

Paraprofessional Roles & Responsibilities

Introduction

Welcome to Half Hollow Hills! As a special education paraprofessional, you will be an instrumental part of shaping the independence, social and academic development for an individual or classroom of individuals with special needs, including autism, ADHD, learning disabilities and other related disabilities.

You will be assigned a student, classroom or a schedule of classroom assignments as your daily responsibility. If you are working with a student as a 1:1 paraprofessional, you will be working with a team of professionals to help the student reach the goals on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These individuals may include:

- Classroom teachers: General and/or special education teachers. One special education teacher is responsible for the management of your student's IEP. This teacher is called the teacher of record. This is your main go-to person for the student.
- Related service providers: The student may also have one or more of the following- Speech, Occupational, Physical, Vision or Hearing therapy, Adaptive Physical Education each week (per the IEP).
- Support staff (located throughout the building): Depending on the student's IEP, the student may have counseling services with our school psychologist or social worker. The student's team may also have support and training from our behavior consultant. Additionally, middle and high school students have a guidance counselor whose name can be found near the top of the student's schedule.
- Administration: Our Principal and Assistant Principals may work closely with some of our students with special needs to provide assistance, support staff or in a disciplinary role.

Confidentiality

Student issues should not be discussed with parents, other paraprofessionals or anyone else who does not work with the student. Be mindful of conversations in the hallway, faculty room, or other areas where you might be overheard.

A parent may ask you for information about their child or their child's day. This should come from the teacher or team member. Though it can be an awkward situation to be put in, please let the parent know you are not permitted to discuss student issues with them. Refer them to the classroom teachers or other team

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members. If a parent asks for your phone number in order to contact you, even if it's so they can tell you their child forgot to bring lunch or is absent, etc., please let them know that per administration you are not permitted to share your number or email with them.

Dignity & Respect

Do not talk about behavioral, medical or familial concerns in front of your student or others. This includes self-care/hygiene (i.e. toileting, bathing), home and cultural issues.

If you must talk about a sensitive issue regarding your student, find a quiet place to speak with the appropriate team member.

Do not use humor at the student's expense. If a student is able to join in the conversation and understand humor, then humor that is not at their expense may be appropriate. Most of the time, this is not the case.

Do not use inappropriate language in front of students.

We understand the occasional need to step out for a call or if an important issue arises. Outside of these times, please refer to administrative directions regarding not using phones or other personal items that may interfere with instruction and supervision of students.

If you do step out, ask another adult to watch your student while you are out of the room. Core classes for your student are easiest to have your student watched, so when possible, use these classes.

Even though they may not be able to show it, our students with special needs may understand more than you think. Keep this in mind when speaking with your student. Be concise when speaking, but also monitor your tone to make sure it's neutral, and not too loud or assertive.

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Supporting Teacher Instruction

The classroom teacher for each class will share how you can best support your student as a successful member of the class as a whole. Please inquire with each teacher as to your role in their rooms.

Your role is to facilitate the interactions between the student, teachers and other students. In general, no more than 20-30% of the information that a student needs for their day should come from their paraprofessional. Work to have your student take cues from the teachers, other students, or the environment before taking on a direct instruction role. Prompt and reinforce attending to the teacher/materials rather than looking to you to give the student what is needed.

Look to what the expectation is for the class as a whole and the age group. Assist the student in exhibiting age-appropriate behaviors and developing age-appropriate interests.

Promoting Independence and Prompting

Gaining a strong rapport with your student is your first goal. Learn as much as you can about interests, free time, things you might both enjoy, etc. You should establish yourself as someone positive in their day with whom they can share successes, interact and find support/encouragement.

Praise, praise, praise!! Students are most likely to continue or increase positive learning and social behaviors if they are praised for appropriate behaviors at least two times more than when they are corrected. Monitor the feedback you provide your student to be sure you are fostering/modeling/teaching appropriate behaviors and not just pointing out/correcting inappropriate behaviors.

Continually monitor the type of support you are providing to make sure that you are working *with* your student to make him/her independent and not working *for* your student just to make sure it's done right/on time, etc.

Lockers/Backpacks: Work with your student to find the best system for him/her to follow when unpacking/packing up for the day, going to his/her locker, etc. Your student is in charge of this role and you will be guiding him/her to do this without your assistance.

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Agenda/Homework: Your student should be responsible for recording homework and using the agenda book. Even if this information is re-written for your student, allow him/her to learn this skill and write as best as he/she can.

Binders: Work with your student to find the best system for your student to organize binders and worksheets/take notes. Your student is in charge of this role and you will be guiding him/her to do this without your assistance.

Tips for prompting:

1. Prompts provide help to the student to complete a task without taking over the student's role or making yourself needed in order to complete it.
2. Choose a prompt that you can eventually fade out.
3. Verbal prompts are the easiest to give, but the hardest to fade out. Students will rely on you instead of the teacher, peers or classroom environment, which limits their independence.
4. Less is more: Even though your student may be capable of handling a conversation, be concise with your words. It limits the time they need to be attending to you and the instruction the student and those around him/her might miss. It also limits how much a student can avoid work by talking with you.

*Please note: the teacher may redirect or prompt your student in addition to you. This may not be because you are doing something wrong. If, after the teacher gives the student help, the student continues to need help, you should intervene using the prompts below:

Prompt Hierarchy - Start with the least intrusive prompt first (see handout).

- **Proximity prompt:** move nearby to your student, having you come near or in their line of sight may remind them to get back on track.
- **Gesture/non-verbal:** point, tap, model, etc.
- **Verbal/Physical:** Repeat/give directions, using partial or full hand-over-hand assistance

If you are taking over any part of the task for your student, this is no longer a prompt. This would most likely be a situation in which the student needs teaching or structured practice to learn the skill. Rather than doing this part of the task for them, try to look at how it can be taught so they can become independent.

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Language & Communication

Students with special needs may have difficulty using verbal language to communicate effectively. You may see frustration, behaviors or social difficulties as a result of this. Look at these areas to see where you can teach your student to replace these behaviors with language to be more successful or prevent problems or problem behaviors:

- Communicating wants and needs
 - Assess your student's ability to do this. He or she may need modeling or phrases to help them remember what to say and prompts for when to say it. Keep these phrases written down, as the visual prompt will be helpful and make the student less dependent on your intervention.
- Communicating emotions, frustration, need for a break
 - Be observant when your student starts to become frustrated or show strong emotions. Prompting your student to use his or her words before getting upset will teach a more functional skill and prevent behaviors from escalating.
 - Keep an eye out for how well your student is able to identify and express emotions and how he or she indicates being overwhelmed (this could be with words or behavior). As a team, we can come up with more functional ways to express emotions and ask for a break before escalating.
- Social communication
 - Students with autism and other related disabilities often have difficulty creating and maintaining friendships. A major part of your role will be to build social bridges between your student and classmates/other typical peers.
 - Two main skills to focus on are **imitation** and **requesting**. **Imitation**: teaching the student to gain information as to what to do or where to go by watching other students. Encourage your student to learn and imitate language and actions appropriate to his/her age group. **Requesting**: teaching the student that he or she can gain assistance and reinforcement from peers the same way the student gets these things from adults. Focus on developing both of these skills with your student every time the opportunity presents itself.
 - Lunch/Recess: Seat your child with peers who will have positive interactions and include your student in conversation/activities (this, of course, is beneficial in class as well). During recess, help your

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- student find a preferred activity with an appropriate group of peers.
- Redirect conversations from adults to peers: If your student or another student approaches you with a topic to discuss, direct the students to talk to each other. E.g. Jimmy (your student) approaches you to say, “I got a new video game this weekend!” You can say, “That’s great! I know Adam loves video games too. Tell him about the game you got!”

Classroom Routines

Whenever possible, do not sit right next to your student during group instruction. Remain behind or away unless the teacher asks you to be there for specific instruction. Try to “Step in—Step out—Step back in” as your student needs it.

1. Step in to prompt with the least intrusive prompt (see below).
 2. Step out to let your student be independent.
 3. Monitor how they are doing and step back in if needed.
*Please do not call out from the back of the room to prompt.
- Packing/Unpacking/Do Now: Allow your student the space to complete these routines on their own. Watch to make sure they are getting started and moving along. If they are not, prompt using the least intrusive prompt, then back out. Monitor your student visually throughout this time.
 - During teacher instruction, be sure to follow along quietly so that you are able to assist, model, or re-teach for your student, if needed.
 - Teacher directions: When a teacher gives directions and your student doesn't respond right away, it's tempting to repeat the directions for them. **Please don't do this.** Before seeing if this is needed, try these strategies first:
 1. Wait a few seconds to see if they need more processing time before starting.
 2. Discreetly alert the teacher (non-verbally, if possible) that they may need to have directions repeated.
 3. Gesture to the teacher, peers who are following directions, Smartboard, or the materials to bring the student's attention back to the task.
 4. Ask the student if they know what they are supposed to be doing. If not, direct them towards the teacher or peers, to look around, at the board, etc. to find out.
 5. Repeat the directions.

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*The goal is for your student to take cues from the teachers or other students or the environment before needing help from you.

- Be mindful that when you speak while the teacher is speaking your student and those around him/her may not be able to hear the teacher while you're talking. Wait for a break in the teacher's instruction, or if needed, whisper.
- When not sitting near your student, be sure you can see them and monitor them at all times.
- Be mindful that if the teacher is ignoring something, it might be for a reason. Before stepping in, check in with the teacher to see if you should be doing the same. This may also be the case for another student. If the teacher or another para is not addressing another student's behavior, they might be ignoring it for a reason. If you are not sure how to respond, either do nothing or should you end up being involved, ask before doing anything.
- Remember, the best way to help your student is to allow and encourage them to build their independence. Doing tasks for them will not help them in the long run.

As an integral part of your student's team and the team member that spends the majority of the day with them, your input and feedback is important. Please make sure to communicate anything you notice, successes to be rewarded, problems we need to solve, trends, changes in behavior, etc. to team members. If you need assistance or support, reach out to those who work closely with your student for help.

Signature: _____ Date: _____