

Staff Room Question 6: Working with EA's, ECE's and CYW's... what every OT needs to know.

Question: Is it appropriate to ask these individuals for advice about the class?

Answer: Since the ECE or EA is an important part of the classroom team, I'm sure they have valuable knowledge about the students. In many cases, communication with other team members allows for a positive day with the students. – Marsha Jones

Question: Is it appropriate for one of these individuals to discipline the class if they won't listen to you the teacher?

Answer: As far as discipline, that would be the responsibility of the teacher. The ECE or EA may inform the OT of practices that are used successfully in the classroom. – Marsha Jones

Question: What do you do if you have a problem with one of these individuals not being supportive to you as a supply?

Answer: If there is an issue or difficulty with the EA, my first suggestion would be to talk with the EA. If that does not work or is not possible, advice would be sought from the administrator. – Marsha Jones

The “Please feel free to contact me for further details” Responses:

The one piece of advice I can give to OT's when they walk into a classroom is to honour the knowledge the EA, ECE, and CYW has. From my experience with LLS classes at the secondary level, the students in those classes really need to know and trust the people around them. It is important for an OT to realize that the staff that work with those students every day, have this trust built up already. They know their students' needs, triggers, how to deal with behaviours and everything else that comes with that student and his/her history.

As an OT going into an LLS classroom, it is so important to communicate with the staff that are there. Your day will go so much smoother if you let them do their job properly. If an EA or CYW disagrees with something that you are planning to do, or have suggestions to make a lesson work better, it is not because they are being "bossy" or anything like that, they are just trying to make the classroom work for their students.

Be kind and realize the wealth of knowledge and skill that these wonderful people have. A couple of years ago I took an LTO in a high school LLS class and I had no experience in an LLS class. The staff in that room helped me with the students and taught me so much. To this day they are all great friends and I truly respect the job they do. - Sharon Little

It seems to vary by school and even by classroom. The simplest situation is when an EA or CYW has certain students they work with and they (or the teacher) let me know up front. I try not to let having another adult in the room make a big difference to the way I approach the job. I still try to learn the students' names etc. It is great to be able to run routines or classroom expectations by them if it's not made explicit in the notes! I have had great experiences working with ECEs- though different classrooms divide the load differently. This is a team teaching situation, which I enjoy. Most challenging in terms of role- having a teacher candidate in the room! - Michelle Harkness

For me, the strangest experience I had was when I was in a class for a few days and an EA kept asking me if I needed her to do anything for me. I know that EA's do not do my photocopying or write notes on chart paper for me. However, this EA kept asking me if she could do just that. I would smile and say no and she would go about preparing other things. It wasn't until the end of the second day that I learned she was actually an EA assigned to the teacher who had a back issue and needed help with certain tasks. – Jennifer Breckenridge

ECE's report to the principal, not to the teacher. It is a team-teaching role and we have a wide range of duties as this is the first year. We do not have a job description at this time and each classroom will be set up differently. Please, please, please, ask the ECE you are working with! Generally speaking, you will find us moving from learning centre to learning centre helping the children with their activities.

It is very frustrating to have an OT come into your classroom and completely ignore you. I have had many come work with me and not even say "hello". If you're uncomfortable or unsure about working with an ECE, let them know at the beginning of the day. I have had to go to the principal about the treatment I have received from an OT. Don't be afraid to ask us (or EA's/CYW's) questions, we know how the classroom runs (and which children to keep separated). - Avril Burns

One observation I have as an OT and in past work within schools is that teachers do not usually socialize with support staff during lunch breaks. I've wondered why more teachers are not taking advantage of the friendships and information support staff can provide? As an OT coming into a classroom that has support staff, specifically ECEs, I always have a conversation with them before class to work out who will take the lead for each part of the day. As someone new entering the classroom I find that it is best to support the regular classroom staff because they are familiar with the routines and children. I enjoy becoming part of the team and learning from other educators' classroom routines, management, and lessons. I also find as an OT that it is best practice to seek out support staff early in the day and introduce myself and find out how and when they can assist me throughout the day if needed. Support staff are also friendly and welcoming to OTs entering the school. – Amber McCourt

I generally defer with these very talented and dedicated individuals. Most are no end of help regarding classroom procedures. I have a tendency to over look minor indiscretions regarding "me being the person in charge" looking toward a smooth day. Most will consult me about what is expected to happen next, however, if they don't I

gently remind them to keep me in the loop. If an EA or CYW is not helpful (this is very rare), depending on the circumstances, I might leave a note for the teacher. I have to say that in most cases my experiences with EAs and CYWs have been positive. - Ingrid Morgan

In response to your question, I always check with the ECE. I love working with them because they know how the classroom runs and they often can communicate so much more than a teacher's day plans. I feel like I am a guest in their work space. They also provide familiarity and continuity for the students. I like to go over the day plans with them to make sure that nothing has been missed. Usually it's not necessary but it always helps to make the day run more smoothly. – Sean Veacock

Anonymous

As someone who has an EA in my classroom for half of the day every day I have a lot of opinions about this and sadly some experiences that were not positive between my EA and OT's. It is my opinion that OT's should treat any person in a position to make their day more positive as their new best friend. What a visiting OT needs to keep in mind is that this person is a great resource for them, not only do they know the students very well, but they know the routines and can often interpret unclear plans with accuracy as they know the regular teacher as well. I let my EA know if I am going to be away ahead of time so that she can help the OT in any way possible. Sadly this year very few have given her the time or attention she deserved when she came to the class early to introduce herself and make them aware of any students they should have a heads up about. I realize this email may not have come out the way I wanted it to sound (as we have had some excellent OT's in my room this year who have made sure to touch base with my EA and take her advice to heart) and it may not be politically correct to make some of the observations I have made it public but it is very frustrating to come back from being ill to situations that could easily have been handled right away if only the OT had taken the advice of the EA who works closely with these children every day. I value the opinions and insights of my EA and she is an indispensable member of our teaching team.

EA's are almost always assigned to one or more students and our job is to help that student. Though we are more than willing to answer questions and help where we can, our primary obligation (and therefore focus and attention) is to that student.

As an OT, the key to working with all of these staff members is to have the same respect for them that you and every other staff member at a school deserves. Most EAs, ECEs, and CYWs will gladly tell you their role in the particular classroom, especially if asked. Most are also willing to explain what you can do to help the student(s) they work with most frequently have a successful day. Another staff member who is regularly in the classroom can be a tremendous help in explaining routines and where resources can be found. I am always delighted to find there is an EA or ECE or CYW in the classroom, even if only for part of the day. As for the role of these staff members, there is no question it varies highly from school to school and even

classroom to classroom. While they work with teachers, EAs, ECEs, and CYWs do not report to teachers. I believe the most effective classrooms are those where every adult in the class works in partnership towards the goal of helping students be successful.

"The purpose of a CYW is to provide instructional support in academic, social, physical, emotional and behavioural programs for students in a variety of learning situations. As well the CYW/EA carries out personal care duties to meet the physical needs of students. As part of the student support team, the EA/CYW promotes and maintains a safe, caring and restorative school environment.

The EA/CYW, as part of the student support team work collaboratively to assist in the delivery, development and implementation of social, emotional and behavioural programs to support the student, family and school personnel."

- taken from the job description for the Kawartha Pine Ridge School Board

The role of a CYW varies depending on the school. For example in an elementary role I was more focused on an individual with a diagnosis (ADHD, ODD, Down Syndrome etc.) My purpose there was to make transitions as smooth as possible and keep the student safe. I would use different skills developed in my college program such as token economy, and rewards. At a high school level I have a wider role. My focus is on the grade 9/10's, but take direction for the principal if I need to be in specific classrooms with individual students, as they are a distraction in the class or need hand over hand support. I report to the principal and the vice principal. When I was on call I just checked in with the head secretary and they directed me to the VP or Principal if there was special instruction. OT's should ask any questions to the EA/CYW's about the classes they are in, as they will know the students very well and have a good relationship with them. Any OT should be open to the suggestions of a CYW/ EA, ask what works best in the class, are there any "high needs" students or students with IEP's and gear your teaching to be sure that the students will have a chance to learn without risk of humiliation.