

Tips for Classroom Volunteers and Assistants

Adapted from Paraeducator.com

As an assistant to the teacher in the classroom, you will have various roles depending upon the needs of the students and the structure provided by the teacher. Here are a few ideas to help you be more effective in your work.

During Whole-Class Instruction

At times you will be observing and providing limited assistance while the teacher is instructing the class.

- ❖ **Preparation and Attention:** If possible know ahead of time what the teacher will be doing and model attentiveness to the students while instruction is going on.
- ❖ **Behavior Management:** Because the attention of the students should be focused on the teacher, your primary role will be to assist with any students that are having a difficult time staying focused or exhibiting any behavioral problems. When a behavioral challenge begins to emerge, assist in a ***non-intrusive manner*** that allows the lesson momentum to continue. Some possible options include:
 - Stand near the student/s exhibiting inappropriate behavior. Maintain your attention on the teacher.
 - Gently touch the student's back, then step away, while maintaining your attention on the teacher.
 - Communicate to the student using nonverbal procedures, such as eye contact, and nod, or gesture.
 - If necessary, give a quiet, private redirective to the student. Tell the student the exact behavior that you desire. End the directive with "Thank you," and move your attention away from the student. One of the key elements when giving a redirect to a student either verbally or nonverbally is to allow the student time to comply. The intent is for the student to choose the appropriate behavior without being told, but in the event that misbehavior continues, it will become necessary for you to, as discretely as possible, remind a misbehaving student of the appropriate choice.
 - Often, misbehavior can be kept at a minimum simply by moving quietly around the room while modeling attentive behavior. Students are less likely to exhibit off-task behavior with an adult looking over their shoulders. Your attention to the teacher is a key element, demonstrating for students what is truly important in the classroom.
- ❖ **Periodic Tasks:** At various times during whole-class instruction, the teacher may direct the students to complete a task at their desks, stations. At this time, you should assist the teacher with observing student work and assisting the students when appropriate.
- ❖ **Refocus:** When the teacher begins instruction again, help the students refocus on the teacher.

During Student Independent Work (teacher present)

During independent work time, your work will be more active and focused on providing assistance with tasks and assignments as well as behavior.

- ❖ **Working Together:** Assisting a class during independent work time is more effective if the teacher and assistants together to proactively avoid behavior issues.
- ❖ **Movement and Assistance:** Assisting in different parts of the room can be helpful to maintaining positive behavior and providing assistance to those who need it. Try to mirror the teacher's movement around the room.
- ❖ **Monitoring Student Work:** It is equally important to be monitoring student work. Use the Glance/Glance/Gaze strategy.
 - As you move around the room, you should be glancing at papers or work of students with few errors and gazing longer at papers of students with a higher frequency of errors. This will allow you to step in and assist those who require additional aid in completing the assignment.
- ❖ **Responding to Students:** When a student does require your assistance, there are two basic strategies to use.
 - First, remember to pause after the student finishes verbalizing his or her question to you. This gives the child processing time, and many times he or she will solve the problem without your assistance. Our first inclination is to answer the question, however it is best if we can allow the child to discover the solution and process the issue.
 - The second strategy is one of courtesy and respect. When assisting a child, it is preferable to assist them on their level. Bend over, kneel down, sit on the floor, look the child in the eyes and send the message that you are here to assist rather than answer. The contrary message is authoritarian with an adult standing above the child looking down.

Small Group Instruction

At times, the class may be working in small groups or you may be asked to take a particular group of students aside for a particular activity. The suggestions below will be helpful whether you are facilitating an activity or simply assisting a group with an assigned task.

- ❖ **Organization:** An orderly learning environment can encourage orderly behavior
 - Students should face the teacher/instructor when receiving instructions
 - Student should be able to face each other when working together
 - High visibility in all areas of the room they are working
 - Ease of student and instructor movement
 - Instructor access to necessary materials
 - If possible, develop standard blocks of time establish a pattern of activities for each block of time.
- ❖ **Establishing Expectations:** Establish expectations and guidelines upfront. This will influence what actually happens
 - Any rules should be few in number
 - State the desired behavior
 - Begin with a verb
 - List in order of importance
 - Cover all possible "transgressions"
 - Expect them to forget
 - Practice the rules and expected behaviors. Simply telling students what is expected does not guarantee they understand what is expected.
- ❖ **Avoiding the Void:** Keeping things moving to avoid emergence of off task behavior. When kids have nothing to do or become bored, they will fill in the gaps.
 - Beyond establishing rules, be very clear of your expectations pertaining to each activity.
 - Active student participation - try to involve the students. Again, if students have nothing to do, they will fill in the gaps, most likely with off task behavior.
 - Have an abundance of activities - it is always best to have too many rather than not enough for students to do. Be realistic in your expectations though. Rushing through activities to cover your entire plan will prove detrimental to student learning.
 - Monitor-Walk-Look-Talk
 - Structure independent work
 - Provide work students can do
 - Model to insure accuracy
 - Provide buffer activities
 - Quiet
 - Independent (1 child)
 - Done for variable amounts of time