

Working Effectively with Families: Research-Based Tips for Paraeducators

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Ritu Chopra, Ph.D.,

*Executive Director & Assistant Research Professor
The PAR²A Center, University of Colorado Denver*

ritu.chopra@ucdenver.edu

website: <http://www.paracenter.org>



**PRINCIPALS KNOW EVERYTHING
ABOUT SOMETHING**

**TEACHERS KNOW SOMETHING
ABOUT EVERYTHING**

**BUT PARA-EDUCATORS ARE
EXPECTED TO KNOW EVERYTHING
ABOUT EVERYTHING WITHOUT ANY
TRAINING.**

**JUST WHO ARE THESE
REMARKABLE PEOPLE ?**

- Kent Gerlach

If your answer is YES, raise your hand?

- Are you a special education paraeducators?
- Do you serve English Language learners?
- Do you work one-on-one with a student?
- Do you act as an interpreter/translator for the parents?
- Do you live in the same community where your students live?
- Do you interact with the parents of your students more often than the teacher?
- Do you share close relationship/friendship with the parents of your students?

What do we know about paraeducator's role in education?

- Paraeducator perform several roles in inclusion: Instructional Support Personnel, Connector, Behavior Support Facilitator, Team Member, Personal Care Giver
- Many consider paraeducators as the bridge to inclusive education
- Paraeducators often have more contact with students who have severe disabilities compared to teachers and other service providers.
- **Paraeducators may:**
 - Become the primary service provider for students with disabilities
 - Relieve teachers of their responsibility
 - Assumes too much responsibility (e.g. Adapting materials or assignments without direction)

What do we know Parents' Role in Education

- Parents are often viewed as the key factor in the student success.
- Parents of students with disabilities have been the primary driving force behind the passage of major laws pertaining to inclusive education for their children
- “Exceptional” parents are now recognized as:
 - the best advocates for their children
 - initiators of reform
 - partners and collaborators with the school in the care, treatment, and education of their children.

What do we know about :

Parent- Paraeducator Relationship?

- Paraeducator live in the same community as their students and their families.
- Paraeducators often share linguistic and cultural similarities with parents of their students
- Parents demand inclusion and paraeducator support.
- Parents value, respect, & appreciate paraeducators.
- Paraeducators communicate with parents more than school professionals do on a daily basis.
- Parents and paraeducators sometimes share close relationships.
- Close parent-paraprofessional relationships are not always beneficial for the child's education.
- Strained parent-paraprofessional relationships are not beneficial either!!
- Parents & students become overly dependent on paraeducators
- Parents and paraeducators may leave the teacher out of the loop.

Role Clarity

- Teacher has the overall responsibility for the program
- Paraeducator works under the supervision of the teacher – know the boundaries of your role
- Teacher needs to be primary contact person from the parents with regards to questions about child's behavior, program planning
- Paraeducator should not make independent decisions about what the family or the child needs:
 - Consult with the teacher
 - Pass on families' questions and requests to the teacher

Tip #3: Demonstrate Professional & Ethical Work Behaviors

- Recognize that the supervisor has the ultimate responsibility for instruction and management of the learning environment.
- Engage only in activities that are delegated to them by the supervisor
- Follow directions of the supervisor
- Refer concerns about the children, parents, other team members to the supervisor.
- Communicate child's progress or concerns with parents or others only as directed to do so by the supervisor.
- Maintain a high level of competence and integrity.
- Respect the dignity, privacy, human and legal rights of all children, their families, and staff members
- Refrain from engaging in discriminatory practices based on children/families disability, race, sex, language, cultural background, and religion.

TIP #4: Develop Healthy Professional Relationship with Parents

Personal vs professional Relationship

- Be aware of the thin line between the two
- Know that friendship with parents:
 - Needs to be maintained parents outside the school
 - may be personally fulfilling for both parties but not always effective for the child's program
- Exercise professionalism and separate your personal feelings from your work.
- Be an advocate for families but don't step on other peoples' toes.
- Keep teacher in the loop!!

TIP# 5: Foster independence among students & families

When students become dependent on you – their families too!

With students:

- Use “wait time” to allow the student to follow teacher directions independently before stepping into assist
- Give students opportunities to practice on their own
- Give support only when needed
- Do things with instead of for the individual.
- Let students choose between acceptable options
- “Moves on” to assist other students needing help once the support is given.
- Help students learn self-confidence, self-reliance and achieve as much autonomy as possible

TIP # 6: Follow Privacy & Confidentiality Policies

- You will have community contact outside school with the parents – they may ask you questions
- You may run in to situations where people outside of the program (neighbors and other community members) intentionally or unintentionally seek confidential information about a families and infants/toddlers they work with.



Privacy & Confidentiality Policies

- Families expect, and are guaranteed by the state and federal law, that the information will be kept confidential and made available only to personnel authorized to view or discuss it
- Any requests regarding children or families should be referred to the supervisor.
- Rehearse responses to such requests



Privacy & Confidentiality Polices

Possible Request: I heard you're working with Johnny... Is that family as demanding as everyone says?

Possible Response:

I'm a paraprofessional with the school ; I can't talk about children and families that way.

or

"Paraprofessional aren't allowed to discuss children and their families with others, sorry."



Paraeducator Role : Connector vs Barrier

These 6 tips help you to be a connector by the families and school!!

Tip # 1: Know Your Role

Tip # 2: Build a Strong Paraeducator -Teacher Team

Tip #3: Demonstrate Professional & Ethical Work Behaviors

TIP #4: Develop Healthy Professional Relationship with Parents

TIP# 5: Foster independence among students & families

TIP # 6: Follow Privacy & Confidentiality Policies

Let's Complete Paraeducator Inventory!!

- Individually complete the paraeducator Inventory handout.
- In pairs, discuss your responses.
- Share with the large group.

Any questions/comments?



For more information.....

Contact:

Ritu Chopra, PhD - ritu.chopra@ucdenver.edu
or 303-315-6361

Visit:

Paraprofessional Resource and Research Center
website: www.paracenter.org

