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?”