



Transcript- Episode 72

The Golden Rule of Support: Would You Want This Help?

I want you to imagine something for a moment.

Imagine that your workplace hired someone to support you. And they're with you all day long.

Sounds good.

They also decide when to step in. They decide how close to stand. They touch your shoulder to redirect you.

Sometimes they touch your face or your head. Sometimes they speak for you. And they will stay there even when you want space.

And you don't get to choose any of it. Just ask yourself, how would that feel? Would that make you feel more dependent or more independent? Might it change how your coworkers related to you? How might it affect your confidence or your creativity or your sense of privacy?

This is not hypothetical because this is a daily reality for many students in inclusive classrooms. And here today, we want to think about what is meant by support through podcast Episode 72, the golden rule of support.

Would you want this help? So y'all can't see me or see us while we're podcasting, but Julie made it to the third line in that what if scenario.

And I was cringing, I was sweating.

I never sweat. That doesn't bug me, but I had a visceral thought. And then when you said somebody might touch my face or my head, I thought, oh, no, we are not.

I mean, I was going to become violent. I know if you could see Kristie, I could see her, and she was getting shorter and shorter and shorter, meaning she was literally sinking in her chair, and like, flailing around.

But when I said touch your shoulder or redirect you, you had a big physical reaction.

I can't take it. And then when you said like, what would my colleagues or coworkers think? I was like, oh, my God, how horrible. If I was in my cupboard, it was bad enough to be in a cubicle.

And then I have a person in the cubicle with me. Oh, sorry, friends. I just yeah.

No, thank you. OK, so Kristie is a big no, thank you. And I'm certain that all of you are like, well, wait, not all support looks like that.

And wait, we're very good and thoughtful. Of course, of course, of course, of course, of course. But we have to look at what support looks like and actually the lived experiences of people with disabilities who describe what it feels like to be supported. And I will say over supported.

Yeah. And Julie, why don't you talk about the title of this episode?

Two things. Let me tell you where you can get the download for this episode. And then Julie is going to tell you a little bit of a story about where this came to be. But we want to invite...

Well, OK, we have other podcast episodes about "support is a verb".

Correct. This download is really about 30 questions you can ask yourself to make just right supports.

And so it's at inclusiveschooling.com/download72. But it all stems from this work about the golden rule, which I guess, maybe not every culture follows the golden rule, Julie, but you can explain, like, kind of how that came to be and how many people understand the golden rule.

Yeah. So the golden rule probably has biblical implications now that I think of it. And I think it's do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

And so when I was a new and eager graduate student studying paraprofessional support, I noticed and I actually experienced through observation time and time again support that I would not want. And I wrote, I did a bunch of research, and I wrote an article called [The Golden Rule of Providing Support and Inclusive Classrooms](#). And we'll link to it in the show notes.

Yeah. And I think it was published in *Teaching Exceptional Children*. And many, many people have read it and many people still use it today.

So it's just kind of this thing that has had a lot of legs, we'll say. So it's taken on its own kind of meaning. And Kristie, I thought we would do just a podcast about this idea because we haven't actually taken it from this angle before.

But one of the best, like if you wanted the summary of this particular podcast episode, the very best way to make a decision about how to support a student is to consider the implications of that support on the student. And when you think of support, Julie and I are using that as a verb.

So if I'm going to restate something, if I'm going to, God forbid, do hand over hand, if I'm going to give a visual reminder, if I'm going to give a verbal prompt, if I'm going to structure the environment, whatever it is, from highly intrusive to very low intrusive.

If it's something that I'm doing as a verb, we need to think about the impact. Yes, it's all about the impact. And so it's like we have to remember when we're thinking about inclusive education, why is the student included in the first place? Oh, sorry, is that not a question that is there right? That was hypothetical, rhetorical.

Okay, sorry, sorry. Okay, no, that's fine, Kristie. End of podcast.

We're done here. Absolutely. Our work is done.

I guess, I mean, the benefits maybe is a better way to say it. I really love what you said. It's because it's the law.

But the benefits of inclusion is about creating relationships, having belonging, having learning, growing independence..

Access, participation, yeah. Progress, right? All those things.

However, so often, a one-on-one person, a human is assigned to a student, and the actual support itself gets in the way of inclusion. And it becomes maybe too consistent, too close, too invasive. And when we did this study, and if you don't know who [Michael Giangreco](#) is, he's kind of this incredible scholar who's done a lot of work also in this area.

But what we found is there are some problems with paraprofessional support in that it separates students from peers. Sometimes it replaces teacher interaction. Sometimes it interrupts learning.

Sometimes it limits creativity. And very often, it creates dependence on adult support. And so if we're not thoughtful and careful about adult support, we can actually undermine inclusion.

Yeah. And remember, Julie and I have a very broad [definition of inclusion](#). I'll link to it in the show notes.

But it's about a sense of belonging where the student gets to show up as a whole person who does not need to be fixed. So when Julie says, does it actually support or get in the way of inclusion, she's asking, does that support a sense of belonging or does that get in the way because we're trying to fix a student? If you look at the download for Episode 72, you'll see that we're talking about, quote, unquote, just right supports.

I think, Julie, for this one, the kicker goes back to other episodes we've talked about, whose nervous system are we using to make these determinations? And so oftentimes, the determinations of the type of support, whether it's a para doing actions or just actions without an adult, we don't get input from the student.

We don't seek input. Even if that's, like, not direct, let's say indirect, like I'm noticing how you feel when somebody holds you by your suspenders and keeps you at Circle Time. Like it can be that way of getting the voice of the student.

It doesn't have to be literally. Right. So let's talk about these 30 different questions that we could ask ourselves to give the just right supports.

So it's not just from our own individual lens. I'm stuck on suspenders, picturing being held by my suspenders. I'm hoping you've never seen that, but have you?

Oh, oh, yes.

We always say if you're a preschooler, don't wear suspenders because it's the easiest way for somebody to get you, you know. Keep you in your chair, keep you on your lap, keep you on your spot.

OK, well, I won't wear suspenders now, but I wasn't going to.

So that's good. OK, so when, Kristie, you kind of invited us to look at this 30 questions to make sure adult support is just right. And, you know, I just want to start with the first one.

Would I want this kind of support all day? Would I want someone this close to me? Would I want someone speaking to me this often? Speaking to me or for me, actually.

Exactly. And so what I love about the way that we've organized these 30 questions is we just have the start here questions, which are called the golden rule check.

And then we have further questions that move into the areas of dignity and privacy, independence and choice and voice and peer relations and fading and redesign. So before we go into one of, you know, you can pick one of your favorite. Julie read the first three of the start here.

But I want you to read the next two. There are five total, friends, and you can get these at [inclusiveschooling.com/download72](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download72). There are 30 questions.

And she said the golden rule gets kind of this initial check. And there are five of them. And so Julie, just read the last two of that section, because I think they're so incredible and so powerful that we should all be asking ourselves these.

So would I feel more capable or feel more watched? And would I get to choose when help shows up? So those are just the five. And I think literally if you took those top five. And honestly, took a teeny video.

For your internal use only of a student receiving support and then say would I want this kind of support all day. Would I want someone this close to me. Would I want someone speaking to me this often?

Would I feel more capable or more watched? And would I get to choose when help shows up? I think your work here is done because if you just attack those five questions and start to rearrange your support to be more respectful, more private, more interdependent with other kids, giving more choice and voice, more faded or redesigned tasks...then we're going to get somewhere really powerful.

And Julie, you read the five and it's interesting because both times you read number three differently than it is on the handout.

So I'm going to say there's kind of six. I like them both. So Julie said, would I want someone speaking TO me this often? And the handout says, would I want someone speaking FOR me this often? I think both are so important.

Kristie, it's just I have to tell you a quick story. I was observing a paraprofessional for a court case and this paraprofessional had been bit by this student. OK, so she's got a scar.

She's upset where everyone's upset. This kid is biting her. And all I did as soon as I got in there was take a look at the interaction.

And I realized very, very, very quickly that her rate of verbal speech right into the student's ear was intense, to say the least. But I decided to quantify it because I'm a fancy researcher like that. And I took data on how many utterances she made toward this student in a minute.

And the average was over 65 utterances a minute. So literally in my notes, I wrote time of day I would have bitten this paraprofessional was 8.07. OK, and school started. School hadn't even started yet.

No, eight bells. We started at eight bells. In seven minutes, I thought to myself, I might bite this human.

And I don't mean to be funny because literally this person did get bit and she did get hurt. And it was a problem. However, we have to look at what our support is doing, the impact on students.

And then we have to move to what we call gentle, respectful, thoughtful, kind, golden rule support. And if you don't know that we have an entire paraprofessional training series, I guess I should mention it. We have something called, it's called [Para-bytes](#).

I just put those two together. That's funny. You're just being so funny.

Yes, we're batching today. So Parabytes, and it's not B-I-T-E-S, it's B-Y-T-E-S because there are these bite-size trainings. But now you'll never forget the name.

And it's how do you provide those kind of supports that are quiet, faded, thoughtful, kind, respectful, etc.? Well, Julie, then I'm going to as we start to wrap up, I'm going to just highlight a couple of the questions under fading and redesign.

Because I also know that in our work in how we train and retain paras, there's rarely a fading plan. And so even when the para understands they need to reduce backup, be camouflaged, right? There's pressure on them to remain side by side, velcroed to the student. So I would say as if I'm a para and I'm like, yes, I am doing too much.

There's learned helplessness. I'm getting in the way, but I'm assigned to the kid. I would say use the last five questions in today's download and say, hey, team, we need a clear fading plan.

It doesn't mean that I don't need a job here in the district. I still need to be here to ensure access, participation, progress, offer choice, differentiate, remove barriers. Include more humor, more fun, soothe systems, reduce stressors.

Right. That's a full time job. Yes.

But what is my next least intrusive step? How do I walk down the ladder of support, which I'll also put in the show notes? Could this task be redesigned instead of, oh, you need more support because this is so far off grade level? How can I make this more accessible? Again, are we removing barriers? Are we managing behaviors? And then if this were my job, what would I change to make it doable?

Julie, we've done an episode on unpreferred tasks and we talked a lot about how as adults we modify tasks in order to make them more, you know, palatable.

Yeah.

Right. So tolerable. So how, why don't we ask that same question instead of like, oh, my gosh, this kid has high needs support.

This kid needs so much support. Yes. Yeah.

Yes. I love that. So that's a brilliant redirect is to go to the last questions and ask your team.

How do we fade? What does it look like? And I just want to wrap up by just saying, you know, when we're talking about the golden rule where it's really simple, support other people the way that you would wish to be supported. And when we ask adults, most people say, I want respectful support. I want discreet support.

I want this support faded when it's no longer needed. And students want the exact same thing. Because the goal of support isn't dependence.

The goal is dignity, access, interdependence and independence. Thank you for tuning in. And don't forget to subscribe and catch up on past episodes where we share valuable insights, straight talk, and practical steps to challenge outdated special education practices.

You can find every episode with the show notes at [inclusiveschooling.com/inclusion-podcast](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/inclusion-podcast) to build more inclusive schools together.

SHOW NOTES

In this episode, Julie and Kristie explore one of the most important, and often overlooked, questions in inclusive education. While support is intended to increase access, participation, and independence, it can sometimes have the opposite effect.

Key Takeaways

- Support should increase dignity, belonging, and independence — not dependence.
 - Well-intentioned support can unintentionally create barriers to peer relationships and learning.
 - The impact of support matters more than the intention behind it.
 - Students deserve a voice in how they are supported.
 - Adult support should be faded, redesigned, and adjusted over time — not remain static.
 - The goal is not constant proximity; the goal is access, participation, and growing independence.
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How do you know if support is actually supportive?

Ask yourself:

- Would I want this kind of support all day?
- Would I want someone this close to me?
- Would I want someone speaking for me this often?
- Would I feel more capable — or more watched?
- Would I get to choose when help shows up?

If the answer is no, it may be time to rethink the support, not the student.

Why Support Sometimes Gets in the Way

Most educators enter the profession because they want to help. But support can become problematic when it:

- Separates students from peers
- Replaces teacher interaction
- Interrupts learning
- Limits creativity and problem-solving
- Creates dependence on adults
- Reduces opportunities for self-advocacy

When support becomes too close, too frequent, or too intrusive, it can unintentionally undermine the very goals of inclusion.

Episode Download / Handout

Is My Support Actually Supportive? 30 Questions to Make Sure Adult Support Is "Just Right"

This practical reflection tool helps educators, paraprofessionals, and teams evaluate whether support is increasing independence — or accidentally creating dependence.

Inside the download, you'll find:

- The Golden Rule Check
- Questions focused on dignity and privacy
- Reflection prompts about independence versus dependence
- Tools for examining student choice and voice
- Questions about peer relationships and belonging
- A framework for fading and redesigning support

Why download it?

Because support is not automatically helpful just because it is well-intentioned. This tool helps teams pause, reflect, and ensure that support is respectful, effective, and aligned with inclusive values.

👉 Download at: inclusiveschooling.com/download72

Additional Resources

- [A Comics Collection of the "Absurdities & Realities of Special Education" \(Vermont Public interview with Michael Giangreco\)](#): Giangreco and illustrator Kevin Ruelle use satire and humor to expose common contradictions, bureaucratic barriers, and inequities within special education systems. Through concise cartoons and visual metaphors, the collection encourages educators, families, and advocates to critically examine practices related to inclusion, disability, and educational decision-making. The cartoons remain relevant because they illuminate enduring challenges while making complex issues accessible and memorable. These volumes are particularly valuable for professional development, reflective discussion, and promoting more inclusive educational practices.

Original cartoon collections:

- Giangreco, M. F., & Ruelle, K. (1998). *Ants in His Pants: Absurdities and Realities of Special Education*.
- Giangreco, M. F., & Ruelle, K. (1999). *Flying by the Seat of Your Pants: More Absurdities and Realities of Special Education*.
- Giangreco, M. F., & Ruelle, K. (2000). *Teaching Old Logs New Tricks: More Absurdities and Realities of Education*

- **The Golden Rule of Providing Support in Inclusive Classrooms: Support Others as You Would Wish to Be Supported:** Causton-Theoharis challenges educators to rethink traditional approaches to adult support in inclusive classrooms by applying a simple but powerful principle: support students in the ways we ourselves would want to be supported. Drawing on research and classroom examples, the article demonstrates how excessive adult proximity can unintentionally create dependence, limit peer relationships, interfere with creativity, and reduce student autonomy. The author offers practical strategies for fading adult support, increasing peer connections, and centering student voice and self-determination. This article remains a valuable resource for educators seeking to create inclusive learning environments that promote belonging, independence, and authentic participation for all students.
- **Paraprofessional Ladder of Support:** The Prompting Ladder provides a practical framework for delivering support in ways that promote student independence rather than dependence. Organized from least intrusive supports, such as natural cues and wait time, to more intrusive supports, such as physical prompting, the tool encourages educators to begin with the minimum level of assistance needed and increase support only when necessary. Using the memorable metaphor of climbing a ladder, the resource reminds educators to return to less intrusive supports as soon as possible so that students can develop autonomy, confidence, and competence. This visual guide is particularly useful for educators, paraprofessionals, and support staff seeking to balance meaningful assistance with high expectations for student independence.
- **Definition of Inclusion:** This concise resource defines inclusive education as a commitment to ensuring that all students learn, belong, and participate together in their neighborhood schools and classrooms. It challenges the assumption that separate settings are in the best interest of students with disabilities and emphasizes that belonging is a fundamental human need. The handout also outlines key features of inclusive education in practice, including shared ownership, meaningful participation, and access to grade-level learning opportunities. It serves as a clear introduction to the values and practices that support truly inclusive schools.
- **Para-Bytes Paraprofessional Training — Inclusive Strategies for Schools:** Para-Bytes is a comprehensive professional learning program designed specifically for paraprofessionals and support staff working in inclusive schools. Through 24 bite-sized, on-demand learning modules, participants explore practical strategies related to inclusion, academics, behavior, student independence, and belonging. The program combines research-based practices with immediately applicable tools, helping paraprofessionals build confidence while supporting students in ways that promote participation, relationships, and autonomy. Para-Bytes serves as a valuable resource for districts seeking consistent, high-quality professional development that strengthens inclusive practices across classrooms and schools.

- **[Inclusion Podcast Episode 49: Support Is a Verb — Not a Human](#)**: This resource challenges the common belief that supporting students in inclusive classrooms requires assigning more adults. Instead, it reframes support as the intentional actions educators take before, during, and after instruction to increase access, participation, learning, and belonging. Through practical examples and reflection, the resource encourages educators to focus on effective strategies — such as planning for access, leveraging peer support, and using subtle prompts—rather than relying solely on adult proximity. It offers a powerful reminder that meaningful support is measured by its impact, not by the number of adults present.



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