A new paraprofessional's first week

A checklist for supporting autistic students, days 1 to 5

New paraprofessional _____ Supervising teacher _____ School _____ Start date _____

How to use it: the supervising teacher or special-education lead works through one day at a time with the new paraprofessional (para). Tick each item when it's done and write a few words in the notes. The goal all week: the student doing more on their own. Follow the student's IEP and behavior plan, and your school's procedures.

Before day 1: what the teacher gets ready

- [ ] Write a one-page profile for each student the para will support, using the blank student profile.
- [ ] Print the class schedule and each student's visual schedule.
- [ ] Choose where the para sits or stands during each part of the day.
- [ ] Put the day-5 check-in on both calendars: 20 minutes, without students.

Student profile (one page per student; copy this page, or print it again)

Write it with the student's family and the school team, in plain words. Keep it with the student's file, not on a personal phone.

Student (first name)

_____

Strengths and interests What the student is good at and enjoys. Start here.

How the student communicates Words, signs, pictures or a device; how they ask for help or a break; how they say no.

What helps For calm, for learning, and for moving from one activity to the next.

What to avoid What the student finds hard or upsetting, and what we do instead.

Goals the para supports From the IEP, in the teacher's words, and how progress is measured.

Doing more on their own What the student does on their own now, and the next step toward more.

Day 1 Meet the students, and what holds from the first hour

- [ ] Read each student's profile together: strengths, how they communicate, what helps, what to avoid.
- [ ] Meet each student. Start with what they enjoy, and let them get to know you before you ask much of them.
- [ ] Watch the teacher work with each student for part of the day.
- [ ] Learn who directs your work (the teacher) and who to call when the teacher is out of the room.
- [ ] Before supporting students, go through each student's behavior plan, if they have one, their communication supports, and the school's emergency procedures with the teacher.
- [ ] If a student is upset: stay calm, keep everyone safe, call the teacher. Day 5 goes over it again.
- [ ] Confidentiality: follow your school's privacy rules. Share what you learn about a student only with the people your school says need it for their work, and ask the teacher if you're unsure. No names or photos on personal phones or social media.

Something I learned about each student today

Day 2 The classroom routine and the visual schedule

- [ ] Walk through the day together: arrival, each change of activity, lunch, specials, dismissal. Where is the para for each?
- [ ] Learn how each student uses their visual schedule, who updates it, and how a change is shown before it happens.
- [ ] Practice the teacher's way of helping each student use their schedule, and let the student check it on their own whenever they can.
- [ ] Note one change of activity that went smoothly and one that was hard, and what was different.

One change of activity that went smoothly, and one that was hard

Day 3 The student's goals, the para's part, and simple data

- [ ] The teacher explains, in plain words, the IEP goals the para will support and how progress is measured.
- [ ] Who does what: the teacher plans the teaching and decides what changes; the para carries out the plan as agreed and brings back what they saw.
- [ ] Before an activity, use the teacher–paraeducator handoff sheet to agree who does what.
- [ ] The teacher shows the one data sheet the para will use, and exactly what to write on it.
- [ ] Write it right away, facts only: did the student do the step on their own, or with which help? The teacher reads it.

Questions about a goal or the data sheet

Day 4 Reinforcement and prompting, then fading

- [ ] Reinforcement: follow the teacher's plan for each goal: which step to reinforce, what to give (often from what the profile says the student enjoys, such as specific praise or a turn with a favorite activity) and when. Give it right after the step, name what the student did, and note whether the student does it more often.
- [ ] Prompting: give the help the teacher has set for this goal (a gesture, a model, a few words, a picture), and only as much as the student needs.
- [ ] Fading: follow the teacher's plan for when to wait, which help to give and when to give less. Give the student the chance to respond on their own, and tell the teacher when the help seems too much or too little.
- [ ] The teacher watches for 10 minutes and gives one specific piece of feedback.

One thing a student did with less help today

Day 5 When a student is upset, and the day-5 check-in

- [ ] Go back over each student's behavior plan, if they have one, and the profile's “what helps” and “what to avoid”, with what you saw this week.
- [ ] In the moment: stay calm and use few words; keep the student and others safe; call the teacher. If anyone is in danger, follow your school's emergency procedures.
- [ ] Tell the teacher the same day, and right away for anything about safety: what happened right before, what it looked like, what happened right after.
- [ ] Hold the 20-minute check-in with the teacher (questions below).

The day-5 check-in (teacher and para, 20 minutes, without students)

What went well this week?

One thing each student did more on their own this week

What is still unclear?

One skill to practice next week, and when the teacher will watch

Next check-in (date and time)

Sources: National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP), Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism (2020), pp. 8, 29, 139 (reinforcement, prompting, time delay, visual supports); IDEA regulations, 34 CFR 300.156(b)(2)(iii) and 300.320(a)(3); FERPA regulations, 34 CFR 99.30(a) and 99.31(a)(1). Follow the student's IEP and behavior plan, and your school's procedures. Free from special-learning.com/free-resources/new-paraprofessional-first-week/