

9 Habits of a Great Classroom Volunteer

Across the country, adult volunteers step-in to classrooms to assist students and teachers. What habits do these helpers share that makes them successful? They demonstrate the nine P's: preparation, purpose, process, pause, patience, probe/prompt, praise, pro-activity, and passion.

Preparation

Great volunteers come ready to work. They look for ways to support the activity they are guiding by bringing in related books, objects, and relevant materials to help bring the activity to life. They know the value of supporting classroom goals and the teacher's objectives before considering their own personal agenda.

Purpose

Great volunteers work to understand the educator's purpose in the activities selected for the students. They accept the teacher as the classroom leader and work to support the goals the teacher sets down. They remind students of those goals before and after their groups meet to help the students stay focused.

Process

Volunteers need to be able to follow the processes, guidelines and goals that govern the classroom. As supporters of a classroom, their task is to help students achieve their specific classroom goals. Whether students go above and beyond the goals, meet the goals or falter, great classroom volunteers leave the teacher a note on their progress.

Pause

Time to think is imperative. By waiting 5-10 seconds before you accept answers, you give students time to seek their best rather than their first answer.

Patience

Learning follows a spiral path; students add on new information, go back and re-evaluate earlier information and build new connections. We need to present ideas, repeat them in real-life scenarios, allow discussion and expect trial and error. That's how we learn.

Probe/Prompt

Assistants must ask questions during and after tasks to determine if students are making connections. "Does this make sense?" "What are you hearing me say?" Using higher level thinking skills and questioning techniques helps students develop an understanding of the relationships between parts of the whole.



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Praise

It is important to share our impressions of students work so they know if they are on the right track. It is best if we focus on the quality of their work rather than saying 'great job' or 'wonderful'. Assistants need to provide feedback that help students judge their own work, make necessary adjustments and move forward with their tasks.

Pro-activity

The purpose of education is helping students learn to process new information. That means students must be active participants. The days of 'sit and get' information are long over. Today's students must interact with ideas and each other. Great volunteers share their personal enthusiasm, love of learning and belief that education has value.

Passion

To be most effective, volunteers exhibit a passion for service. They need to love what they do enough to come back week after week and year after year, seeking to serve without expecting rewards beyond seeing students grow and learn. Their interest/passion is picked up by the students they work with and often inspires those students to be more active learners. Not surprisingly, working with students often enriches the assistant's life as much as the assistants enrich the student's life.

The 9 habits are not difficult. But when applied they empower assistants to be aware of how their presence affects the students, the teacher, and the classroom. It's all about being an active guide.

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