

- Preview the PowerPoint file from this module. Enhance it as needed.
- Identify any terms to define.
- Find additional videos to supplement those listed.
- Discuss the role of the paraprofessional as it relates to this topic.
- Preview the objectives. Briefly state why each is important.



Communication is the key to understanding. Having effective communication skills helps resolve conflicts—and can prevent them from occurring. Paraprofessionals must communicate effectively with students, teachers, parents and others.

There are many ways to actively improve your ability to engage in communication, in both written and verbal form. Good communicators are assertive, attentive listeners, able to articulate their message, and tactful. They also display a positive attitude, communicate negative feelings effectively, and use appropriate nonverbal signals.

Objectives

By the end of this module, the paraprofessional will be able to:

1. Identify common causes of communication breakdowns.
2. Distinguish among types of approaches to communication.
3. Respond to scenarios about communication methods.
4. List strategies for effective communication.
5. Respond to “you” messages using “I” messages.
6. Explain how to handle negative feelings in a positive way.
7. List skills for effective listening.
8. Compare positive and negative forms of nonverbal communication.
9. Give strategies for interacting with teachers and parents.
10. Give strategies for interacting with students:
 - Students with traumatic brain injuries.
 - Students with deafness or hearing impairment.
 - Students with intellectual disabilities or autism.

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- Students with specific learning disability.
 - Students with orthopedic impairment.
 - Students with emotional disturbance.
 - Students with speech or language impairment.
 - Students with other health impairment.
 - Students with visual impairment (including blindness).
11. Answer questions about disability etiquette scenarios.
12. Complete a FERPA Q&A.
13. Respond to communication scenarios.

Causes of Communication Breakdowns

We all enjoy sharing our thoughts, ideas, and feelings with others. When we communicate, we also listen, observe, and respond. The communication process includes the sender (the person who extended the message), the receiver (the person who must process and make sense of the message), and the message itself. This process comes with plenty of opportunities for misunderstanding. Becoming aware some of the problems that can occur will help you be a better speaker and listener—both of which are important for success at home, work, in relationships, and throughout life.

On the surface, communication may seem easy. However, communicating with others can become frustrating and difficult if those engaged in a conversation don't deal with the barriers that often get in the way. Recognizing and removing communication barriers provides one of the best ways to build lasting personal and professional relationships. Listed below are some of the most common obstacles, as well as suggestions for overcoming them.



- Ask for volunteers to share examples of each cause of communication breakdown.



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External communication barriers are those found in our environment. If you've ever tried to talk on a cell phone in a busy store, you can understand how the environment can cause a communication barrier. External barriers can also include such factors as lack of time, physical distractions, loud noises, illness, technology problems, or the inability to speak the language. The use of clichés, automatic responses, colloquialisms, jargon, technical terms, trite expressions, or vague wording can lead to poor communication. For example, think about the number of times you have said, "I'm fine. How are you?" without even thinking about what you were saying.

External communication barriers are often easy to recognize and overcome. When communicating with others, give them your undivided attention. Try to find the best time and location for your conversation to reduce the chance of interruptions. If in a meeting, turn off your cell phone for the duration of the discussion if possible. Also, avoid trying to talk over noisy disturbances. If necessary, reschedule your conversation for a quieter time. Make sure to hold important discussions in a comfortable setting, away from distractions.

Internal communication barriers come from within us. These barriers can result from such problems as a lack of interest, misunderstanding, assumptions, and inexperience.

Lack of interest or attention — Effective communication takes work. For a message to be truly meaningful, we must internalize it and relate it to our experience. That takes effort and requires staying engaged in the communication process. When you stop paying attention, you only hear parts of a message and you may end up *reacting* to the speaker instead of *engaging* in a meaningful conversation.

Failure to listen — Just because you hear the words does not necessarily mean you comprehend what is being said. You can miss the real meaning of the message if you become preoccupied with preparing a reply, think about something else, ignore nonverbal cues, or have preconceived ideas. Many people don't realize that effective communication depends more on the ability to understand others, rather than being understood.

Failure to clarify comments — Paraphrasing back what you have heard and asking questions are ways to clarify the meaning of a comment.

Childhood teachings — Some people are taught from childhood not to express certain feelings and impulses, so they have difficulty discussing emotional issues or personal topics.

Failure to see a person as an individual — False beliefs can limit your understanding and acceptance of others. Value judgments, labels, prejudice, sexism, and stereotypes can prevent you from seeing other people as they really are. For example, the statement "teenagers are irresponsible" falsely implicates all teenagers. While this statement may be true about some teenagers, not all teenagers are irresponsible.

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Interruptions — If you interrupt a speaker, you give the impression that you are in a hurry, are self-serving, or do not believe that the speaker has anything important to say.

Lack of self-confidence — Fear of rejection or ridicule prevents some people from saying what they really mean or expressing how they feel. This state of mind causes people to become overly dependent on the approval and reactions of others to the point where they lose their own identity. A fear of rejection fuels peer pressure because people begin acting in a certain way to receive acceptance within a group.

Ignorance of your projected image — Sometimes people are unaware what their body language or tone of voice communicates to others. To be clearly understood, your body language and verbal communication must be consistent. Effective communicators make eye contact, use the proper tone for the message being communicated, and are mindful of their facial expressions, hand gestures, and other body movements. Such cues show your interest in the listener and will lead to a more favorable dialog.



Types of Approaches to Communication

Aggression is interacting with other people without showing respect for them, making another person feel inferior or powerless, or sending the message that others dare not disagree. Aggressive communication can negatively affect relationships in all parts of a person's life, because aggressive individuals alienate others, experience more personal stress, and act defensively. Violence represents aggression in its most extreme form. But people can also show more subtle signs of aggression through body language by rolling their eyes, glaring, or pointing.

For example, when Akira was interrupted while speaking, she said "Would you just be quiet and let someone else talk for once?"

Passive individuals are opposite of those who are aggressive. They are easily dominated or intimidated, continually yield to others, go along with the crowd, and may seem to lack the will to defend themselves when engaged in a discussion. These individuals rarely raise questions and often avoid becoming noticed to stay clear of any type of confrontation.

For example, when Eduardo was interrupted while speaking, he said nothing. When his friend said "Eduardo, what did you start to say?" he said "Nothing, never mind."

- Discuss how each example illustrates each approach to communication.

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Rather than expressing feelings openly, people who are **passive aggressive** express resentment or other negative feelings in an unaggressive way. This type of behavior may be expressed through actions or statements. For example, rather than declining an invitation, someone who is passive aggressive may choose to show up late. A person may also show signs of passive aggression by inserting subtle verbal jabs or slightly critical comments in a conversation. It is important to note, however, that a person may have good intentions and be completely unaware of their passive aggressive tendencies.

For example, when Bree was interrupted while speaking, she sighed and said “Oh, excuse me. I guess you have something more important to say.”

Showing aggression is not the same thing as being **assertive**. Effective communication relies on assertive behavior. Clearly expressing beliefs and opinions leads the way to a healthy discussion—one in which individuals show mutual respect and value the opinions of others. Assertive communication allows people to disagree without being disagreeable and enables them to compromise and arrive at solutions.

For example, when Dara was interrupted while speaking, she said “Excuse me; I do want to hear what you have to say, but please let me finish first.”

- Preview the activity in advance.
- Discuss the results as a group. Ask volunteers to share their responses.



Activity 5.1
Communication Methods

Directions: Read the scenarios below, give a brief example of the requested response for each scenario, then give the response you would use.

1. You have been a paraprofessional in the same classroom for the past three years. They have added another assistant in the classroom, but you feel she is not “pulling her own weight.” What do you do?

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2. You notice that one of the general education teachers is not being patient with one of your students. What do you do?

3. You have been working with the same small group for the past two years. A new teacher comes in and asks you to teach a different group and subject. You feel uncomfortable about the new material. What do you do?

4. You hear several staff members in the lunchroom talking about a student from your classroom. They are discussing personal information about the student and you feel it isn't an appropriate time or place for the discussion. What do you do?

Effective Communication Strategies

Poor communication habits can interfere with learning capabilities, personal relationships, and productivity. Fortunately, bad habits can be corrected. Deciding you want clearer interaction in your life is the first step toward improving your communication skills. Listed below are strategies to put you on the right path.

- Ask why each strategy is effective.

Maintain a pleasant tone of voice. People enjoy listening and talking to others who are positive, pleasant, and easy to converse with. Use a cheerful yet professional tone. This becomes especially important when talking on the phone. Even if you've had a long day, it should not be obvious by your voice. Practice varying your pitch and using a dynamic speaking voice. Use the appropriate volume for the setting—speak softly in a close setting and more loudly when you need to be heard across a room.

Vary your speed. Listening to someone who speaks at a constant clip can become monotonous. Speaking much too quickly can make it difficult for others to understand you. It can also signal to others that you are nervous or insecure. Slowing down your speech enables you to pronounce words correctly. However, speaking too slowly can cause your listener to want to finish your sentences for you. Including slight pauses helps punctuate your speaking.

Choose your words carefully. Keep listeners in mind by using terms they will understand and phrases that give a clear explanation. Also, avoid hinting—be polite, but direct. Indirect messages can be misleading and confusing.

Use “I” messages rather than “you” messages. “I” messages make the communicator responsible for the message and convey an opinion without casting judgment. “You” messages are often used to criticize or blame others. For example, a statement such as, “You do not understand what I’m saying” blames the listener for the communication breakdown, when you may be at fault for being unclear. Instead, say, “I’m sorry; I must not have expressed myself clearly.”

Use a person’s name. Repeating a person’s name aloud often helps you remember the name, and it also sends the message that you care about the listener. Remembering names of people is an important job skill, especially those who have frequent contact with the public.



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Use the appropriate nonverbal cues. Nonverbal communication plays an important role in face-to-face communication. Your gestures, tone, and facial expressions should all be in agreement. Also, making eye contact can be a way of showing self-confidence.

Ask meaningful questions. Asking questions allows you to receive more information, and the way you ask questions can reveal your listener's level of understanding. Questions can also be used to show a sincere interest in the other person. Keep in mind that simple "yes" or "no" answers seldom provide adequate interaction or meaningful feedback, so be sure to ask open-ended questions. For example, instead of asking, "Did you enjoy your trip?" ask, "What was your favorite part of your vacation?"

Choose an appropriate time for communicating. Interruptions damage the outcome of discussions. Try to select a time when the other person will be most receptive to visit. Do not initiate a deep conversation when the other person appears preoccupied, emotional, or tired. Also, allow plenty of time and do not rush the discussion.



Activity 5.2
Respond to "You" Messages using "I" Messages

Directions: Change each you-message to an I-message or we-message.

1. "You need to finish the assignment before the end of class today."

2. "You still haven't learned how to get along with the other students."

3. "You need to give me more time to complete this task; there is no way I can do it in the time that's left."

- Preview the activity in advance.
- Discuss the results as a group. Ask volunteers to share their responses.

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4. "You always bring me a copy of the IEP at the very last minute."

5. "As a parent, you should pay careful attention to the meeting time and place."

Handling Negative Feelings in a Positive Way

We all occasionally have negative feelings. But when strong negative feelings are allowed to build, held inside, and not expressed, they can lead to frustrations, anger, and resentment. Expressing negative feelings in a constructive way can prevent feelings of resentment and help put the situation behind you.

Recognize responsibility for personal faults and understand that you cannot blame others or outside events for what you do. Acknowledge that you are responsible for the choices you have made and that you must address the consequences of your actions. We are often reluctant to admit guilt when we've done something wrong, but an apology goes a long way in undoing the damage. Have you ever been in a situation where you said, "It wouldn't be so bad, except she won't admit she did anything wrong! I'd forgive her if she'd just apologize!" In addition, understand that you cannot be responsible for the actions of others. Once you do this, you may be able to get past the negative feelings.



Discuss your negative feelings with the person whose behavior causes you the problem. Express your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same or get worse.

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Describe the issue or behavior without emotion and concentrate on the facts. You must be able to step back, observe, and assess the situation without letting your emotions get the best of you. Stressful situations and the actions of others can greatly influence your emotional state. Keep in mind that just because people occasionally behave thoughtlessly doesn't necessarily mean they are bad people.

Use "I" messages when you talk about emotions. "I" messages enable you to express your feelings without verbally attacking or laying blame, and they can help facilitate an open and constructive dialog. If you feel someone has been inconsiderate, explain to the other person why you feel that way and what they can do to help resolve the situation.

Discuss your problem without making accusations or unkind comments. Even though the other person may be the instigator, avoid becoming defensive. If it turns out that you were wrong about the other person, this could result in others making accusations about you.

Do not bring up already-settled issues or rehash previous disagreements. Bringing up such matters only stirs up additional hard feelings.

Follow the guidelines for effective communication throughout your discussion — maintain open body language, use friendly gestures, and choose your words carefully. Try to end the exchange on a friendly note by saying something positive about the person or the situation.

Skills for Effective Listening

Most of what we learn is by listening. We spend approximately half of our waking hours listening—far more time than we spend speaking, reading, or writing. Yet, we often don't develop and practice effective listening skills. It stands to reason that people sometimes need to hear a complex message more than once in order to process its meaning and fully understand it.

Prepare to listen. Eliminate physical distractions, such as background noise and possible interruptions. If possible, learn about the topic before you hold the discussion.

Listen to what the speaker is and is not saying. Watch for cues and be aware of body language of others. The speaker's body language or the speaker's manner and tone of voice may conflict with the verbal message.

Concentrate. Pay close attention to the message the speaker is trying to convey. Develop interest by focusing on an aspect of the topic that relates to you. Put other distractions out of your mind and avoid mentally drifting or daydreaming, and give the speaker respect by listening to the message.

Be empathetic. Have you ever made some sort of announcement only to be disappointed by the response you received? Imagine how you would feel if you told your friends you were planning on finally paying off your car today, and one of them answered, "So? I paid off my car six months ago." Compare that to how you would feel if your friend said "Congratulations! I know it felt great when I paid off my car." Try to understand the speaker's point of view.

- Integrate an effective listening activity, if you have one.

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Have an open mind. Emotions often affect how a speaker is interpreted. Listeners should try to control emotions, overcome prejudices and biases, and not let the speaker's status, accent, or physical appearance affect your willingness to listen. Be careful not to prejudge people based on their appearance or previous experience that you've had with them.

Judge the content, not the delivery. An awkward speaker may have something important to say, yet someone who is well spoken may have nothing to offer. Get beyond the delivery and judge the message, not the words used or the way they are spoken.



Repeat what you think you heard for clarification. “Active” or “reflective” listening is used to paraphrase what was said to let the speaker know his or her message was heard and understood. We can listen much faster than the average person speaks. This gives us time to process what we hear; ask ourselves questions about it, note related ideas, and form opinions about the message. Being actively engaged with the message helps us understand and remember it.

Provide feedback. Let the speaker know he or she was heard by providing feedback, both verbal and nonverbal. For example, make eye contact, nod your head appropriately, and inject encouraging comments.

Nonverbal Communication

Even without words, you can send strong messages through subtle signals. Nonverbal communication, or *body language*, includes the messages sent by our gestures, posture, movements, and facial expressions. When you are engaged in face-to-face interactions, nonverbal actions—including where you stand, how you sit, and how loudly you speak—communicate something about you.

Understanding a message requires paying as much attention to body language as to the words being spoken. For example, a nonverbal cue such as a pat on the shoulder can convey the message of a job well done, even if no words are spoken. Body language can also contradict the spoken word, such as when your coworker begins tapping on his phone after saying he is interested in hearing about your business trip. A gesture such as throwing your hands up in the air can accentuate a message of jubilation. The following table outlines forms of positive and negative communication.

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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION	
Positive Forms	Negative Forms
Open body—open palms up, hands away from body, arms swinging freely	Closed body—clenched fist, palms down, crossed arms or legs
Head held high, shoulders upright; body leaning toward other person's body	Erect body, holding head and body stiff or drooping head and shoulders
Relaxed, alert manner of sitting or standing, turned to listener	Biting fingernails, pulling at hair, fidgeting with clothing
Smiling, pleasant expression, nodding in agreement	Frowning, raised eyebrows, clenched teeth
Natural gestures	Aggressive gestures—finger pointing, hands on hips
Frequent eye contact	Avoiding eye contact—shifting gaze, looking up or down Staring, not blinking

- Discuss the positive and negative forms.

Interacting with Teachers and Parents

General strategies:

- Ask questions about your job description if you do not fully understand your duties and responsibilities.
- Ask questions.
- Keep a positive attitude.
- Use appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Follow appropriate channels at your school for resolving concerns or conflicts.
- Provide objective, not subjective, feedback about students.
- Be honest and take responsibility.
- Avoid contributing to gossip about a student, the student's family, co-workers, or anyone else in the workplace.
- Use people-first language.
- Comply with FERPA requirements relating to confidentiality at all times.
- Practice strategies for anger management and for demonstrating patience.

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- Apply active listening skills.

Interacting with teachers:

- Respect your role as a paraprofessional. Recognize the classroom teacher as your immediate supervisor.
- Ask the teacher about his/her expectations of you:
 - Roles of team members: teachers, substitute teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals
 - Teaching style and philosophy
 - Classroom rules
 - Communications with parents
- Ask for guidance if you do not understand.
- Communicate a positive work ethic:
 - Arrive at work on time.
 - Abide by any dress code.
 - Keep a positive attitude.
 - Follow through on decisions made by licensed professionals (teachers and administrators).
 - Take initiative within the boundaries of your job description.
- Take any concerns or issues to the teacher first to discuss or resolve them.
- Use we-statements over I- and you-statements.
- Discuss your comfort level about assisting students with complex subjects.
- Ask teachers for feedback about your performance, including opportunities for appropriate professional development.



Interacting with parents:

- Communicate with parents consistent with your role and with the approval of the teacher.
- Avoid labeling parents as “difficult” and treating them as such.
- Be patient with parents—their behavior may be motivated by good intentions for their child’s education.
- Avoid arguing with parents.
- Respect the cultural and family traditions of each student.
- Avoid going beyond your role of paraprofessional—you are not a counselor or confidante.

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Interacting with Students

- Treat all students equally—do not favor or neglect any student.
- Acknowledge students
- Apply techniques of behavior management, consistent with your role.
- Provide students with positive feedback every day.
- Put the student first, not the disability. Use people-first language.
- Address the student directly, not any companion or interpreter.
- Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting.

Students with Traumatic Brain Injuries

- Give directions one step at a time. For tasks with many steps, it helps to give the student written/pictorial directions.
- Show the student how to perform new tasks. Give examples to go with new ideas and concepts.
- Have consistent routines. This helps the student know what to expect. If the routine is going to change, let the student know ahead of time.
- Check to make sure that the student has actually learned the new skill. Give the student lots of opportunities to practice the new skill.
- Show the student how to use an assignment book and a daily schedule. This helps the student get organized.
- Realize that the student may get tired quickly. Let the student rest as needed.
- Reduce distractions.
- Be patient. Maximize the student's chances for success.
- Provide frequent feedback and recognize successes, especially as new skills or gains are acquired.
- When asked to repeat a statement, use the same words and then paraphrase it for greater comprehension.

Students with Deafness or Hearing Impairment

The ability and facility to communicate orally often depends on when the person became deaf. People who lost their hearing after the development of their speaking skills may have little difficulty speaking. In contrast, people who were born without hearing, or who lost it at a very early age, may experience difficulty in learning to speak (though this is not always the case). Because speech develops by listening to others and imitating the sounds, vocal communication can be more complicated for people who have never heard speech than for those whose hearing loss developed later in life. Many persons who have a hearing loss learn to use their voices in speech therapy and prefer to communicate orally. Others choose to communicate using sign language or writing.

- Relate the strategies to the student's specific needs.

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Hearing loss or deafness does not affect a person's intellectual capacity or ability to learn. However, students who are hard of hearing or deaf generally require some form of special education services in order to receive an adequate education. Such services may include: regular speech, language, and auditory training from a specialist; amplification systems; services of an interpreter for those students who use sign language; favorable seating in the class to facilitate lip reading; captioned films/videos; assistance of a note-taker so the student can fully attend to instruction; instruction for educators in alternate communication methods, such as sign language; and counseling.



When using an interpreter:

- Communicate directly with the student with a hearing loss, rather than speaking as if he or she were not there. Avoid phrases such as, "tell him..." Ask questions directly of the student with a hearing loss, e.g., "How do you feel about that?" not, "How does she feel about that?" Talk to, not about, the student. Talk through, not to, the interpreter.
- Maintain eye contact with the student, even as he or she is looking at the interpreter.
- At times, the student may prefer to have the interpreter voice the message that is communicated in sign. If this is the case, remember to respond to the student, not the interpreter.
- Be aware that the interpreter is there only to facilitate communication, not to participate in the conversation or activity.
- The student should be consulted about where to place the interpreter. This will usually be in a well-lit area near the speaker. The student should have a clear view of the interpreter and any visual aids the speaker may use. Avoid bright lights or colors directly behind the interpreter.
- Adequate lighting of the interpreter is necessary at all times, especially when the room is darkened.
- Speak at a customary rate of speed, in a natural tone, and using usual speech patterns.
- As the interpreter will be a few words behind the speaker, allow additional time for questions before continuing during a conversation.
- Be mindful that the student cannot watch the interpreter and look at visuals simultaneously. Therefore, allow time for people to look in each direction.
- The student watching the interpreter usually cannot take notes simultaneously, so it is helpful to provide written instructions, directions, or notes when possible.
- Be aware that when using an interpreter, there may be a need to be more precise. For example, in English, there is a big difference between "I would" and "I will". Yet, the sign that the interpreter would most likely use is the same for both. Thus, it could be confusing unless the interpreter adds the concept of "if" to the first phrase, such as, "If I were you, I would..." compared with "I will..." The interpreter may not make the distinction that in the first instance, the speaker is suggesting that the listener do something, and in the second, the speaker is taking the action.

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Communication & Interaction Strategies

In general:

- Let the student decide how to communicate—sign language, lip-reading, or writing notes.
- Be aware of what is communicated through body language, hand gestures, and facial expressions.
- Be aware that, if you point to an object or area during a conversation with the student, the student will most likely turn to look at where you are pointing. Wait to resume speaking when the student faces you again.
- If you need to get the student's attention, gently tap his or her shoulder or wave your hand.
- Position yourself so that there is no bright sunlight or glare. Keep your face out of shadows.
- Remove from your mouth objects such as pens, pencils, gum, or food. Keep your hands or any other objects from covering your mouth.
- If the student is speaking for himself or herself and you do not understand the student's speech, it is appropriate for you to ask the student to repeat, or even write down what was said.
- If the student has difficulty understanding something you've said, try repeating the phrase. If your message is still not understood, try to rephrase your thought rather than repeating the same words. Do not raise your voice or shout; the essential barrier is not the student hearing you, it is the student understanding you. If needed, jot the phrase down on paper.
- Not all individuals with a hearing loss can lip-read, but many do. Even good lip-readers, though, sometimes miss words. It is important to check with the student to make sure you are communicating effectively.
- Focus your articulation, diction, and verbal clarity for those students who read lips.
- Maintain face-to-face interactions and eye contact.
- Try to learn some basic sign language.
- Explain any interruption (such as a phone ringing or knock at the door) before attending to it.

Students with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism

In general:

- Be prepared to repeat what you say orally, in writing, or using multiple formats.
- Offer assistance in understanding written instructions and in completing forms or documents.
- Provide extra time for decision-making.

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Communication & Interaction Strategies

With students who have intellectual disabilities:

- Teach one concept or activity component at a time.
- Teach one step at a time to help support memorization and sequencing.
- Teach students in small groups, or one-on-one, if possible.
- Always provide multiple opportunities to practice skills in a number of different settings.
- Use physical and verbal prompting to guide correct responses, and provide specific verbal praise to reinforce these responses.

Students with Specific Learning Disability

- Break learning into small steps.
- Use diagrams, graphics and pictures.
- Provide ample independent, well-designed, intensive practice.
- Let students with reading problems use instructional materials that are accessible to those students with print disabilities.
- Let students with listening difficulties borrow notes from a classmate or use a tape recorder.
- Let students with writing difficulties use a computer with specialized software that spell checks, grammar checks, or recognizes speech.
- Teach organizational skills, study skills, and learning strategies.
- Be firm about any limits that are set.
- If inappropriate behavior is observed or reported, tell the student exactly what behavior is inappropriate and what changes need to be made.
- Reduce distractions and unnecessary visual and auditory stimulation.
- Be thorough, direct, and specific in communication. Ask questions to insure understanding. Allow adequate time for a response.
- Demonstrate how to do a task in addition to explaining it verbally.
- Give frequent and constructive feedback.
- Allow adequate time to learn certain skills.
- Whenever possible, notify the student of changes well in advance.
- Decide together the preferred way to communicate.

Students with Orthopedic Impairment

- Always presume competence.
- Be patient.
- Remember that every student has different needs.
- Students with mobility impairments have a broad range of physical capabilities. When in doubt, ask.
- If a student uses crutches, a walker, a cane, or some other assistive equipment, offer assistance with coats, bags, or other belongings.
- When walking with a student who walks more slowly than you, walk alongside and not in front of the student.
- If a student falls or is off-balance, simply offer assistance. A natural tendency is to overreact, but you need not be overprotective of a student with a mobility disability.
- Never lean on a wheelchair or treat the wheelchair as a piece of furniture—it is a part of the student’s personal space.
- Talk directly to the student, not to a companion or other third party.
- It is appropriate to offer to assist with a particular task such as opening a door, but do not be offended if your help is not accepted. Never assume the student needs your assistance and start grabbing or pushing his or her wheelchair.



- If the student uses a cane or crutches, the student will want to keep them within reach. If, however, they are in the way or pose a tripping danger, ask the student to move them under the chair or desk.
- Pull up a chair so that you are at eye-level, or stand far enough back so the student doesn't have to look up at an awkward angle.
- If the student's speech is difficult to understand, do not hesitate to ask him or her to repeat what was said. Never pretend to understand when you do not.
- If a student uses assistive technology, be patient with the technology.

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- Some people with paraplegia, quadriplegia, or other OIs may have difficulty in holding a pen or in writing. Although you should not assume so, the student may want or need your assistance in this task and ask for it. If this is the case, ask how you can best assist him or her. For example say, "If you would like assistance, I am available to help you."
- Do not physically lift or manipulate a student with a mobility disability in any manner against his or her will.

Students with Emotional Disturbance

Students with emotional disturbance require a structured environment that includes: predictable rules and routines; consistent rewards for appropriate behavior; behavior management techniques; systematic teaching of social skills; supportive therapies involving music, art, exercise, and relaxation techniques; and individual and group counseling to improve self-understanding, self-esteem, and self-control.

- Be sensitive to the student's needs relating to medication issues, insomnia, fatigue, or other conditions that often accompany psychiatric disabilities.
- Through your own behavior and demeanor, show that you trust the student's ability to monitor his or her behavior.
- Integrate the student fully into group activities.
- If the student makes an occasional odd statement, help redirect the student to the topic or task.
- Minimize stress for the student as much as possible.
- Approach each student with an open mind about his or her strengths and abilities.
- Convey important information objectively and avoid using sarcasm and giving mixed messages. Talk to the student in a calm and relaxed manner. Make sure that any instructions are defined carefully and clearly. Repeat or summarize information and write it down for the student's reference when needed. Explain things even though they may seem obvious to you.
- Clearly express expectations for performance and provide feedback on a regular basis. Do not assume the student knows when he or she is doing either well or poorly.
- Be firm, fair, flexible, and consistent, especially in administering rules and learning assignments.

Students with Speech or Language Impairment

- Always assume competence.
- Read, read, read.
- Be patient.
- If necessary, use other forms of communication such as sign language, symbols, sign cards, or communication boards.
- Offer maximal social interaction opportunities.

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Communication & Interaction Strategies

- Work at the student's pace.
- Present only one concept at a time.
- Provide verbal and tangible reinforcements.
- Encourage reading and writing daily.
- Use tactile and visual cues.
- Do not pretend to understand when you do not. Ask the student to rephrase the thought or spell out a particular word to facilitate your understanding.
- Repeat back what you do understand so the student may fill in or correct your understanding where needed.
- If you are having difficulty understanding what the student saying, say so. "I didn't understand that sure if I understood correctly. Did you say...?"
- Concentrate on the words the student is saying, rather than on how they are being said.
- If a communication barrier seems impossible to overcome, ask if someone could facilitate the conversation.



is last part. Could you please repeat it?" "I'm not

Students with Other Health Impairment

For students with Tourette Syndrome:

- If a student is exhibiting the symptoms of Tourette Syndrome, try to ignore the symptoms. If the symptom is bothersome or intrusive and cannot be ignored, bring it to the attention of the student in a non-judgmental and non-threatening way.
- If the symptom is a physical one, move out of the way.
- Do not react with anger or annoyance if the student displays motor or vocal tics. Remember that the student cannot control these.
- Be patient.
- Several short breaks are often more effective than one long break.
- It may help to allow the student to briefly go to a private place where the student is comfortable to relax and release tics. Short time-outs are very helpful.

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Communication & Interaction Strategies

For students with ADHD:

- Figure out what specific things are hard for the student. One student may have trouble starting a task, while another student may have trouble ending one task and starting the next. Each student has different needs.
- Communicate in direct, clear terms. Be patient, specific, and consistent. Apply structure whenever possible in communication.
- Ask clarifying questions throughout the conversation to ensure that the student is grasping the information provided. Repetition will be necessary.
- Post rules, schedules, and assignments. Clearly stated rules and routines will help the student. Follow set times for specific tasks. Call attention to any changes in the schedule.
- Help the student channel his or her physical activity. For example: let the student do some work at the board, standing up, sitting, or laying on the floor; create rhythmic movement opportunities, such as standing and clapping out the syllables while reviewing vocabulary words; or provide special cushions that allow for controlled wiggling in the chair. Use visual, tactile, and kinesthetic activities whenever possible.
- Provide regularly scheduled breaks.
- Give step-by-step directions and be sure the student is following them. Give instructions both verbally and in writing.

Students with Visual Impairment (including Blindness)

- Do not feel awkward using words that relate to sight, such as "Did you get a chance to see that game?" or "See you later!"
- Announce your presence by name because your voice may not be recognizable. Never leave a student's presence without excusing yourself first.
- Speak directly to the student in a normal speed and tone of voice; do not shout or speak too slowly.
- When conversing with a group of people, identify the person to whom you are speaking. If a student who is blind or has low vision does not respond to you, it may be because he or she thinks you are talking to someone else.
- Be prepared to read aloud any information that is written, if requested.
- When giving directions, use a relevant reference. "Two steps to your left" is a better way to describe a location than a vague expression such as, "over there." Some individuals like to refer to positions in terms of clock hands: "The chair is at your 2 o'clock."
- Use directional words with the other person's orientation. For example, when you are facing a student, the door that is on your "left" is on the student's "right."
- If a student asks you for assistance in going from one location to another, put out your arm and tell him or her that your arm is there. He or she will then take your arm and you can proceed. Do not just grab the student's arm.

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Communication & Interaction Strategies

- Walk at a comfortable pace when guiding a student who is blind. There is no need to walk slowly. Let the student know if you are approaching a step or other obstacle, and how you plan to navigate it.
- When guiding a student into a new or strange surrounding, describe special features or physical characteristics of the area. When going into a room, orient the student to the surroundings: describe where furniture is, where the door is, and where the student is in relation to these objects.
- When speaking to a student with low vision, position yourself so that the sun or any other bright lights are in front of, not behind, you. Your face will be illuminated and, at the same time, glare or blinding light in the eyes of the student will be eliminated.
- Service animals are not pets—do not distract or pet them. When the animal is not on duty, it is up to the student to decide if play is permitted.
- If you are offering a seat, physically indicate the back or arm of the chair or give a verbal cue about the seat's location, e.g., "The chair is one step to your right" or "The chair is two steps behind you." Then the student will be able to sit down by him or herself. Do not force the student into the chair or move the chair without telling the student.
- Be precise when you describe people, places, or things. Use descriptive language. If the student has visual memories, references to colors, patterns, designs and shapes are perfectly acceptable. If not, try to attach other descriptive words and ideas to colors. For example, red is often associated with hot, blue with cool, green with calm, yellow with cheery.
- Use alternative formats for written materials, such as Braille, large print, or audio.



Educators who work with students who are both deaf and blind have a unique challenge to ensure that the student has access to the world beyond the limitations of their reach. The most important challenge for educators (as well as for parents and caregivers) is to meaningfully communicate. Students who are deaf-blind will often need touch in order for them to be sure that their partner shares their focus of attention. Exploring objects should be done in a "nondirective" way, allowing the student to have control. The student may also have very slow response times. Therefore, allow time for the student to respond.

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Communication & Interaction Strategies



Activity 5.3
Disability Etiquette Scenarios

Directions: Visit the United Spinal Association website at: <http://www.unitedspinal.org/disability-etiquette/>. In the free publication titled, *Disability Etiquette*, choose three (3) of the etiquette scenarios illustrated by drawings. Each scenario will have two drawings. Answer the questions below.

	RESPONSES
ETIQUETTE SCENARIO 1 (describe):	
What is wrong about the first interaction illustrated?	
What is right about the second interaction illustrated?	
ETIQUETTE SCENARIO 2 (describe):	
What is wrong about the first interaction illustrated?	
What is right about the second interaction illustrated?	
ETIQUETTE SCENARIO 3 (describe):	
What is wrong about the first interaction illustrated?	
What is right about the second interaction illustrated?	

- Preview the activity in advance.
- Preview the website in advance. Find an alternate resource if the link has changed.

Communication and Privacy

Paraprofessionals must follow the policies of their school that relate to sharing information about students. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when the student reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. (Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students.")

Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school. Schools are not required to provide copies of records unless, for reasons such as great distance, it is impossible for parents or eligible students to review the records. Schools may charge a fee for copies.

Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions:

- School officials with legitimate educational interest;
- Other schools to which a student is transferring;
- Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
- Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
- Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
- Accrediting organizations;
- To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
- Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and
- State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

Schools may disclose, without consent, directory information such as a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance. However, schools must tell parents and eligible students about directory information and allow parents and eligible students a reasonable amount of time to request that the school not disclose directory information about them. Schools must notify parents and eligible students annually of their rights under FERPA. The actual means of notification (special letter, inclusion in a PTA bulletin, student handbook, or newspaper article) is left to the discretion of each school.

- Preview the website in advance. Find an alternate resource if the link has changed.



Review additional guidance about FERPA from this U.S. Department of Education website: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/students.html>.

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Communication & Interaction Strategies



Activity 5.4
FERPA Q&A

Directions: Visit the U.S. Department of Education website at: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/students.html>. Look for the answers to the questions below.

1. Is a school generally required to provide an eligible student with access to academic calendars, course syllabi, or announcements of extra-curricular activities?

2. Must a school provide an eligible student with updates on the student's progress in a course (including grade reports)?

3. Is the school required to amend education records in response to an eligible student's request?

4. Do exceptions exist relating to the school's disclosure of a student's education records?

Answers:
1. No.
2. Only if the information already exists in the form of an education record.
3. No: the school is required to consider the request.
4. Yes.

- Preview the website in advance. Find an alternate resource if the link has changed.

- Preview the activity in advance.



Activity 5.5 Communication Scenarios

Directions: Read each scenario and answer the questions that follow.

- Sandy has worked at Arbor Heights Schools for three years. She completed the state's training program for special education paraprofessionals, as well as additional classes. She's received good reviews from the teachers she has worked with, as well as from administrators and parents. She usually arrives at school early and often rearranges her personal schedule to accommodate her work. This year, Arbor Heights has a new teacher, Rick, who recently graduated from the state university's teacher education program. Understandably, Rick has high expectations, lots of ideas, and seemingly boundless enthusiasm. Although Sandy accepts the need to change, she does not seek it out. This year, change came knocking when she was paired with Rick on a team. Sandy is not as confident in Rick's ideas as Rick is, and she discusses her concerns with other paraprofessionals. Once, she even confided to a student's mother that she thought one of Rick's new ideas was not a good use of time. Rick appreciates Sandy's dependability, dedication, and obvious love of her work, but he is puzzled by her lack of enthusiasm for his ideas. More than once, he has noticed Sandy looking in his direction with her arms folded, or saw her glance at the clock frequently while he was talking with her. This being his first teaching job, though, Rick isn't sure what to do, so he decides to wait for Sandy to say something first.

 - What issues does the scenario involve?
 - What are the professional implications of the scenario for the persons involved?
 - How could each person best respond to the situation?
- Reynaldo is a paraprofessional. One of his responsibilities as a team member is to work with Amy, a student, to help Amy achieve her IEP goals. The general education teacher on the team, Michelle, has been very pleased with Reynaldo's work with Amy, who has made great progress. One Wednesday afternoon, Michelle talks with Reynaldo about Amy's file ahead of a scheduled IEP meeting. That Friday night, while attending a school function, the school principal overhears Reynaldo talking about Amy's family background to another person. Recognizing Reynaldo, the principal mentions the incident to Michelle on Monday. The principal also receives a phone call from Amy's guardian, her aunt, asking why information about their family had been shared with people in the community; somebody had shared the information with Amy's aunt on Saturday. Reynaldo is surprised; he would never do anything to lose the trust of a parent or guardian. Michelle is disappointed, because she assumed that Reynaldo was familiar with FERPA requirements.

 - What issues does the scenario involve?
 - What are the professional implications of the scenario for the persons involved?
 - How could each person best respond to the situation?

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Communication & Interaction Strategies

3. Tori has worked as a paraprofessional in Morningside Schools for several years. She enjoys working with teachers and others on a team to help students meet their education goals and prepare for life after school. Tori would tell anybody that language arts instruction is her strength, but she is a committed team member. She has seen the positive results that effective teams can achieve. This year, Tori has found herself assisting her students with more math assignments than previously. Tori would never list mathematics as one of her strengths. To help make the math assignments more manageable for herself and less frustrating for her students, Tori sometimes takes shortcuts by abbreviating the assignments or letting two students work together on a problem. The math teacher, Erik, has observed Tori and wonders how he could make her aware of his different expectations.

- A. What issues does the scenario involve?
- B. What are the professional implications of the scenario for the persons involved?
- C. How could each person best respond to the situation?

- Ask learners to complete the module review questions. Discuss the responses as a group.