



March 2010 Update for District Contacts for Paraprofessional Issues



The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), established the District Contacts for Paraprofessional Issues to disseminate information of importance to paraprofessionals and their supervisors.

Communication Skills

An open line of communication is vital to the development of an effective working relationship between the paraprofessional and teacher, as well as other members of the educational team. Communication is an interactive process that involves the ability to listen as well as the ability to share expectations, feelings and ideas.

Basic Strategies for Clear Communication

1. Attitudes and feelings must be known, respected, understood and dealt with openly especially as they relate to: roles and responsibilities of team members; student needs and abilities; instructional styles; classroom management and discipline; the value of other people's contributions.
2. Develop and share a common vocabulary with regards to educational jargon.
3. Outline directions and expectations for both students and paraprofessionals.
4. Take time to talk about procedures and techniques.
5. Discover the special skills, interests and training that the paraprofessional brings to the team that enhance the effectiveness of the instructional program.
6. Share expectations, ideas, beliefs and feelings with dignity.
7. Adhere to confidentiality policies.
8. Plan together and share the duties (the good, the bad and the ugly).
9. Set guidelines for communicating with parents.

Use of physical restraint or seclusion in the public schools

By Theresa DeFrancis, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education, CSDE

In 2007, the laws pertaining to the use of involuntary physical restraint or seclusion were amended to cover children requiring and receiving special education from a local or regional board of education and children being evaluated for eligibility for special education by a local or regional board of education. This means that public schools have to follow the statutory provisions for the use of involuntary physical restraint or seclusion with children who are eligible for special education or children being evaluated to determine their eligibility for special education. In addition, the State Board of Education adopted regulations, effective May 7, 2009, that further describe the parameters for the use of seclusion in public schools. In the fall of 2009, the State Department of Education made available a "Parental Notification of the Laws Relating to Seclusion and Restraint in the Public Schools" document for school districts to use to notify parents about the use of involuntary physical restraint and seclusion. This notification document is available on the SDE website at: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&Q=320730>.

Several important aspects of these laws and regulations are as follows:

First, the use of life-threatening physical restraint is prohibited. Life-threatening physical restraint is defined as "any physical restraint or hold of a person that restricts the flow of air into a person's lungs, whether by chest compression or any other means." (See Connecticut General Statutes Section 46a-150(4))

Second, involuntary physical restraint of a child may only be used as an emergency intervention to prevent immediate or imminent injury to a child or to others, provided the restraint is not used for discipline or convenience and is not used as a substitute for a less restrictive alternative. Physical restraint is defined as "any mechanical or personal restriction that immobilized or reduces the free movement of a person's arms, legs or head. The term does not include briefly holding a person in order to calm or comfort the person, restraint involving the minimum contact necessary to safely escort a person from one area to another, medical devices, including but not limited to, supports prescribed by a health care provider to achieve proper body position or balance, helmets or other protective gear used to protect a person from injuries due to a fall or helmets, mitts and similar devices used to prevent self injury when the device is part of a documented treatment plan or individualized education program pursuant to section 10-76d and is the least restrictive means available to prevent such self-injury." (See Connecticut General Statutes Section 46a-150(5))

Third, the involuntary placement of a child in seclusion may only occur as an emergency intervention to prevent immediate or imminent injury to the child or to others and seclusion may not be used for discipline or convenience and may not be used as a substitute for a less restrictive alternative.

Fourth, the planning and placement team (PPT) may utilize seclusion as a behavior intervention in the child's individualized education program (IEP). The state regu-



March 2010 Update for District Contacts for Paraprofessional Issues



lations require the PPT to review an assessment of the child's functional behavior and other relevant information before seclusion is used as a behavior intervention. If seclusion is to be used as a behavior intervention, the IEP must specify the location of seclusion, maximum length of any period of seclusion, the number of times during a single day that the child may be placed in seclusion, the frequency of monitoring required for the child while in seclusion and any other relevant matter agreed to by the PPT taking into consideration the age, disability and behaviors of the child. (See Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, Section 10-76b-8(b))

Fifth, parents must be notified on the day of, or within 24 hours after, physical restraint or seclusion is used with a child as an emergency intervention. This notification may be made by e-mail, phone or other method, including sending a note home with the child. Parents must receive a copy of the incident report no later than two business days after the emergency use of physical restraint or seclusion. When seclusion is included in the IEP of a child, the PPT and the parents will determine a timeframe and manner of notification of each incident of seclusion.

Sixth, a child may be physically restrained or removed to seclusion only by persons who have received training in physical management, physical restraint and seclusion procedures. Training shall also include, but is not limited to: verbal defusing or de-escalation, prevention strategies, types of physical restraint, the differences between permissible physical restraint and pain compliance techniques, monitoring to prevent harm to a person physically restrained or in seclusion and recording and reporting procedures on the use of restraint and seclusion.

Lastly, public school districts must record each instance of the use of physical restraint or seclusion and the nature of the emergency that required its use and include this information in an annual compilation of the district's use of restraint and seclusion. If a physical injury occurs when restraint or seclusion is used, public schools may report this injury to the State Board of Education. If a serious injury or death is reported to the State Board of Education, the State Board is required to report the incident to the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities and if appropriate, to the child Advocate and the Office of the Child Advocate.

A Problem-Solving Exercise: Each month, we will provide a case study and discussion questions to facilitate discussion among teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators.

Ryan has become aware that whenever Jessica, the paraprofessional is explaining something to him, he is distracted by trying to get several other things done in his classroom. Consequently, he doesn't remember what she says and has to ask her to repeat herself. He wants to give her his full attention next time.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What could Ryan do to make sure he is paying attention to Jessica?
- b. How will better listening skills improve his relationship with Jessica?
- c. How will Ryan know if he has become a better listener?

The State of Connecticut Department of Education is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/ affirmative action for all qualified persons and does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, religion or any other basis prohibited by Connecticut state and/or federal nondiscrimination laws. Inquiries regarding the Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to the Equal Employment Opportunity Director, State of Connecticut Department of Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457-1543, 860-807-2071.