read it all day!" When Mrs. Howe took the book, Mark reacted by kicking her. The team questioned

whether grabbing the book was the best strategy and Mrs. Howe responded with two comments:

*"If I don't take the book he might win!"
"He can't read instead of doing his work!"*

This approach results in a losing situation for the paraprofessional and the student because it culminates in a power struggle.

Mrs. Howe needed help to prioritize the objective in this situation. The first goal was to reduce the frequency of Mark's aggressiveness. Getting Mark to participate appropriately in the curriculum is very important but less so, while he has a pattern of aggressiveness that has not been resolved.

The paraprofessional can instantly identify that a power struggle has occurred because the student adamantly refuses to follow a direction. The natural tendency of the adult when a student refuses to follow a direction is to repeat the direction. For the student with ASD this is usually not going to be helpful. When the direction is repeated to the student with ASD (often in a louder, more emphatic voice) the student is likely to escalate and thus become more inflexible. The paraprofessional will need instruction to understand and avoid power struggles.

- **What is a power Struggle**

Anatomy of a Power Struggle

Paraprofessional Does...	Student Responds...
The paraprofessional gives the student a direction.	The student says, "No". The student begins to feel tension and pressure.
The paraprofessional repeats the direction in a louder voice.	The student repeats the refusal, turns away and escalates further.
The paraprofessional tries to prompt the student to follow the direction, or threatens to remove a reinforcing event (recess) if the student refuses to comply.	The student feels extremely angry and has a meltdown.

Avoiding a Power Struggle

Paraprofessional Does...	Student Responds...
The paraprofessional observes the student in a preferred activity and recognizes that the student will have difficulty transitioning from the activity. The paraprofessional gives the student transition preparation to enable the student to feel as though he has finished what he is engaged in.	The student hears the transition notice and begins thinking about completing the activity at hand. He does not escalate because he is prepared and has time to process the transition from the preferred activity.

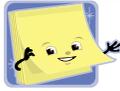
Responding to a Potential Power Struggle

Paraprofessional Does...	Student Responds...
The paraprofessional indicates to the student that it is time to stop an activity.	The student says, "No." The student feels increasing tension and pressure.
The paraprofessional says, "I said time to stop but you're not ready. I'll set the timer for 5 more minutes and it will be time to stop."	The student says, "No." The student feels the tension and pressure decrease.
The timer is set. The paraprofessional says, "You have 2 more minutes."	The student continues the activity. He doesn't respond.
The timer sounds and the paraprofessional says, "The timer went off, all done."	1) The student begins to make a transition to the next activity.
	2) The student says, "No," and the paraprofessional repeats the procedure described above.
The paraprofessional maintains a pleasant tone and responds, "The timer went off and you're still not ready. I'll set the timer for 5 more minutes. The paraprofessional is not angry or frustrated, she merely repeats the procedure with the timer until the student makes the transition.	Eventually the student relaxes and is able to make the transition successfully.

These situations may occur for several reasons, but the paraprofessional should be mindful that often the refusal occurs because the student with ASD already feels that he doesn't have enough control over what happens in his life. Also, many students with ASD experience the events of a typical school day as stressful and so the student with ASD can be particularly vulnerable to engaging in power struggles.

When a student is trying to manage his anxiety and is given a direction rather than a choice, he is likely to resist. The paraprofessional should try to offer choices rather than directions. Also, when the paraprofessional realizes that the power struggle has occurred, it is important to identify what has happened.

The paraprofessional should avoid monitoring personal aspects of the student's experiences at school unless explicitly directed to do so by professional staff. This includes student's interactions with peers as well as to what the student eats at school. Students who have paraprofessional support can live in a fishbowl if the paraprofessional does not have clear boundaries. For example, the middle school student who uses language in the hallway consistent with that of his peers may be chastised by a hovering paraprofessional. This should not happen. Another common error of over-supervision occurs when the paraprofessional comments about or directs the order of food consumption of the student during meal times at school. The student with ASD should have no more interference from staff about whether he eats the cookie before the sandwich at lunch than his typical peer's experience.

 TIP	TRAP 
<p>The paraprofessional's relationship with the student(s) should be "win-win." Giving choices helps the student feel empowered.</p>	<p>When the paraprofessional feels too much pressure to "control" the behavior of a student it can cause power struggles that actually result in more resistance than cooperation.</p>

- **Waiting as a Tool**

Without proper training paraprofessionals may feel it is their job to immediately respond to the student and to stay in close proximity to the student with ASD at all times. This is inaccurate. Skilled paraprofessionals are excellent observers who make decisions about when to intervene. They allow the student time and space to process before they offer help.

Students with ASD often require several seconds and even minutes before they formulate a response. This occurs in response to social interactions and to academic tasks. Paraprofessionals who wait for the student to think and reply encourage independence.

- **“Get In, Get Out”**

Paraprofessionals who maintain constant proximity to their student are in danger of causing “learned helplessness” in the student. Paraprofessionals who are near the student at all times suggest to the learner that he is unable to do anything on his own. The expression, “Get in, get out” characterizes the approach paraprofessionals should take to their interactions with the learner. This means the paraprofessional assesses that the student needs support, offers help that is needed, and then moves away from the student to do other things.

7) Dealing with Cognitive Inflexibility

One of the common characteristics of an autism spectrum disorder is restricted and repetitive behaviors. This can result in the learner having difficulty shifting from one activity to the next. This characteristic is also manifested by strong preferences and interests. It will be beneficial for the paraprofessional who works with the student with ASD to know how to respond to the issue of transition and to the student who has an extremely fixed interest. Students with ASD benefit from preparation for transitions. This can be as simple for the student as seeing the transitions on the schedule and to checking them off to using a “transition object” such as having the student carry the recess balls to the playground. Paraprofessionals should learn to prepare the student with ASD for new experiences such as field trips and assemblies. The preparation can include a schedule for the activity, a list of behavioral expectations, and photos that allow the student to “preview” the event.

Students who have compelling interests need support to deal with the fact that those interests interfere with concentration at school. Paraprofessionals will benefit from learning how to respond to a student who wants to talk about and read about their particular fascination all school day. Often students respond well when there are designated times during the school day that are delineated on the personal schedule that indicate when the learner can focus on his preferred interest.

Mike was a fifth grade student with ASD. He loved pirates and the topic of "buried treasure." He frequently stopped in the middle of his school work to daydream. Often, no matter what topic anyone else mentioned, Mike responded with a comment about "buried treasure." His paraprofessional Mrs. Kent was very sensitive to Mike's interest in buried treasure. She recognized that it was a struggle for him to think or talk about anything else. Mrs. Kent wisely put "Think or talk about buried treasure for 5 minutes" on Mike's schedule 4 times during the school day. When Mike daydreamed or struggled to get on task she would point out the next "buried treasure" break. Soon Mike was able to start work more easily and he stayed on task longer.

Paraprofessional support can be beneficial to a student who is having difficulty staying on task because his preferred interest "nags" at him. The paraprofessional needs to learn to use the student's interests to help him stay motivated and focused during the school day.

8) Responding to Student Meltdowns

The paraprofessional assigned to a student with ASD needs considerable training in how to respond to student behaviors and escalating stress. There are excellent resources available to assist supervisors to educating paraprofessionals about responding to a crisis. Janice Janzen, in *Understanding the Nature of Autism*, has a flow chart for decision making that can help the individual who is responding to the student with ASD during a meltdown. Brenda Smith Myles, in *Asperger's Syndrome and Difficult Moments*, also offers specific responses the adult can make when the student is in varying stages of "rumbling" or escalation. The paraprofessional mindset when a student is escalating should be to reduce demands and offer support. For that response to be effective the paraprofessional must model a calm demeanor. The goal when the student is in meltdown mode is to

protect his dignity and to help him regain self-control. This means directing the student to a "safe," private place.

Joe was a sixth grade student with ASD. His paraprofessional, Mrs. Curtis knew him well and usually was able to detect his low level stress and direct him to use the tools that would help him relax. Those included "antiseptic bouncing" (an errand to the office) and his "pleasure book." Occasionally something occurred that was less predictable and Joe escalated to a crisis level. This happened in history class. Joe's teacher, Mr. Burke, announced a "surprise" quiz that was on the reading assignment from the past weekend. Joe cried audibly when he heard about the quiz. Mrs. Curtis quietly directed Joe to a "safe" place, an empty room in the counselor's office, using a visual cue (a photo of the office). When she walked with Joe she allowed him to talk and complain. He made statements like, "I hate Mr. Burke, he's a stupid teacher." "This is the dumbest school in Michigan." Mrs. Curtis walked quietly beside Joe. She did not tell him to lower his voice. She did not tell him that his language or comments were inappropriate. Mrs. Curtis always kept paperwork available for these times. When Joe went to the room to calm himself Mrs. Curtis sat at the other end of the room and worked. Her only comments to Joe were to ask him if he needed a drink of water and to tell him that he should let her know if he wanted to return to class. Joe did some pacing and as he did that he talked to himself about how mad he was at Mr. Burke. Mrs. Curtis stayed focused on the paperwork. After 20 minutes Joe was calm and he was able to re-engage in his classroom.

9) Incompatible Behaviors for Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals should have specific instruction about when to interact and when to allow the student space. The paraprofessional will accomplish this effectively if they have an "incompatible" behavior for when interaction with the student would be counter-productive. Examples of when the paraprofessional should give the student space include all times that the student is performing appropriately. For example, the paraprofessional should not interact with the student with ASD who is processing a direction, is doing academic work, or is successfully interacting with peers. The paraprofessional may keep a stack of papers to correct, bulletin board

work, or any other school related paperwork that they can do in order to be otherwise engaged when the student does not need support.

Another important time for the paraprofessional to avoid interaction is when the child is emotionally escalating. It may be tempting at that time for the paraprofessional to try to "talk" in order to calm the student. Usually this interferes

10) Academic Accommodations

Accommodations can be provided by a skilled paraprofessional. Accommodations are supports and services that enable the student to participate successfully in the general education curriculum and validly demonstrate their learning.

Accommodations may include:

Time	extending the time a student is allowed for learning, completing a task, or taking a test
Level of Support	ways to support a student with ASD utilizing class tutors, working in groups, peer support and paraprofessional support
Instruction Grouping	allows the student with ASD to be partnered with peers who understand the curriculum, who can accommodate the student's abilities and who are good social models
Input	an adaptation of the way instruction is delivered (pre-teaching, re-teaching)
Reduced Response Effort	reduces the response effort of the student with ASD through use of a scribe, calculator, P-Touch/Word processor and other forms of technology
Setting	providing alternative settings to complete assignments or take tests
Adaptations of the Environment	providing preferential seating, organizational systems, visual strategies and sensory programs
Quantity of Sections of Curriculum Expectations	reduces assignments in each area of the curriculum

11) Data Collection on a Target Behavior

One paraprofessional responsibility regarding behavior may be to keep data on a target behavior. The paraprofessional must do this only at the direction of the student's team and with specific direction about what to record and how to keep data. The paraprofessional should not make independent decisions about data collection. Paraprofessionals need specific training on data collection. It is important that they are informed about what is appropriate and about the necessity of objectivity in record keeping. For example, when logging information about the triggers to aggressive behavior comments such as, "He still has a terrible cold and his mother sent him to school anyway" do not belong on the data collection sheet. Paraprofessionals may be requested to give information about behavioral triggers such as "Stan and Joe argued about the Harry Potter book." When data is maintained on a student the teacher has the responsibility to review all data that is collected and to sign all data sheets before they are filed or sent to parents.

12) Preparing for the Absence of the Paraprofessional

Consistency of support is necessary to avoid disruption to the student with ASD and his classroom. The paraprofessional needs to make preparations for the student and for the substitute in the event that she is absent from work. A substitute folder with detailed information that describes the daily tasks of the paraprofessional must be completed at the beginning of the school year. This folder should be a working document that is continuously updated as the needs of the student change. For example, often, the occupational therapist will often make changes to the student's sensory program. As they acquire new skills, the student will need less prompting from the paraprofessional. These changes must be noted in the substitute folder to assure that the student is being supported in a constant manner. Refer to *Paraprofessional Sub Folder Form #S5.1* in Forms Appendix.

Preparing the student should begin before the paraprofessional is absent. This can be in the form of an age-appropriate social story that explains how the student with ASD can seek assistance from the substitute and that the substitute has information on how to help.

Section 6: PARAPROFESSIONAL SELF-ADVOCACY

Paraprofessionals who work with a student with ASD will experience a variety of stressors. Paraprofessionals should be instructed that they have the same option to take a break as the student has. This includes the breaks automatically assigned contractually and also short breaks that may be needed in times of increased stress. A short break may be to take a quick walk in the hallway or to get a drink of water. Paraprofessionals should learn to monitor their own stress as well as that of their student and have a plan for how to manage when things get too escalated.

The “coach” or “case manager” as well as the classroom teacher, individuals who have a supervisory relationship to the paraprofessional, is usually among those who can offer support to the paraprofessional who has questions about what to do in a given situation with a student.

One of the important reasons for “team” approach is to ensure that the paraprofessional does not take on the education of the student with ASD as her sole responsibility. This understanding of the role, in itself, reduces stress.

- paraprofessionals also must be assured that their success is not measured by their ability to “control” a student’s behavior
- paraprofessionals should know how their performance on the job is evaluated

Resources for Advanced Training

Advanced Skill Development for the Paraprofessional Assigned to the Student with ASD

Topics and Resources:

Managing Escalating Behavior and Preventing a Crisis

1. Janzen, J. (2003) *Understanding the Nature of Autism* San Antonio, TX: Therapy Skill Builders
2. McAfee, J. (2002) *Navigating the Social World* Arlington, TX: Future Horizons
3. Myles, B., Southwick, J. (1999) *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments*, Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

Social Stories

1. Gray, Carol (2002) *My Social Stories Book*, London, England, Jessica Kingsley Publishers; (1994/2000) *The New Social Stories Book*, Arlington, TX, Future Horizons Inc.

Visual Strategies

1. Hodgdon, Linda (1999) *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication* (Troy, Michigan: Quirk Roberts Publishing
2. McClannahan and Kranz (1999) *Activity Schedules for Children with Autism: Teaching Independent Behavior*, Bethesda MD., Woodbine House, Inc.

Social Skills

1. Coucouvanis, Judy (2006) *Super Skills: A Social Skills Group Program for Children with Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Related Challenges*

2. Baker, Jed (2003) Social Skills Training For Children and Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome and Social Communication Problems, Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

Organization

1. Garcia-Winner, Michelle (2005) Strategies for Organization: Preparing for Homework and the Real World, Kentwood, MI, The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding

Functional Communication Systems

1. Bondy, Andy (2002) A Picture's Worth: PECS and Other Visual Communication Strategies in Autism, Bethesda, MD, Woodbine House, Inc.,

References

Paraprofessional References:

1. Doyle, Mary Beth (1997), *The Paraprofessionals Guide to the Inclusive Classroom: Working as a Team*, Baltimore, Md.: P.H. Brookes Pub. Co.
2. Dover, Wendy (1996), *The Personal Planner and Training Guide for the Paraprofessional*, Manhattan, KS: The Master Teacher, Inc.
3. Dover, Wendy (2001) *The Paraeducator's Guide to Instructional and Curricular Modifications*, Manhattan, KS: Master Teacher, Inc.
4. Fox, G. (1998) *A Handbook for Learning Support Assistants*, London : D. Fulton Publishers,
5. Hammeken, Peggy (1996) *Inclusion, An Essential Guide for the Paraprofessional: A Practical Reference Tool for All Paraprofessionals Working in Inclusive Settings*, Minnetonka, Minn.: Peytral Publications
6. Morgan, Jill & Ashbaker, Betty Y (2001) *Teacher's Guide to Working with Paraeducators and Other Classroom Aides*, Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
7. Twachtman-Cullen, Diane & DeLorenzo, David (2000), *How to be a Parapro, A Comprehensive Training Manual for Paraprofessionals*, Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
8. Project, PARA (1997) University of Nebraska, Lincoln



In March 2001, Grand Valley State University was designated by the Michigan Department of Education as the lead university in the development of a state team that would build and coordinate regional multidisciplinary teams in support of school personnel and parents of individuals with autism spectrum disorder. This designation was supported by an initial grant award and subsequent financial support for professional development that increases capacity and access to training for educators to support students with autism and their families. Funding is awarded to START through the Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE/EIS)

The START (Statewide Autism Resources and Training) Program at the Autism Education Center at Grand Valley State University encompasses four components:

- Training
- Resources
- Effective Practice
- Collaboration and Networking

Our Mission

Giving professionals and parents the knowledge and skills to support individuals with autism spectrum disorder in reaching their greatest potential.

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FORMS APPENDIX X

Form #	Form	Discussed on Page...
S1.1	Assessing the Need for Paraprofessional Support	6
S1.2	Interview Essay	7
S1.3	Paraprofessional Observation Form	9
S1.4	Rationale for Paraprofessional Support	10
S2.1	Paraprofessional Schedule	20
S2.2	Getting to Know You	22
S2.3	Staff Letter of Introduction	22
S2.4	Tools Used to Support Students with ASD	25
S3.1	ASD Mentor Contact Notes	31
S3.2	Bi-Weekly Communicator	31
S3.3	Mentor Checklist: Paraprofessional Visitation Record	31
S3.4	Initial Interview with Teacher	32
S3.5	Student Observation Notes	32
S3.6A	IEP Goal Checklist for Paraprofessionals EXAMPLE	34
S3.6B	IEP Goal Checklist for Paraprofessionals	34
S3.7	Team Roster	34
S5.1	Paraprofessional Sub Folder	50

Assessing the Need for Paraprofessional Support

Activity	What Is the Student Doing Now?	What Specific Task Will the Paraprofessional Do?	How Will The Paraprofessional Support Lead to Independence?

PARAPROFESSIONAL OBSERVATION FORM

Your Name: _____ Date: _____

Location Visited: _____ Staff Member or student visited: _____

Please record your impressions and return this form to your supervisor. You should complete this form for each paraprofessional you work with. Use back if needed.

Schedule:

- Describe the schedule format.

- How does the student interact with the schedule.

- In your opinion is the schedule an effective visual tool for the student?

- Do you have suggestions or comments?

Directions:

- How does the Paraprofessional get the student's attention?

- How does the student know what to do? (How do they get directions?)

- How do they know what is important?

- How do they know the steps to follow?

RATIONALE

for

PARAPROFESSIONAL REASSIGNMENTS

Paraprofessionals are reassigned to accomplish the following program goals:

Student Goals:

- Increase level of independence
- Appropriate boundaries in relationships with adults to enhance development in these areas:
 - Academic
 - Emotional
 - Social
- Improve student's adaptability
- Improve student's assertiveness and self-advocacy skills:
 - To respond without prompting or adult re-assurance
 - To initiate requests for help
 - To have adequate time to process information and develop a response without interruption by an adult
- Increase the student's skill level; gain additional skills from the different methods of teaching that individual Paraprofessionals have to offer

Paraprofessional Goals:

- Enhance rapport building skills
- Increase opportunity to learn in several settings
- Improve skill level(s)
- Increase abilities to work with different personalities
- Increase confidence related to student support
- Increase awareness of resource people possessing various levels of expertise
- Challenge their potential
- Maintain optimal energy and enthusiasm
- Retain appropriate boundaries and professionalism in interactions with students

PARAPROFESSIONAL SCHEDULE

Student: _____ Paraprofessional: _____ Work Hours: _____

Other Paraprofessionals working with ASD students in the building: _____

ISD Autism Department: Mentor _____ Ph: _____

Time/ Class	Teacher/Location	Class Activity	Student Activity	Paraprofessional Duty

Getting to Know You



My name is _____

At my house there are _____ people. Their names are:

I have a pet named _____.

It is a pet _____

I like to play _____

My favorite game is _____.

My favorite song is _____

My favorite dinner is _____

Staff Letter of Introduction

Use to introduce Paraeducator to **Middle** and **High** School student

Write a letter to the student that includes this information:

Include these elements	Example
INTRODUCTION	Hello. I want to introduce myself to you. I am Sally Jones. I will be working at your school this year.
INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENT RELATED TO SCHOOL WORK.	Your teachers have told me a little bit about you. They told me you use a laptop for journal writing and English papers. I enjoy using technology, too. I know how to use <u>DragonSpeak</u> and <u>Inspiration</u> and would be glad to help you if you need it. I am interested in learning more about the technology you use.
STUDENT STRENGTHS AND INTERESTS	Miss Smith told me you are good at math and science. She also told me you are a very good Chess player. I have started to learn to play Chess.
STATEMENT ABOUT HOW STAFF WILL ASSIST	I will be in your science class. I know you use a BREAK card when you leave the room. I can walk with you to the rest area when you take a break.
CLOSING	I look forward to seeing you in the fall.

SAMPLE LETTER

Hello. I want to introduce myself to you. I am Sally Jones. I will be working at your school this year.

Your teachers have told me a little bit about you. They told me you use a laptop for journal writing and English papers. I enjoy using technology, too. I know how to use DragonSpeak and Inspiration and would be glad to help you if you need it. I am interested in learning more about the technology you use.

Miss Smith told me you are good at math and science. She also told me you are a very good Chess player. I have started to learn to play Chess.

I will be in your science class. I know you use a BREAK card when you leave the room. I can walk with you to the rest area when you take a break.

I look forward to seeing you in the fall.

Tools Used to Support Students with ASD

Student Name _____ Reporter _____ Return to Mentor by _____

Please list tools in place at this time. Describe how frequently the tool is used, how important it is to student's success. If not in use, should it be? Return with this week's Bi-Weekly Communicator.

Tool	Currently in use?	Describe the Tool and Use
SCHEDULES		
Student personal schedule		
Mini-schedules		
Destination Cards		
Work Contract (I am working for...)		
Transition supports (ex: transition object)		
Calendar		
Other		
CUE/REMINDER CARDS		
<i>Stop; quiet; wait; quiet; think it, don't say it; walk; red words; mountain/molehill; walk in line.</i> <i>List items in use</i>		
BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATION INFORMATION		
<i>How to enter a room, turns, etc.</i> <i>List items in use</i>		
COMMUNICATION WITH HOME		
School to Home Communication		
Home to School Communication		
PHYSICAL STATE		
Sensory Program		
Oral Motor Program		
Relaxation		
Physical exercise		
SOCIAL STORIES (attach copies)		
Social stories		
Applause social stories		
Comic strip conversations		
Power cards		
SELF/BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT TOOLS		
Anger/Frustration Log		
Self monitor feelings: before/after sensory		
Pleasure Book		
Grievance Book		
Sins of the System (stop light)		
Break card		
ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS		
Technology		
Behavior plan		
Circle of Friends		
Organizational support (agenda, homework list)		

ASD Mentor Contact Note

Part 1

Student: _____

Date: _____

VISUAL TOOLS:

How is the student's schedule being used?

What other tools are being used?

BEHAVIOR:

Are there consistent behavior issues? No Yes *(explain below)*

REWARD SYSTEM:

Is there a reward system? No Yes *(describe below)*

Who has authorized this system?

PARAPROFESSIONAL:

Characterize the paraprofessional's attitude about their student (empathetic, positive, enthusiastic, frazzled, annoyed, exhausted, etc.).

INTERACTIONS:

Describe positive observations:

Describe concerns:

ASD Mentor Contact Note

Student: _____

Date: _____

Issue(s)	Discussion	Who

BI-WEEKLY COMMUNICATOR
(Due with Timesheet)

Mentor: _____

Student: _____

Reporter: _____

Date: _____

Behavior

TARGET BEHAVIOR: _____

Is there a written plan? No Yes
If yes, date created or last modified ____/____/____

Does the plan need modification or clarification? No Yes (If yes, explain)

If there is not a plan what are you doing?

Sensory Program

Sensory diet provided by OT? Yes No
Are you using a mini-schedule for sensory? Yes No
Is there an "Emotion check in" for student? Yes No
Is the sensory program effective? Yes No

Comments:

Communication

What are you working on this period (last 2 weeks)?

Expressive:

Receptive:

Written:

Response:

Socialization

What are you currently doing to enhance skills?

Organization

What supports are you using?

Modifications/Accommodations

List what you are currently using:

Upcoming Special Events

How have you prepared?

Teacher Comments:

ASD Case Manager Comments:

Other:

Response:

Next scheduled Team Meeting: _____ Time: _____

Initial Interview with Teacher

Paraprofessional: _____ Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Note: Send copy to mentor with first bi-weekly

Developing good communication with the classroom teacher is extremely important. The following topics should be reviewed in the initial meeting with the teacher:

Discuss transition information, including strengths and successes of student.

The role of the paraprofessional in the classroom

1. Describe how paraprofessional typically works to support student. Describe and show tools that are used. (I.E., Individual Schedule, Request Cards, Social Stories)
2. Discuss accommodations and modifications for the student. *Classroom teacher determines modifications.* Paraprofessional provides accommodations as determined by IEP.

3. Once needs of ASD students are met the paraprofessional can assist with other duties. What role would the teacher like paraprofessional to have in the classroom?

Determine a signal between teacher and paraprofessional to indicate need to leave room.

1. The behavior of a student with an ASD student or the intervention of a paraprofessional has the potential to interrupt the classroom. Ask the teacher for a signal that indicates that the noise has reached an unacceptable level.

Leaving and reentering the room (break, additional programming such as sensory, etc.)

1. Does the teacher want the student to check out with the teacher, (raise hand? give break card?) or would they be comfortable with student communicating need to leave with paraprofessional only?

2. The student's schedule may include breaks or activities outside the classroom. Does the teacher want to be informed each time the student leaves the room?

3. Discuss how to return to the classroom. Student will need to be oriented to what is happening and what the student should do upon entering the room. Does the teacher have any special instructions?

Paraprofessional schedule

1. Explain that you will be developing sub notes that include activity, time, typical student expectations, ASD student expectations and paraprofessional duty. Ask the teacher to suggest lunch and break times for this schedule.

2. Indicate to the teacher that sub notes will be provided for their review and input.
3. Determine where sub notes will be placed so that teacher can make them available in the case of your absence.

4. Request from classroom teacher a copy of the classroom schedule to use as you develop both the student and paraprofessional schedule.

Classroom behavior response plan—request that the teacher describe her expectations and plan.

- What role would the teacher like the paraprofessional to take in classroom management and discipline?

With ASD student: _____

With other students in classroom: _____

- Are there positive behavior supports or a behavior intervention plan in place for the student? **Discuss with the teacher.**

- Discuss signs of escalation and supportive responses for the ASD student

Determine a schedule and format for ongoing paraprofessional/ teacher communication regarding the response of the student with ASD to paraprofessional assistance.

EXAMPLE

IEP GOAL CHECKLIST for Paraprofessionals

Student: _____

Week of: _____

Reporter: _____

Program	Goals	Weekly Inclusion Activities																																												
		Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri																																								
OT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Use PECS during OT activities Imitate vertical stroke consistently Imitate drawing a circle consistently Build 3-cube bridge Write name legibly Cut on a straight line, using adaptive scissors Cut on a curved line, using adaptive scissors Use a laptop to complete writing assignment Identify characteristics of tactile input using PECs or Clicker 5 (wet, cold, warm, soft...) 	1					2					3					4					5					6					7					8					9				
		Comments:																																												
Sensory Program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Vestibular (movement) Proprioception (Heavy Work) Tactile (Pressure Touch) Oral Motor 	Comments:																																												
Speech Therapy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Imitate yes or no responses using head nods or icons Add descriptive words to pictures and 'I want', 'wait', 'first – then' and 'help' with PECS Use PECS to communicate needs/wants with other staff members Imitate mouth movements Imitate single sounds in speech 	1					2					3					4					5																								
		Comments:																																												
Oral Motor	<p>Massage: <i>Repeat each step of massage 5xs.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-feeding and pre-speech sensory. Done to help the student to tolerate the sensory input and prepare for therapy. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Place firm, elongated massage from the middle ear to corners of the lips. Alongside the nostrils to the corners of lips. Under nostrils to the upper lip. <p>Damp Toothette: Twist between cheek/lip and outer gum ridges from front to back on both top and bottom of mouth. Complete R then L.</p> <p>ARK Grabber: Place tip of grabber on surface of lower back of molars. Support child's jaw and work to create repetitive chewing on each side.</p>	AM	PM	Comments:																																										

Program	Goals	Weekly Inclusion Activities					
		Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	
Social Work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take turns in social skills group with visual or gestural cues 2. Greet peers with high-five with visual or gestural cues 3. High-five all group members at end of group session 4. Respond, with a wave, to a greeting by adult without prompts 	1					
		2					
		3					
		4					
		Comments:					
Resource Room	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pick a letter requested by an adult when given 5 letters to choose from in front of him. 2. Identify the beginning sound when shown a picture by placing the picture next to the letter of the sound. 3. Identify numbers 1-20 by picking up number requested when given 5 different numbers requested by an adult. 4. Count 1-50 by tapping his hands on table 50 times. 	1					
		2					
		Comments:					
Physical Therapy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take 3 steps on a line 2. Take 6 steps on a line 3. Will kick a ball 4. Balance on one foot for one second. 	1					
		2					
		3					
		4					
		Comments:					
Peer to Peer Support	<p>Monday: Lunch - Recess -</p> <p>Tuesday: Lunch - Recess -</p> <p>Wednesday: Lunch - Recess -</p> <p>Thursday: Lunch - Recess -</p> <p>Friday: Lunch - Recess - (Alternate Student) -</p>	Notes/Observations:					

This form is intended to be used as a resource to keep all team members informed of each student's progress toward IEP goals. Please bring this completed form to each team meeting.

IEP GOAL CHECKLIST for Paraprofessionals

Student: _____

Week of: _____

Reporter: _____

Program	Goals	Weekly Inclusion Activities				
		Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri
OT	1	1				
	2	2				
	3	3				
	4	4				
	5	5				
	6	6				
	7	7				
	8	8				
	9	9				
			Comments:			
Sensory Program		Comments:				
Speech Therapy	1	1				
	2	2				
	3	3				
	4	4				
	5	5				
			Comments:			
Oral Motor		AM	PM	<u>Comments:</u>		

Program	Goals	Weekly Inclusion Activities					
		Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	
Social Work	1	1					
	2	2					
	3	3					
	4	4					
		Comments:					
Resource Room	1	1					
	2	2					
	3	3					
	4	4					
		Comments:					
Physical Therapy	1	1					
	2	2					
	3	3					
	4	4					
		Comments:					
Peer to Peer Support	Monday: Lunch - Recess - Tuesday: Lunch - Recess - Wednesday: Lunch - Recess - Thursday: Lunch - Recess - Friday: Lunch - Recess - (Alternate Student) -	Notes/Observations:					

This form is intended to be used as a resource to keep all team members informed of each student's progress toward IEP goals. Please bring this completed form to each team meeting.

Autism Spectrum Disorders **Team Roster**

STUDENT: _____

2007-08

Team Position	Name	Phone #	Address
Case Manager			
Teacher			
Occupational Therapist			
Physical Therapist			
Speech Therapist			
Social Worker			
Mentor			
ISD Supervisor			
Parents			
Building Administrator			

PARAPROFESSIONAL SUB FOLDER

CONTENTS:

1. **Welcome the Sub and Introduce the Student:** Include important information about the student, including some of his likes and dislikes, what upsets him, what calms him, what is his procedure for taking breaks, etc.
2. **Map of the School:** Include information about where to go for fire drills, tornado drills, sensory, quiet breaks, etc.
3. **Student's Schedule:** Also include times that the student may leave class early or arrive later than classmates, sensory time, lunch, dismissal, etc.
4. **People You May Meet:** List names of teachers, administrators, secretary, other paraprofessional who may work with the student, social worker, speech therapist, occupational therapist, lunch and recess ladies, ASD mentor, bus driver, etc.
5. **When and Where to Assist:** When and what kind of assistance does the student need during the day? Where should the sub be in relation to the student? Where should the sub be if the student doesn't need assistance in a class? What does the sub do if the student is taking a break? Does the student need support at lunch or on the playground or when using the restroom? Should the sub do sensory, and if so, what should she do? Are there special instructions for fire and tornado drills? Does the student attend assemblies and what supports are helpful?
6. **Phone Numbers and Extensions:** Teachers, administrators, ASD Staff, emergency contacts.
7. **Miscellaneous Information:** Student and adult lunch prices, staff break room and rest rooms,

