



Transcript- Episode 49

Support is a Verb- Not a Human

Hi, everyone, and welcome to Episode 49, Support is a Verb.

Kristie, how excited are you about this one?

Well, for different reasons, pretty excited, because I always think of our origin story around paraprofessionals. And then this one goes even deeper, because it stems from your dissertation, as well as my dissertation. So for me, it's like pretty exciting, because it's always like our origin story.

I love it, too, Kristie. And for all those reasons, and because one of the first and most problematic things that we hear from school systems that are becoming inclusive is, we need more support. So Kristie and I think, great, you're right, we do need more support.

But they think humans, they think paraprofessionals, they think they just need one more or seven more or 19 more adult humans to provide support so we can include kids.

Well, I think it even goes even deeper, Julie. Oftentimes, we hear people talking about co-teaching as a synonym for inclusion.

And so we would be more inclusive if we had more co-taught classrooms. So it's also speaking to this idea that we need more humans doing something together to offer the amount of support kids need to accomplish inclusion.

Yes.

So today, we've done something a little different. We've written a little piece that we're going to be reading throughout this podcast to really help people change their thinking about what support is and what support isn't. So, Kristie, have you ever had someone supporting you, but it didn't actually help?

I always blame Mike, but I always think, you know, like, you know, like when you're just like complaining about something or you, or my mom sometimes does this too, like we'll schedule a time to talk and then she'll be like, well, is this an OK time or we could call later or you could rest first or you could, you know, like they're offering ideas, but they think they're supporting me by giving me advice or troubleshooting.

And I'm like, nope, I'm good. You know, that's like the least kind of intrusive kind, but it's annoying. It's so annoying.

And I think what we have to do is rethink what support looks like from the unobtrusive and annoying, right, to the incredibly intrusive. And harmful. And harmful.

Right. So we're going to just start with this idea. We're going to rethink what support really means in inclusive education.

And spoiler alert, it's not a person. It's not a time slot. It's not something we put in an IEP checkbox.

It's a verb. And I always like to say it's not any kind of verb, Julie, and this is boring to anybody and everybody but me, but it's a transitive verb. So it really has to be about what are we supporting? What are we doing? What are we kind of thinking about our actions? Not just any kind of word, but a transitive verb.

Oh, I know you love that, too. And I've grown to love it, Kristie, because I realize that there's an object that we're doing something to in order to support. So I'll start with kind of part one.

Support is not just any verb. It is not standing or sitting next to a student. It is not the magical air breathed by the special education teacher.

No, no, no. Support starts in knowing the student's strengths, needs and preferences. Then it's the thoughtful, intentional actions we take before, during and after instruction that help a student open up to learning and make that learning stick.

Sometimes support means adding things like novelty, visuals, tools or strategies and other times it means subtracting things like distractions or complexity or unpreferred formats. So when we kind of start that way, thinking about support not being just any verb, it's the things we add and the things we subtract. Why is that important when we especially think about the ways in which people think support is hiring an adult human?

Well, I think at least one thing, Julie, is that we don't always articulate what the action should be.

And I mean, maybe, maybe a little bit like you said, like in a drop down on an IEP. But normally it's more like, go be support, go support this classroom. I have to go and support this kid.

But we don't talk about the action we're going to take. And then I would say the part about subtracting, we rarely talk about. So you and I talk about fading support or invisible support or natural supports.

But that's rarely a conversation when we're thinking of adding humans. We're not thinking of subtracting actions. So they kind of are opposites of each other.

Yes. And it's rarely mentioned. It's rarely written down.

It's rarely discussed. It's rarely shared with the humans that are in that role that are confused because often the default is, support must mean I'm going to sit

next to this kid and I'm going to point at their work and I'm going to tell them again the instructions. And all of those kinds of supports are not helpful.

So, Kristie, I don't mean to change our order, but would you tell people about the resource that they're going to get if they go and check out the resource that comes with this podcast?

Yeah, you know that we love a handout. So sure, we can tell all about the handout. So this is at [inclusiveschooling.com](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com). And then I always have to go, is it forward slash? Forward slash download49.

So [inclusiveschooling.com/download49](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download49). And you're going to get 130 verbs, I guess, is the best way to say it.

Yes. So again, like Julie said, support is not a place or a person or a program. It's these intentional actions.

So if you're driving or working and can't see the handout, just imagine there are 13 broad categories. Julie will probably call out a few. And then in each of the 13 categories, there are 10 verbs, 10 actions that we intentionally add or subtract.

OK, let's go back to, kind of the idea of, support is a verb. It's not a human. And I'm just going to look at part two, which is this three part framework.

And it's about what to do, we do before, during and after. Kristie, do you want to read the before, during and after?

You go ahead. I'll make a connection back to the handout and download after.

Oh, perfect. OK, so before the lesson, support begins with planning. It's asking what words or steps might be tricky in this lesson.

Can we pre-teach, add visuals? Can we chunk anything? And crucially, support is co-planned by general and special education teachers. So that's the support that happens before the lesson. During the lesson, support is quiet but powerful.

It can be a visual cue, a sticky note, a peer support. It's all the educators working to create access points for all the students. It's also knowing when to step back and let the students take the lead.

Then after the lesson, support becomes reflection. What worked? What didn't? What did the students show us or say that they need next? And then we listen, we adjust, and we grow and we change. Hmm.

So then if you're thinking, OK, I like that. I like this idea of figuring out, like, how can we co-plan? And I want to be silent or quiet, but powerful. And I want to, like, make sure that we do some reflection.

Then you definitely want to get the download at [inclusiveschooling.com/download49](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download49), because this is where we think more about not just what action, what verb, what thing we're going to do, but when we're going to do it, how it's received, who did I communicate with it? Do I need to

chunk it, like you said? Do I need to be more silent? Do we need to be more obvious? So that's where the art comes in. I love describing it as an art. And I love that you said it's the figuring out of the how of it.

And I would add the who of it, right? Because so often we think it has to be a paraprofessional that's doing this stuff. And the truth is it can very often be the general education teacher. It can very often be a peer who's providing that support.

It can be the adults that are already naturally in the environment without adding an additional adult. Yeah, and I think that sometimes, Julie, that goes back to we've often said we need to say we need to become more inclusive. And then we need to say we need to become more inclusive with supports.

And then we need to say we need to become more inclusive with supports that aren't humans. And so it's like it's a big story, right? And so, but you just hit on that "the". Best support in that moment for that person might be something that's in the environment, might be a peer, but it's not always by default an adult or someone with a lot of training.

It could be a variety of ways.

That's right. That's right.

So let's talk a little bit about, we want support. There's actually supportive. Let's go back to our little story a bit.

Mm hmm. Yeah. So it's only support if it is actually supportive.

This is where we get it wrong often. And this is where I was trying to say with my husband and my mom that they're trying to be helpful and supportive and meet my needs. But I didn't have a need.

I didn't need something. I didn't need problem solving.

Yeah.

Right. And so for you, you wouldn't call that support because why? It's annoying. Annoying.

Exactly. So what we like to say is we must remember it's only support if it's actually supportive. If it doesn't help the student access content, if it doesn't help them engage or make meaning, then we can't call it support.

Too often we mistake presence for impact. We confuse proximity with effectiveness. We even equate fulfilling IEP minutes with providing meaningful support.

But support is not about checking a box. It's about whether a student is growing, participating, and feeling like they belong. And if it's not working, that's not a failure.

It's feedback because support is a verb and verbs can be changed.

Oh, I just want to drop the mic there like, oh, are we done? Because that's like, that's like the best part.

Yeah.

Yeah. I love it, too, because I think often that we equate sitting next to a special ed teacher even and go, hmm, look at, look what's happening- support. And in reality, it's not their presence.

It's what they've done to plan for before, during or after the lesson. And when we think about it in the kind of current way, Julie, we think inclusion is harder than it is.

Yeah.

Not to say that there aren't challenges and not to say that it doesn't take a lot of effort in shifting mindsets, heart sets and skill sets. But we start to make up that there's something magical happening that only certain people can do in certain ways, in certain places.

That's right.

And it sounds so complex, doesn't it? Because I have to have a degree to do it. And in reality, really good educators know all these strategies and more. And so I think that when we think about one more time, let's, let's go back to your notion about the quiet and powerful supports that they aren't the people at all.

It's actually the verb, the "what" the people are doing or creating or ensuring or planning that is actually what is supportive. So do you want to say anything more about the handout?

Yeah, I was just going to open it up right now to kind of, to just pick one piece to talk about. So, again, support is a verb.

It's what people do. And it's everything from how we pace a lesson to how we present subject matter to the materials we have at the ready, to the adaptations we have at the ready, to the social interaction supports. And what I'm doing is I'm just reading the big categories.

And under each of those categories, you'll see 10 verbs that give you support as to how to do this work. So I'm going to take social interaction support. I'm going to read just one of the verbs.

Pair students strategically to support positive interactions. So the pairing itself, the thinking carefully about who is the best student to support this other student is the actual support. And I think for me, as I'm looking at our list again, this is at [inclusiveschooling.com/download49](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download49).

I love some of the verbs. They're going to be surprising. They're like "celebrate" and "share" and "offer" and "send" instead of like, you know, "hand over hand" or "sit by".

Right. I don't even think any one of these talks about flashcards, Kristie.

No, I would think not.

If they do, if they do, we better revise that. And so these resources are free. Right, Kristie, you can just put in your email address and you get it immediately to your inbox for free.

Exactly. So we didn't say that, but just know that this will help you guide your educators if you're an administrator or if you're an educator. It will help guide your paraprofessionals or others in what does support look like and how do we make it make the most sense for this particular kid? So let's kind of get to the closing, Kristie.

And the closing of this particular essay that we wrote is, so let's stop defining support as a person. Let's define it by what we do and whether it works. It's the thoughtful planning.

It's the in the moment adjustments. It's the reflection follow through. And let's remember why this matters, because inclusion doesn't mean more people.

It means more possibility. And when we get support right, it just fades right into the background so students can step into the foreground. That's the magic of real inclusive support.

SHOW NOTES

What does it really mean to "support" a student? In this episode, Julie and Kristie flip the script on one of the most misunderstood concepts in inclusive education. You'll learn why support isn't about proximity, programs, or people— it's about purposeful, in-the-moment actions that help students learn, belong, and succeed.

Backed by research, decades of experience, and a powerful handout packed with 130 practical verbs, this episode unpacks what support *actually* looks like before, during, and after instruction. Whether you're a leader guiding a team, a co-teacher rethinking your role, or a paraprofessional looking for clarity— this one's for you.

Key Takeaways

- **Support is not a person— it's a verb.** Real support is rooted in intentional actions, not IEP checkboxes or adult proximity
- **Before the lesson:** Support starts with co-planning, anticipating barriers, and building in access from the start
- **During the lesson:** The best support is quiet but powerful— think visual cues, peer partners, or subtle prompts.

- **After the lesson:** Reflection and adjustment are part of support too. If it's not working, that's not failure— it's feedback.
 - **Presence ≠ impact.** Sitting beside a student isn't support unless it actually helps them engage, learn, or belong
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Episode Download: 130 Ways to Support Students

Support isn't a checkbox— it's a choice we make again and again. This handout gives you 130 clear, actionable verbs across 13 categories, including:

- Environmental Supports
- Instructional Delivery
- Social Interaction & Self-Regulation
- Executive Functioning
- Behavioral Supports
- Cultural & Family Engagement

[Click here](#) to download the handout - Use it to guide paraprofessional training, team meetings, IEP conversations, and your own daily practices.

Practical Tips

- **Audit your support practices:** Are they observable actions or just presence?
 - **Replace “he needs a para” with:** What actions will help this student access, engage, or reflect?
 - **Use the download to co-plan:** Assign verbs across roles and timelines— before, during, and after instruction.
 - **Normalize reflection:** Ask, “Is this working?” and be willing to adjust.
 - **Celebrate quiet supports:** The most powerful moves often go unnoticed.
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Additional Resources

- [Beyond Treats and Timeouts: Humanistic Behavioral Supports in Inclusive Classrooms](#): This article critiques traditional behavior management strategies (such as rewards and punishments) and highlights their unintended social-emotional consequences, especially for students

with disabilities. Instead, the authors advocate for humanistic behavioral supports rooted in respect, empathy, and student-centered practices within inclusive classrooms. Through practical strategies and real-life examples, the paper encourages educators to shift from controlling behaviors to nurturing belonging, motivation, and autonomy. It offers a compassionate, evidence-informed approach aligned with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) that fosters meaningful inclusion and whole-school transformation.