

THE PARAPROFESSIONAL CONNECTION®

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HELPFUL FEEDBACK

If you have been implementing the good question strategy from last month, another strategy that also supports critical thinking and learning is to provide helpful feedback. Research identified timely and detailed feedback as one of the most powerful strategies to support learning. When you say “good job” how does the student know if you are talking about how they are paying attention to the teacher, sitting quietly and safely, the assignment they just finished or how they were kind to a peer? Telling a student exactly what they are doing right, instead of “good job” helps them know when they are on the right track. It is important to be specific and give feedback immediately or as soon as possible after they demonstrate the behavior or complete the task. It helps to recognize their improvement and progress toward a goal. Acknowledging even the tiniest step forward can help a student stay motivated because someone has noticed how hard they are working and that they are making gains.

“We all need people who will give us feedback. That’s how we improve.” – Bill Gates

One caution when giving feedback is to present the information carefully. If you provide feedback on everything that the student does, they will begin to feel closely monitored, micromanaged, nervous or self-conscious. Give feedback on the new skill that they are learning or something that they have been working hard on and are showing growth. The feedback should focus on what they are doing right and how to improve, and not on what they are doing wrong or controlling every move. Finally, feedback may need to be private depending on the student or situation. Public feedback can cause competition, which is not effective for some students and could lead to avoidance. It is possible that feedback given in one of these ways could come across the wrong way and decrease the learner’s motivation.

The benefits of meaningful feedback are better learning and achievement. When students understand what they are doing well and what they need to improve, then they are more able to make positive changes.

FADING SUPPORT

Many components of the IEP, Individual Education Plan, have been reviewed in The Paraprofessional Connection over the school year. A paraprofessional is an integral part of supporting all of the types of plans for the student to be successful. As a student meets their goals, gains skills and uses their accommodations it may be possible to begin to fade some of their close adult support. This is done through assessing and observing what is happening currently and identifying less intrusive alternatives for support with the whole team. A student may become more independent during certain routines, activities, time periods or tasks. Some areas to consider increasing independence could be: riding the bus, during arrival/dismissal time, during hallway transitions, during lunch or recess, in social situations, beginning a task, completing a task, organizing materials or staying focused. Increasing independence does not mean that all support is removed. It simply means that the level of prompting or cues is decreasing, less intrusive or is happening less frequently. This isn't about withdrawing help, but rather about making a gradual shift that encourages students to rely on their own skills.

“Being prompt dependent implies that it is the learner’s fault. It’s not...it’s the instructors. We have to teach to prevent the student from learning to rely on the prompt.” - Unknown

Some questions to think about when considering fading support:

1. When is it truly necessary to be physically next to the student? Could you monitor a student from across the room, at times, instead of directly next to the student?
2. What is the goal for independence during specific activities? Can the student be more independent during non-academic times, but needs more support with academic tasks? Can the student do parts of the task on their own? For example, could the student carry their lunch box, unpack the foods from their lunch box, open some containers or bags, but need help with other containers, instead of an adult getting their entire lunch set up for them.
3. What types of cues or prompts are we using currently? Can we decrease how often we provide those prompts or change the type of prompt? Can you break the task into smaller steps? Does the student need more wait time to allow them to complete or attempt the task on their own before offering support? Could a student be successful with a verbal prompt instead of a physical prompt? Could a student use visual cues or natural cues from the general education teacher or a peer?
4. What materials, schedules or structures might help the student? What skills would need to be taught or what systems would need to be put in place for the student to use the lesser prompt?

MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

Multilingual learners are students who have consistently been exposed to multiple languages or are developing proficiency in multiple languages. This is an asset that should be celebrated and built upon. Students may have recently moved to a new country, have lived there for years or have been born in the country. Students may have special education needs in addition to learning multiple languages. Students who use AAC, sign language or braille should also be considered multilingual. Many of the strategies that are effective for students with learning differences can also be beneficial to students learning another language and vice versa. Here are some strategies that support our multilingual learners:

Build on background knowledge by connecting students' own experiences and strengths to the lesson. Having opportunities to share their connections and knowledge can help understanding. Students may share or express themselves in their preferred language or through drawing, pictures, objects or gestures.

Build vocabulary by previewing and teaching academic and unfamiliar vocabulary before the lesson. Word maps connecting concepts and vocabulary can help with understanding.

Build conversation time as many students have better receptive skills or understanding of the language, but are hesitant to speak or express in the less familiar language. Give clear prompts and models for sentences so students can see and hear what it sounds like. Allow opportunities to share in small groups instead of in front of the whole class. Yes and no responses are easier than responding in full sentences.

Build collaboration time to help students learn from one another. There may be a peer in their group that is more proficient in both languages and can support their understanding. Students may be more comfortable speaking to peers rather than adults as social language often develops more quickly than academic language.

Reflection/Discussion Guide

- What similarities do you notice in strategies?
- Are there strategies that you only use with some students that you should try with more students?

ACTIVE SUPERVISION

S U P P O R T I N G B E H A V I O R

It is a guarantee that for at least part or maybe all of your day, your role includes supervision of one or more students. Effective supervision requires you to be actively involved in the supervision to prioritize the safety and well-being of the students in your care. This means staff are constantly monitoring the students' location and activities, actively watching, listening and interacting to ensure safety and promoting positive behaviors. Even if you are directly assigned to one student which is your priority, you can still participate at some level in active supervision to support the other school staff. There are six common steps in Active Supervision:

1. Set up the Environment – Set the behavioral expectations for the environment and activity. Give clear directions and define the level of noise and movement that is acceptable during this time. Make sure you can see most of the space and it is accessible. Think about what items or activities may pose a risk to students and consider how that changes your supervision plan.
2. Position the Staff – Position yourself so you can see the full environment that you are in whether it is a classroom, cafeteria or playground with closer proximity to the students you are directly responsible for monitoring. Consider placing yourself closer to exits, distracting or potentially unsafe areas.
3. Scan, Monitor and Count – Scan and circulate around the room or space. You should not just sit in one space. Walk around and engage with students even if it is just a smile or positive gesture. If you are in a space where students may be coming and going, make sure you are observing and scanning to know where everyone is and what they are doing. Have a system for regular head counts and for knowing when students leave for other locations.
4. Listen – Pay attention to unusual sounds which could be more noise or less noise than usual. Listen to changes in tone or volume which could indicate a problem. Listen to other adults in the environment that may be requesting support, engagement or redirection.
5. Anticipate behavior – Be alert and aware of potential activities, times of day or interactions that could increase behavior or be challenging for students.
6. Engage and Redirect – Stay closer to your assigned students and be ready to engage or redirect. Use a calm, respectful and neutral tone to redirect quickly when you see potential for things to go off track. As soon as students are back on track and following expectations, provide specific and positive reinforcement.

Benefits of active supervision include a learning environment that is safe and supportive which encourages learning and positive interactions. Active engagement with students helps build stronger relationships between staff and students, fostering trust and cooperation. Reduced accidents and injuries occur as staff can identify and address potential hazards before accidents happen. Finally, proactive intervention and guidance can help address problem behaviors before they escalate. Stay alert and engaged!

