

# Communication Between Paraprofessionals and Educators

Session 1

# Who We Are: Public Consulting Group

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# Agenda

1. Welcome
2. What is Communication?
3. Understanding Communication Styles
4. Problem-Solving Strategies (Conflict Resolution)
5. Collaborative Strategies
6. Roles and Responsibilities Regarding Communication
7. Wrap-up and Next Steps



# Session Objectives

1. Determine strategies to develop and maintain positive relationships with teachers.
  - Aligned to CEC Paraprofessional K.7.2: Identify communication styles and strategies for problem-solving and decision-making.
2. Implement strategies for effectively communicating and maintaining communication with teachers.
  - Aligned to CEC Paraprofessional S.7.1: Establish and maintain professional, collegial, and appropriate relationships with school personnel, students, and their families.

# Engagement Guide



- A personal place to think and reflect.
- Used throughout the session.

**Note:** While this content reflects general best practices, paraprofessionals should always operate under the direction of their supervising teacher(s).

**What is Communication?**

# What is Communication?

**Communication is complex and cannot be defined simply as one way of sharing information.**

What is communication?

- *Communication* is exchanging messages.

What forms of communication are common?

- Speaking, writing, sending a text message, body language, and facial expressions

What are the **two** parts to communication?

- Sending a message
- Receiving the message



# Pause and Reflect



*Why is communication important?*

Write your top three answers in your engagement guide.

# Communication: Part of High-Leverage Practices (HLP)

***HLP 1: Collaborate with professionals to increase student success.***

**“Collaboration with general education teachers, *paraprofessionals*, and support staff is necessary to *support students’ learning* toward measurable outcomes and to *facilitate students’ social and emotional well-being* across all school environments and instructional settings (e.g., co-taught).”**

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# Pause and Reflect



**Circle the rating that most closely aligns to your belief about the following statement:**

*I communicate effectively with the supervising teacher(s) with whom I work.*

- 1 – Never/Rarely** communicate effectively
- 2 – Sometimes** communicate effectively
- 3 – Usually** communicate effectively
- 4 – Always** communicate effectively

# Pause and Reflect



*I communicate with teachers most frequently using the following method:*

**Select one from the options below:**

Face-to-face

Text

Communication log/notebook

Other

# Understanding Communication Styles



# Understanding Communication Styles

- Four styles of communication:
  - Director
  - Expresser
  - Thinker
  - Harmonizer

# Understanding Communication Styles

Director	Expresser	Thinker	Harmonizer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Goal oriented</li><li>▪ Tells it like it is</li><li>▪ Makes decisions quickly</li><li>▪ Always on the go</li><li>▪ Speaks crisply</li><li>▪ May be insensitive, intimidating</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ People oriented</li><li>▪ Animated, easily excited</li><li>▪ Makes expressive gestures</li><li>▪ Entertaining</li><li>▪ Thinks aloud</li><li>▪ Speaks rapidly</li><li>▪ May be imprecise</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Task oriented</li><li>▪ Makes lists</li><li>▪ Does things by the book</li><li>▪ Speaks deliberately</li><li>▪ Believes there's a right way and a wrong way</li><li>▪ May procrastinate</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Relationship oriented</li><li>▪ Sensitive to others</li><li>▪ Dedicated, loyal</li><li>▪ Speaks softly</li><li>▪ Avoids conflict</li><li>▪ May overcommit</li></ul>

# Appendix A – My Communication Behavior

Appendix A is a brief self-assessment tool that will help you consider your own tendencies as they relate to communicating with coworkers.

## Appendix A – My Communication Behavior

**Directions:** For each question, select the answer or ranking that most closely aligns with your own communication behavior. Then review the key at the end to learn more about how you rated yourself.

1. If I were to explain something to a group of colleagues and they sat quietly with blank faces, I would:  
\_\_\_\_ Try to explain clearly and then move on  
\_\_\_\_ Encourage colleagues to ask questions until I was sure they understood
2. If a supervising teacher or administrator explained something to me that I did not understand, I would:  
\_\_\_\_ Keep silent and check with someone else later to see if they could clarify for me  
\_\_\_\_ Ask the person to repeat their explanation, or ask clarifying questions of the person
3. How often do I let colleagues know when I like or approve of something they say or do?  
Never 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 Always
4. How often do I let colleagues know when I am irritated by or opposed to something they have said or done?  
Never 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 Always
5. How often do I check out colleagues' feelings and not just assume that I know what they are?  
Never 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 Always
6. How often do I encourage others to let me know how they feel about what I say?  
Never 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 Always
7. How often do I check to be sure I understand what others are saying before I think judgmentally (e.g., "I don't agree," "She's right!")?  
Never 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 Always
8. How often do I check to be sure I understand what others are saying before I express my judgments nonverbally (e.g., head shake, frowning) or out loud (e.g., "I don't agree," "She's right!")?  
Never 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 Always



# Pause and Reflect



- What communication style do you feel best describes you? Why?
  - Director
  - Expresser
  - Thinker
  - Harmonizer
- What communication styles do you feel like you encounter most often in your role as a paraprofessional?

# Key Elements of Communication

- **Consider communication through the lens of the 5 Ws: Who, What, When, Where, and Why (and how).**
  - **Frequency:** When? How often?
  - **Method:** How? Where?
  - **Relationship:** With whom?
  - **Content:** What? Why?

# Pause and Reflect



*The biggest challenge to communication I encounter is:*

**Select one from the options below:**

**Frequency** (When? How often?)

**Method** (How? Where?)

**Relationship** (With whom?)

**Content** (What?)

# Effective Communication is...



<b>Considerate</b>	Give careful thought to your audience and their varying backgrounds and knowledge bases. Use language that is positive and student-first.	“ <u>Clifton can make significant progress on these skills with visual supports</u> ” versus “Clifton can’t do this work.”
<b>Clear</b>	Be specific. Use statements that are accurate and descriptive rather than vague and evaluative to avoid confusion or misunderstandings.	“ <u>What should I do to best support today’s lesson?</u> ” versus “Do you need my help today?”
<b>Concise</b>	Get to the point quickly. Be intentional about phrasing your words in the most efficient way possible.	“ <u>Jenny struggled with letter sounds for c, k, and j</u> ” versus “Jenny doesn’t like studying letter sounds. She didn’t do well.”



# Nonverbal Communication

**Nonverbal communication** is an exchange between people that does not have a direct verbal translation (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions).

## **Reflect:**

- How does nonverbal communication influence the interactions you have in your role as a paraprofessional?
- How does nonverbal communication enhance the interactions you have in your role as a paraprofessional?

# Paraprofessional Roles and Responsibilities

# Confidentiality for Paraprofessionals

- Information to keep confidential:
  - Student name
  - Area(s) of eligibility; disability category
  - Details from the student's IEP
- Operate on a need-to-know basis with teachers as well as other school staff.
- Maintain confidentiality in community settings: restaurants, after-school events, sporting events, personal/family events, etc.
- Refer questions asked of you back to the special education teacher.

# Communication About Students



Information I <u>provide</u> to the teacher	Information I <u>request</u> from the teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Student Data</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Observations</li><li>▪ Concerns</li><li>▪ Progress</li><li>▪ Skills</li></ul></li><li>▪ <b>Questions</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Student Data</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Needs (academic, behavioral, medical, etc.)</li><li>▪ Appropriate supports (accommodations, behavior plans, medical plans, emergency plans, etc.)</li><li>▪ IEP goals</li><li>▪ Schedule</li></ul></li><li>▪ <b>Preferred method of communication</b></li><li>▪ <b>Expectations</b></li></ul>



# Lesson Information to Know/Share

- What is the activity that students are completing? Why is this activity important?
- What is the goal for the activity? What are the learning objectives?
- During the activity, what is the role the paraprofessional?
- What are the expectations for the student?
- What would an exemplar look like for this activity? What does success look like for this student?

# Appendix B – Paraprofessional Survey of Knowledge and Skills

Use this survey to review important knowledge and skills for paraprofessionals.

Results of this survey can be used to inform discussions with your supervising teacher.

## Appendix D – Paraprofessional Survey of Knowledge and Skills

**Directions:** First, complete the chart by marking your degree of understanding regarding the topics listed below, with 5 indicating the highest degree of understanding and 1 indicating the lowest level of understanding.

Then, circle any items for which you would like additional information, support, and/or training.



*IMPORTANT: This document is not meant to be evaluative in nature. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to reflect on your knowledge and skills as a paraprofessional while also communicating this information to the teachers you work with, so they have a better understanding of how to support you in your role.*

**Rating Key**

5 = Highest degree of understanding

1 = Lowest degree of understanding

KNOWLEDGE	5	4	3	2	1
1. Cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language development which impact milestones of students with disabilities compared to typically developing peers.					
2. Educational challenges manifested as a result of varying disabilities.					
3. Effect of disabilities on students, families, and society through the lifespan.					
4. Family systems and their influence on the educational process.					
5. Common concerns of families of students with disabilities.					
6. Effects of cultural and linguistic diversity on the educational process and relationships between school, home, and community.					
7. Characteristics and implications of one's own culture and use of language, including verbal and nonverbal communication, and how this may differ across cultures.					
8. Effect of speech and language development on academic and nonacademic learning of students with disabilities.					
9. Non-verbal modes of communication used by students with disabilities, including augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).					
SKILLS	5	4	3	2	1
1. Support student's independence, self-advocacy, positive sense of identity, self-control, and self-reliance under the guidance of the instructional team.					
2. Support students with disabilities in their use of self-assessment, problem-solving, and other cognitive strategies under the guidance of the instructional team.					

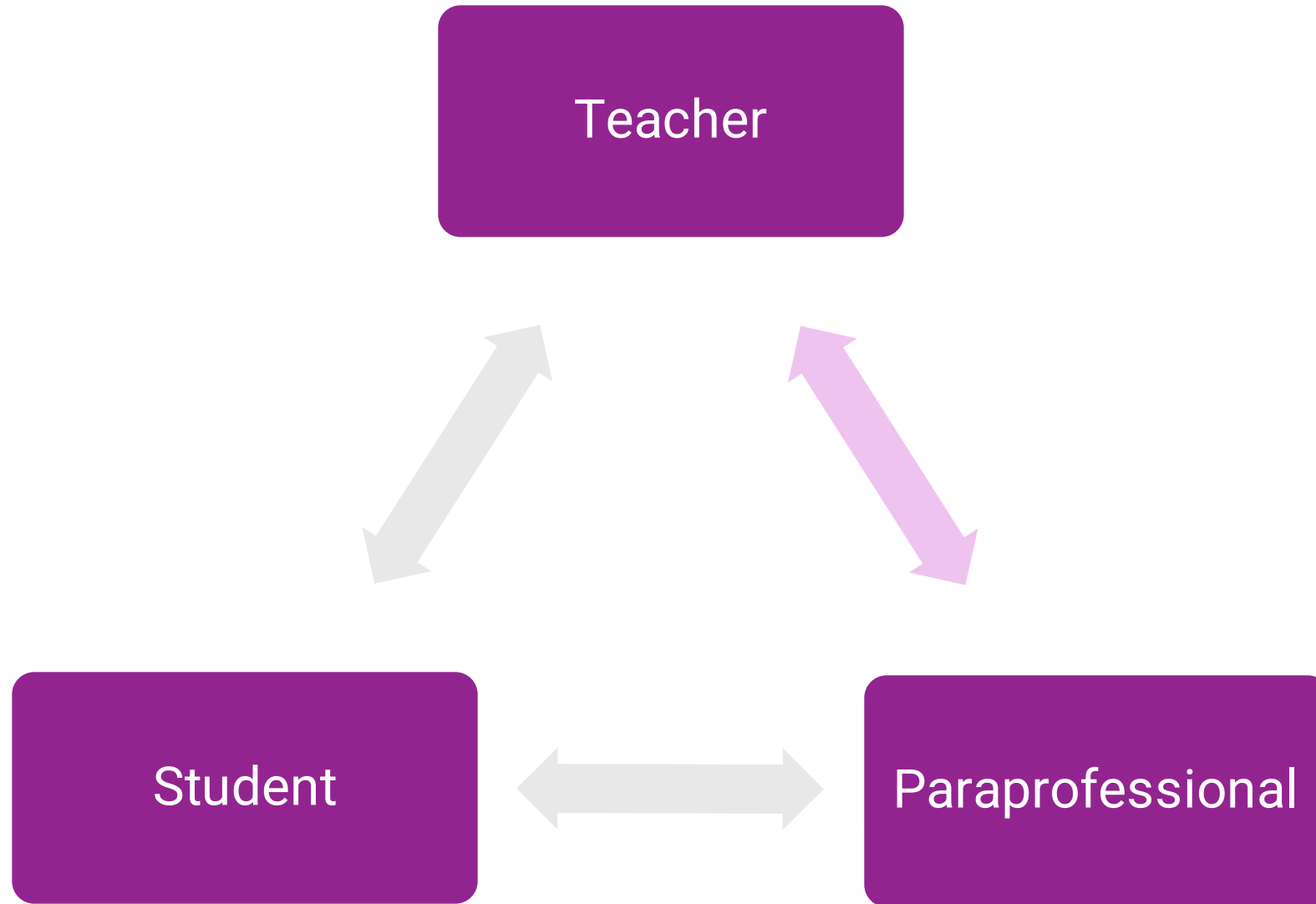
# Pause and Reflect



How do you maintain regular communication with teachers?

*(In-person meetings/check-ins, notes, communication binder, emails, etc.)*

# Collaborative Strategies



# Appendix C – Interview Template: Teacher Mission and Vision

Appendix B provides a structure for discussing key questions with your supervising teacher around the mission and vision for his or her classroom.

## Appendix B – Interview Template: Teacher Mission and Vision

Directions: Use the table below to structure a conversation between you and your supervising teacher.

Question	Teacher Response	How can I support this as a paraprofessional?	Additional Notes and Ideas
What is your vision for every student we support?			
What is your classroom mission?  What action steps will we take to accomplish your vision?			
What are our short-term goals to accomplish the vision and mission?  What is the timeframe for accomplishing those goals?			
What are our long-term goals to accomplish the vision and mission?  What is the timeframe for accomplishing those goals?			

# Appendix D – Communication and Collaboration Self-Evaluation



- What topics need immediate attention with your supervising teacher?
- How can you request support and maintain respect and collaboration?

## Appendix D – Communication and Collaboration Self-Evaluation (Slide 31)

**Directions:** Review your current experience as a paraprofessional by rating the key elements of communication and collaboration between teacher and paraprofessional listed below.

1. The teacher has a clearly defined role for me.
2. The teacher has checked that I understand my role.
3. I know the school and district guidelines regarding paraprofessional roles.
4. The teacher has established clear priorities for student learning.
5. The teacher has communicated these priorities to me.
6. The teacher understands my preferred work style.
7. Regular time is set aside to meet with my teacher.

### Rating Key

- 1 = No attention needed
- 2 = Add to our next discussion
- 3 = Needs immediate attention

# Effective Collaboration Strategies

Strategy	Pros	Cons
Shared documents (e.g., Google Docs or Forms)	Easily shared without being in the same place at the same time (asynchronous); accessible by multiple people; and can be printed as necessary	Less convenient for any who has inconsistent access to technology
Collaborative sharing platforms (e.g., Padlet, Jam board)	Different options/structures for organizing information; easily shared; and asynchronous accessibility	Less convenient for any who has inconsistent access to technology
Data binders / communication logs	More convenient for anyone who has inconsistent access to technology;	Storage and security considerations
Email	Recipient notified of new information	Potentially easy to lose important information
Written/digital lesson plans	Provides key information about specific lessons without requiring face-to-face interaction	Doesn't provide space to share information that is unrelated to lessons



# **Problem-Solving Strategies (Conflict Resolution)**

# Strategies to Navigate Conflict

1. Remember: Your Perspective Is Just One Among Many
2. Be Aware of Your Assumptions
3. Don't Make It Me Against Them
4. Know Your Goal

**Wrap-Up and Next Steps**



# Reflection and Session Takeaway

- What are your biggest takeaways from today's session?
- What questions do you still have?
- What is one next step you will take because of today's session?
- What is one next step you will take because of today's session?

# Thank You, Alabama!



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