

19 Ways to Step Back and Build Independence



*Adapted from Classroom Collaboration,
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It often feels right to give help to students with disabilities, but this may not be in their best interest. Use this list to help yourself to step back.

- (1) You're stepping back so your students can step forward and become independent. Keep this in mind.
- (2) Clock how long it actually takes for students to start zippers, pick up dropped papers, or find page numbers. What's a few more seconds in the grander scheme?
- (3) Sit on your hands for a whole task while you practice giving verbal instead of touch cues. Hands off the hands! Or give touch or visual cues instead of verbal cues.
- (4) If you need touch cues, try hand-under-hand instead of hand-over-hand. This gives students much more choice.
- (5) Let your students make mistakes and get into trouble. It's part of the human experience!
- (6) Acknowledge your own needs. There's a reason you chose the helping profession.
- (7) Sit further away. If you've been within arm's reach, sit just within earshot. If you've been sitting just within earshot, sit across the room.
- (8) Pat yourself on the back every time you help by supporting and scaffolding, not thinking. Your job is to assist in skill acquisition, NOT do the thinking!
- (9) Even though helping can feel right, be aware that too much assistance is short-sighted. Sometimes less is more, less is better.
- (10) Catch yourself before you correct your students' work. Don't cover for them. This is about their skills... not yours.
- (11) Commit to no intervention for a whole activity. Take data instead. Things might not fall apart as much as you had expected.
- (12) "What page are we on?" "What's for lunch?" Have students ask their classmates instead of you, both during school and on the telephone.
- (13) Assign student learning partners and sighted guides.
- (14) Teach students to decline assistance, "Thanks, but please let me try it by myself."
- (15) Whenever you add prompts, include a plan to phase them out.
- (16) Let others know that you need to step back so that your students can be more independent. You're not shirking your responsibilities.
- (17) Collaborate with other adults to break your habits of helping too much. Agree to remind each other to step back.
- (18) Try helping only when classroom teachers give you a signal. They may prefer to respond directly or to give students longer to work it out alone.
- (19) Post a sign: "Are there any other ways I could step back?"

