



**Paraprofessional Training
Series**

**PART III:
COMMUNICATION AND TEAMWORK**

Missouri Department
of Elementary and Secondary Education

Paraprofessional Series

This is a multi-part series offered for paraprofessionals. Verification of orientation training necessary for each paraprofessional to perform duties as assigned is present. The Federal Regulations and the Missouri Office of Special Education Compliance Standards and Indicators indicate that paraprofessionals who do not hold teaching certificates are required to have received fifteen clock hours of training within six months of hire including orientation and initial training prior to working with the student. A minimum ten clock hours each school year thereafter is also required.

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Objectives

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Part 3 of this series will provide information about:

- organizational structure of the school district; and
- learn how to effectively communicate with students and adults.



The objectives for this webinar are to understand the organizational structure of the school district and to learn how to effectively communicate with students and adults.

Guide to this Webinar

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Handouts:

- HO #1 – Guided Notes for Strategies for Communicating with Students
- HO #2 – Communication Log
- HO #3 - Information From Today



Please take a moment to make sure you have the handouts listed on the screen available for your use throughout the webinar. During the course of this training, you will be directed to pause the webinar to review and reflect on content or activities, using these handouts. Upon completion of each activity, click “play” and continue with the Communication and Teamwork webinar.

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Organizational Structure



It is important to know this structure so you can follow the appropriate order and understand the daily routine. Each district's organizational structure is different. Be sure to follow your district's organizational structure.

Organizational Structure

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Each district has a unique structure that helps them do business.

It is important to know the structure of the district.

Examples:

- Board of Education
- Superintendent
- Assistant Superintendent/Director of Special Education
- Building Principals
- Assistant Principals
- Teachers
- Staff



Each district has a unique structure that helps them do business. It is important to know the structure of the district and to remember that each district's structure is different. Examples could include: Board of Education, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent/Director of Special Education, Building Principals, Assistant Principals, Teachers, and Staff. As a paraprofessional, you are considered a staff member. If there is a question, the paraprofessional would go to her teacher. If there is a concern about the classroom or the teacher, the paraprofessional may want to talk to the building principal.

Please take a moment and reflect on how this looks in your district and building. Is this example similar to what you see?

Organizational Structure and Evaluation Process

- All paraprofessionals participate in a personnel evaluation process
- The district decides how often this occurs
- It may be once or twice a year
- The district determines who will conduct the evaluation

Do you know the evaluation process in your district?

A part of the organizational structure of districts is the evaluation process. Paraprofessionals are considered staff and participate in an evaluation process. The district decides how often this occurs. It may be once or twice a year. The district determines who will conduct the evaluation.

Do you know the evaluation process in your district?

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Communication



At this point in the webinar, we will discuss effective communication strategies as you work with students and adults.

When Communicating

- Avoid specifics.
- Don't distort, exaggerate, or confuse information.
- Always be positive and focus on strengths.
- Don't label children as "your students."
- Avoid using student names.
- Develop a standard response.
- Refer questions to the teacher.
- If you don't want to answer, or are unsure, then don't.

Adapted from The Master Teacher, PDXPERT

When communicating with parents, friends, family, students, and all others, it is important to remember to avoid specifics. Don't distort, exaggerate, or confuse information. Always be positive and focus on strengths. Don't label children as "your students." Avoid using student names. Develop a standard response. Refer questions to the teacher. If you don't want to answer, or are unsure, then don't.

Communication and Confidentiality

- Respect the privacy of students and their families.
- Know the laws – Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Be selective with whom you share student information.
- Be careful and thoughtful about what you say.
- Realize that you may not be able to answer every question you are asked.

Part 2 of this series was dedicated to confidentiality and mandated reporting; however, it is important to review as we discuss communication.

Respect the privacy of students and their families. Know the laws – Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Be selective with whom you share student information. Be careful and thoughtful about what you say. Realize that you may not be able to answer every question you are asked.

Communication with Students

The following characteristics are important when interacting with students

- Honesty
- Confidence
- Openness, care, and empathy
- Humor

*• Adapted from: 10 Management Strategies
Education Assistants and Paraprofessionals*

By embodying these characteristics, you can work with students to help mold their behavior while helping to make sure their needs are met. These characteristics are respectful and honor all students. They are: honesty; confidence; openness, care, and empathy; and humor.

Activity #1

Guided Notes for Strategies for Communicating with Students

Fill in the blanks as you view the next slides.

Think about your student with whom you work, and how these communication strategies could help your student. Please fill in the blanks from handout #1 as you view the next slides.

Strategies for Communicating with Students

- Active Listening
- Sidestep Power Struggles
- Catch Them Being Good
- Model Prosocial Skills
- Alter the Volume and Cadence of Your Voice

• *10 Management Strategies for Education Assistants and Paraprofessionals, CPI, June 2016*

A few important strategies for communicating with students especially student with disabilities. They include, but are not limited to: active listening, sidestep power struggles, catch them being good, model prosocial skills, and alter the volume and cadence of your voice.

Active Listening

- Giving the student total and complete focus
- Giving eye contact and keep a friendly and open expression on your face
- Listening closely
- Withhold judgement

Adapted from: 10 Behavior Management Strategies for Educational Assistants & Paraprofessionals

The more you can genuinely engage with students with whom you work in an authentic way, the more they feel respected and valued. Consider giving the student total and complete focus. Giving eye contact and keep a friendly and open expression on your face. Listening closely, and withhold judgment.

Sidestep Power Struggles

Instead of trying to force students to do what you want, try using these alternatives:

- Find a common interest and build on that
- Be friendly. Smile!
- Use a one word direction
- Remember that “No” is a complete sentence.
- Provide choice
- Find a win-win compromise

Adapted from: 10 Behavior Management Strategies for Educational Assistants & Paraprofessionals

A power struggle occurs when two people hold different ideas and both are unwilling to compromise. Instead of trying to force students to do what you want, try using these alternatives: Find a common interest and build on that. Be friendly. Smile! Use one word direction. Remember that “No” is a complete sentence. Provide choice. Find a win-win compromise.

Catch Them Being Good

Sometimes negative behavior is the only way that students can communicate their needs to you. It may be the only way they know how to get your attention. Instead of reinforcing the negative behavior, try to catch them being good. The goal here is to praise the positive behaviors and neutralize or ignore the negative behaviors.

Adapted from: 10 Behavior Management Strategies for Educational Assistants & Paraprofessionals

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Model Prosocial Skills

You can support prosocial skill development by being a positive role model. The more that students see positive adult interactions, the more likely they are to engage in such activities themselves.

Adapted from: 10 Behavior Management Strategies for Educational Assistants & Paraprofessionals

Prosocial skills are those behaviors that we engage in that benefit others. You can support prosocial skill development by being a positive role model. The more that students see positive adult interactions, the more likely they are to engage in such activities themselves.

Alter the Volume and Cadence of Your Voice

Often we overlook how we can affect the emotional state of our students. Emotions can be infectious. When we are angry, aggravated, excited, anxious, or nervous, these emotional states can impact the state of escalation of our students.

Adapted from: 10 Behavior Management Strategies for Educational Assistants & Paraprofessionals

Often we overlook how we can affect the emotional state of our students. Emotions can be infectious. When we are angry, aggravated, excited, anxious, or nervous, these emotional states can impact the state of escalation of our students.

Alter the Volume and Cadence of Your Voice

If you notice that your student is escalating and becoming visibly agitated, try these techniques to control your own emotions:

- Lower the volume of your voice and speak more quietly. As you speak more quietly, your student will have to become quieter to hear you.
- Alter the cadence of your voice and speak more slowly.
- Modulate your tone of voice and be calm and supportive.
- Simplify your vocabulary.

Adapted from: 10 Behavior Management Strategies for Educational Assistants & Paraprofessionals

If you notice that your student is escalating and becoming visibly agitated, try these techniques to control your own emotions: Lower the volume of your voice and speak more quietly. As you speak more quietly, your student with whom you work will have to become more quieter to hear you. Alter the cadence of your voice and speak more slowly. Modulate your tone of voice and be calm and supportive. Simplify your vocabulary.

Communication with Students

As a paraprofessional you might be required to keep a log that documents your activities. It is considered a best practice to document communication.

Please pause the webinar and look at handout #2.

• Adapted from: Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders

It is important to document communication that you have with students. A good way to do this is with a Daily Paraprofessional Log. The handout from this webinar is one example of a communication log. Please pause the webinar to take a moment to look at this handout #2.

Does your district have one that is similar? Communication is key in working with both the student and the teacher.

Final Thoughts on Communication with Students

Communicating with students should:

- Support independence
- Promote student communication
- Promote social skills
- Support appropriate behavior

• Adapted from: Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders

The goal for all students is to prepare them for their postsecondary life. This should be kept in mind as you communicate with students. All communication should therefore support independence, promote student communication, promote social skills and also support appropriate behavior.

Effective Communication with Adults

How do I ask questions, give suggestions, or communicate concerns?

- Use good common sense and discretion.
- Never imply judgment.
- Be sincere, simple, and direct.
- Be willing and ready to listen.

*Adapted from: *The Master Teacher, PDXPERT*

Schools are busy places, and there is not always time set aside just for the adults to talk together, share ideas, and plan. If you have questions, concerns, or want to offer a suggestion, what is the best way to go about that? Here are some ideas: Use common sense and discretion. Never imply judgment. Be sincere, simple, and direct. Be willing and ready to listen.

If a problem or situation seems to go further than just finding time or asking questions, go back to the organizational structure and see who is the next appropriate contact.

Effective Communication with Adults

What causes communication problems?

- Lack of time to communicate or plan
- Unclear role or task assignments
- Differences in styles
- Difficulty adjusting to different work arrangements
- Tenure differences and “connectedness”

• Adapted from: *The Master Teacher, PDXPERT*

Communication problems can arise for a number of reasons. Some of these could be: Lack of time to communicate or plan, unclear role or task assignments, differences in styles, difficulty adjusting to different work arrangements, and tenure differences and “connectedness.”

Effective Communication with Adults

When dealing with communication problems

- Communicate on a business level.
- Don't complain or make excuses.
- Don't take things personally.
- Make time to communicate.
- Deal immediately with problems.
- Involve a third person, as appropriate.

• Adapted from: *The Master Teacher, PDXPERT.*

If communication is uncomfortable for you, here are some suggestions. Communicate on a business level. Don't complain or make excuses. Don't take things personally. Make time to communicate. Deal immediately with problems. Involve a third person, as appropriate.

Wrap Up

Organizational structure of school districts, effective communication with students, and confidential and effective communication with adults is critical to build teamwork for student success.

Summary

“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.”

- Anthony Robbins

Understanding how to best communicate with others is key.

Information From Today

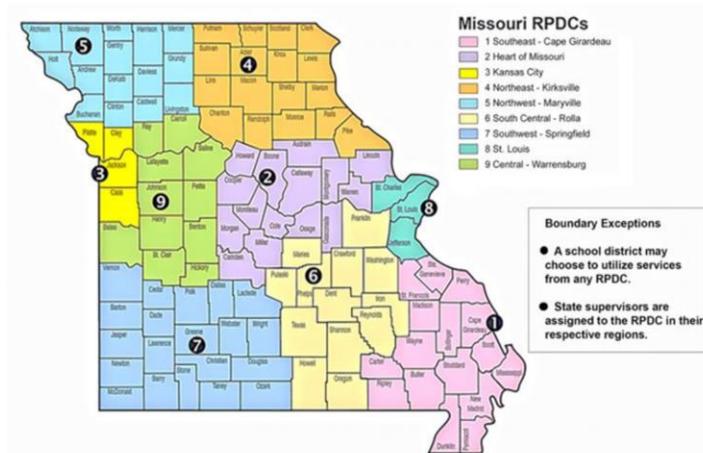
Most Important...

Surprised me...

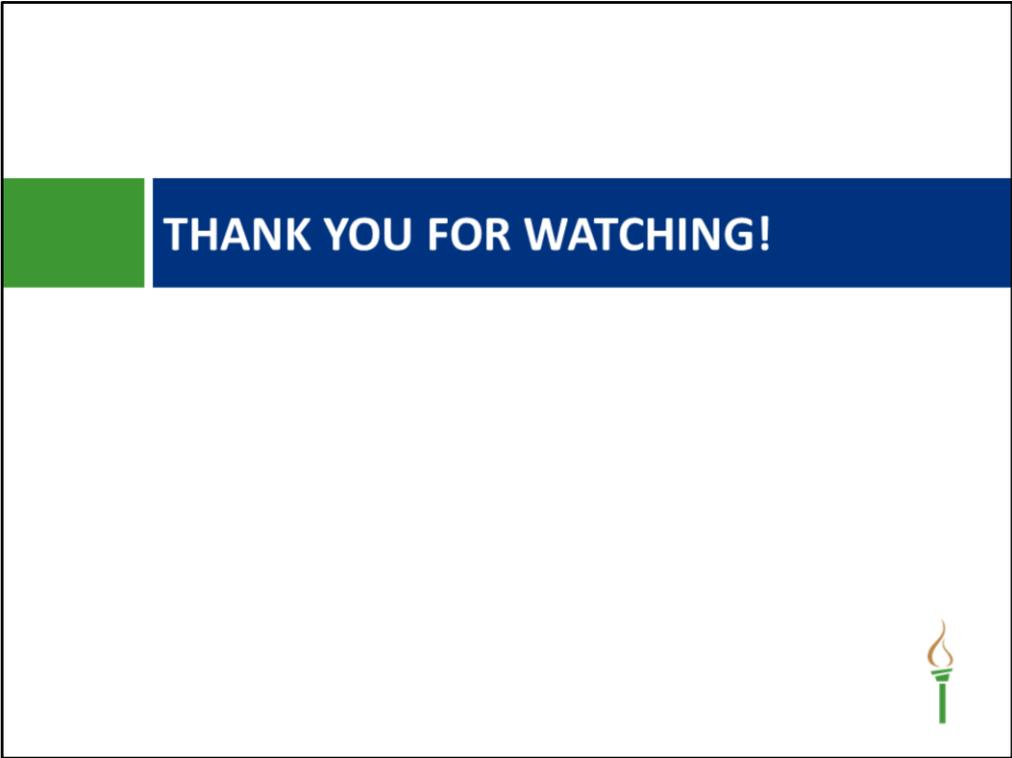
How will I use...

Pause the webinar and complete handout #3 on important information from today.

Regional Professional Development Centers



Missouri has been split into nine regions. Each region has a Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC). The diverse staff of the RPDC provides a variety of professional development opportunities and services for K-12 schools both on and off campus. Each of these centers have staff trained in paraprofessional professional development. Please contact your teacher/leader and your supervisor for access to the resources available through these centers.



This concludes Part 3 of the Paraprofessional Training Series.