

THE PARAPROFESSIONAL CONNECTION®

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“JUST RIGHT” SUPPORT

Goldilocks and The Three Bears is a very familiar story and if you recall the story was about what was “just right” for each bear and for Goldilocks. What was just right was different for each individual. A tricky part of your role is to find the “just right” support for students in a range of environments, situations and activities. How much help is too much? How much help is not enough? How much support is just right? It is a balance between too easy and too hard for each individual. It also can change depending on the day and the ability of the student to adjust to the changes of the day. The just right support helps a student to be as independent as possible while feeling successful. It is important to have tools and strategies to figure out the right level of support for each student in each different context.

“I worry that students who are labeled as special education get our lower expectations because we don’t think they can do more than they are doing, when we really should be helping them to do more than they believe they can do.”– Peter DeWitt

Ask yourself, can the student do it: On their own? With wait time? If given the right technology and equipment? If given a little instruction or practice? With the help or a model from a friend or a peer? With a visual cue or checklist? With occasional prompts from the staff? With significant prompts from the staff? The “just right” support can impact learning in all academic areas and with social, emotional and behavioral learning. Discovering the just right support for a student is not a quick strategy, but being aware of the need for it can start right now.

We welcome your feedback, questions, and comments:

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WHAT IS AN IEP?

IEP stands for Individualized Education Plan. An IEP is a legally binding document that is developed for each student after they qualify for special education services. The interventions, modifications and accommodations must, by law, be followed. Every IEP has the same components, but the content is individualized for each student and their needs. You may have access to the full IEP or an IEP Snapshot which is a basic overview. It is a confidential document and should not be shared or discussed with others. You can not even confirm that a child has or does not have an IEP to someone. This includes other staff in the building. If you are receiving questions about a student and if they have an IEP, please direct that person to the special education teacher that you are working with.

Layer Three, from last month, was focused on the specific skills and goals identified in the IEP to decrease gaps in skills. There are several areas that can help you when you read an IEP. First, there are the present levels of performance which give you a picture or baseline of what the student could do at the time the IEP was written. An IEP is developed annually and the date it happens will vary for each student for a variety of reasons.

The next area is the student's goals. Typically, students have several goals depending on their needs and the services that they receive. Common categories for goals include academic, communication, motor skills, social-emotional and behavioral goals. These goals are designed to address the unique needs and abilities of a student and guide their educational progress while providing a framework for individualized instruction. The goals should include high expectations and be attainable in one year. Data collection and analysis helps determine if a student is making adequate progress and helps teachers determine how to adjust their instruction.

Adaptations, which include accommodations and modifications, are another large part of the IEP. They are specific recommendations about what a student needs to access the instruction and be successful. These adaptations are not optional and need to be in place across the student's day and in all the environments.

Your role is to integrate practice and generalization of those IEP skills across the school day at meaningful times and take data on student progress on those goals.

Reflections

- Are you aware of the goals, accommodations, modifications that the students have?
- If you are not or there are things you do not understand how to implement or support, who can you ask ?

KEY TERMS TO KNOW

I D E A S T O C O M M U N I C A T E

Communication delays are common for students with special education needs. Many students may receive services from an SLP or Speech Language Pathologist. If an SLP is able to provide you some strategies to support the communication of the students, please use them throughout the day so the student can generalize the skills. Communication is a critical part of learning and interacting with others. If you have the opportunity to join the student during their speech therapy, please pay attention and help the student practice the skills in other situations. Here are some key terms and related skills that are helpful to understand related to communication.

Speech is the physical production of verbal language and is how the student makes sounds and words. The structure of a students' mouth, tongue and breath can impact the production of speech sounds. There are several types of speech delays. A student could have difficulty with intelligibility or how understandable their speech is, have difficulty with articulation or stuttering which is how fluent their speech. Voice disorders also fall in this area and could be an abnormality in pitch, intensity or quality of speech. They can be related to physical damage or psychological conditions.

Language is using non-verbal language, verbal language, correct grammar and sentence structure to communicate thoughts and needs. An SLP can provide therapy in both speech and language depending on the needs of the student.

Receptive language is a broad term to describe comprehension or understanding of language. This can include knowing the vocabulary for familiar people, places, things, actions, descriptors and more. It begins with following simple directions and answering simple questions and progresses to following multi-step directions and answering more complex questions.

Expressive language refers to how the child expresses their needs and could be with verbalizations, words, sentences, signs, pictures or AAC. Students can demonstrate very different skills in receptive and expressive language. For example, their understanding may be at a much higher level than their ability to share what they know.

Pragmatic language is related to social communication skills. This includes paying attention to others, using nonverbal skills like eye contact and facial expression, staying on topic and engaging in a back and forth conversation.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication or AAC refers to the systems student use to support communication or may be the primary form of communication for an individual. This can include low-tech or no tech AAC like pointing, sign language, pictures or single switches with pre-recorded messages. High tech AAC systems may be on a computerized device like an iPad with apps to support communication or a designated device. Research shows that the use of AAC can improve the student's chance of speaking by giving a consistent model and decreasing anxiety. It does not prevent a student from becoming a verbal communicator.

POSITIVE PRAISE

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Praise can have a powerful effect on students and improve relationships. It can improve student attitudes about learning and the right kind of praise at the right time could turn around behavior challenges. Using this simple PRAISE acronym can help you remember the characteristics of effective praise.

P – Praise process and progress, not just the outcome. Students who struggle to complete tasks or learn new skills may feel discouraged if they are working hard, but still feel that their work is not good enough. Give the students specific praise about their process and progress to let them know they are on the right track. Praise the quality and the effort, not their ability, looks or personality.

R – Respectful and appropriate. Praise may be public or private. Some students are embarrassed to be recognized in front of their peers. Praise can be verbal or written depending on the student or situation. Some students would love a written note that they could save and look at again or share with their family.

A – Avoid comparisons to other students. Praise a student for mastering a skill they are working on. Don't compare their skills to other students' skills or tell them they did better than someone else. Comparisons can make other students have negative feelings about themselves.

I – Immediate. The closer the praise is to the action or behavior, the more likely that the positive behavior occurs again. Immediate praise can also encourage a student to keep trying.

S – Sincere and specific feedback that goes beyond "good job". The praise identifies exactly what the student did well. It reinforces the positive behavior that you want the student to repeat. It addresses what they do, not who they are. For example, "I can tell you used all your reading strategies and read that paragraph really well," instead of "you're so smart."

E – Expectations are clear. Specific feedback what the standard or expectation is and how they are meeting it. For example, "Wow, you got your backpack unpacked in the first 10 minutes of class. Way to go!"

Look around the learning environment whether it is the bus, classroom, cafeteria, gym or playground and think about all the things you could praise students for, especially the kid who challenges you. The one who can't sit still, can't stop talking and can't keep their hands to themselves is the one who needs praise the most. Behavior is communication and what if this individual needs to feel seen, heard and appreciated. Praise can be an effective tool to encourage students, increase positive behavior and motivate students to continue to learn. By following the praise suggestions above, we can help improve relationships and help our students thrive.

