

Confidentiality and Ethics

All school personnel, including paraeducators, present an image to students, professionals, parents and the community.

Paraprofessionals need to be aware of legal standards and ethical guidelines in order to present a positive image, comply with the law and maintain a professional demeanor.

Ethics

Following accepted standards of professional behavior clarifies what is appropriate and what is not. It is part of being a professional, fosters a good working relationship with the supervising teacher and ensures adherence to the law.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) defines a paraprofessional as an employee who provides instructional support. The law spells out specific roles for the paraprofessional:

- Tutoring beyond regular classroom instruction time.
- Assisting with classroom management.
- Providing instructional assistance in a computer lab.
- Providing support in a library or media center.
- Acting as a translator.
- Providing instructional support services under the direct supervision of a teacher.

In addition to compliance with NCLB guidelines, paraprofessionals must exhibit loyalty, honesty, dependability, cooperation, accountability, and willingness to learn.

Other generally accepted ethical behavior includes the following:

- Engage only in instruction and activities for which you are trained.
- Recognize the teacher as your supervisor.
- Develop good communication and a positive working relationship with your supervising teacher.
- Follow confidentiality rules.
- Adhere to all school and district policies.
- Respect the rights and dignity of all students and parents.

- Refrain from expressing a difference of opinion with your supervising teacher or criticizing the school or district when students are present.
- Accept responsibility for improving your skills.
- Refrain from discriminatory practices based on a student's race, gender, cultural background, religion or disability.

Confidentiality

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school employees must follow guidelines to preserve the privacy rights of students and parents.

Confidential information refers to all information about a student including the following:

- Personal and family information.
- Social, behavioral and psychological actions and data.
- Academic performance and progress.
- Program goals and objectives.

Paraeducators must comply with strict guidelines as to how and with whom information is shared. Consider the following:

- Information should be shared only with staff working directly with the student.
- Parents' requests for information should be referred to the supervising teacher.
- Paraprofessionals should never discuss confidential information in the teacher's lounge.
- Confidential information should never be shared in any setting other than the school and never in community social situations.

Checking for Understanding

Activity One - Case Studies

Directions: For each of the situations below, identify the legal/ethical issue (i.e. confidentiality, role, law) and state how the paraeducator should respond.

1. The supervising teacher asks you to help Joe with a math assignment, but you are not sure you understand the material well enough to help him.
2. You are friendly with the guidance secretary. She knows a lot about students and their families. You ask her about the rumors you've heard in the teachers' lounge about Jim Smith's family.
3. Your child attends the school in which you work. You often give him and his friends a ride home. One child begins talking about how terrible his English teacher is and soon the whole group is tearing the teacher apart.
4. A Special Education teacher has a class for students with emotional difficulties. Jack is having problems with science and social studies, becomes angry and violent easily and is rumored to be involved in shoplifting and possibly even a robbery. The teacher wants to be very strict and punitive with Jack and asks you to do so as well. You overhear her saying that she hopes this will cause Jack to drop out and thus she will have one less problem to deal with.

5. Kendra has had a bad day and acted out in several classes. The supervising teacher tells you to call Kendra's mother and fill her in on the situation.
6. You are taking a community art class and learn that one of your classmates is the parent of one of your students. She constantly questions you about her child's behavior and grades.
7. You frequently eat lunch with another paraeducator. The two of you find that this is a great time to discuss the things your supervising teachers do that you feel are wrong.
8. At a neighborhood party, you get into a conversation with the president of the tenants' organization who tells you that he thinks money spent on Special Education students is a waste because those children are losers and can't learn.
9. Your supervising teacher asks you to stop by the guidance office and pick up the latest achievement test scores for the students with whom you both work.
10. You view your supervising teacher as an unusually harsh disciplinarian who upsets children needlessly. Her behavior interferes with their learning as she is unable to establish good relationships with students.

Notes and good ideas:

