



# What Makes a Good Accommodation?

by Cindy Goldrich, EdM, ACAC

**P**ARENTS AND EDUCATORS OFTEN STRUGGLE when it comes to deciding whether or not to provide a child with an accommodation or modification. In giving a child a “leg up” or a “crutch” are we making them more dependent? Are we preventing them from trying their best? Are we giving them a message that they aren’t capable of reaching their peer’s standards? These are important distinctions and not always easy to determine.

One way to address this issue is to look at how we define “enabling” versus “supporting.” When I ask parents and educators to define enabling, I get answers such as:

- When we don’t expect the child to do what they could do, or should do, on their own.
- When we make excuses for a child, who has acted poorly, or not done as they are expected to do.
- When we “over-help” or “fix” the work the child has done.

- When we don’t allow the natural consequences of their behavior to occur.

If a child forgets to bring in their violin for the third time this month and the parent brings it to school in time for orchestra, is this parent enabling the child? It may appear that way at first, but let’s consider another possibility.

Perhaps the child knows that he must finish his homework before practicing the violin. And, of course, it takes a long time to complete homework (or anything) for this child. So, trying to be good, he goes downstairs and practices until his dad says, “Come up, Jonny, it’s time to shower and get ready for bed.” So, Jonny leaves his violin, planning to pack up after the shower.

The next morning, Dad goes downstairs after Jonny leaves for school and *there is the violin*. “*What should I do?*” he thinks. “*I don’t want him to get in trouble. And I know he isn’t great about being organized—in fact, it’s not my strong suit either sometimes. And gee, he made the bus today! And his shoes matched! Okay, his room is a mess, and he did fight with his sister. But we are working on those things. I guess I have to add ‘getting organized for school’ to the list. Oh, that list is long—but the other things on there are more important right now. I think I’ll just bring in the violin again and make a plan on helping him—when we have time to focus on that issue.*”

Here is my definition of enabling:

**Enabling is doing something for someone else without a PLAN to help them do it for themselves.**

So perhaps before we judge from the outside that someone is enabling, we may need to step back and recognize that we don’t know what we don’t know. What may seem like enabling may actually be “supporting”—providing a short-term solution until a behavior can be learned or a problem can be solved.

## Social and emotional learning

These days, fortunately, there is a growing awareness that we need to look beyond just the academic and functional impact of helping a child, but also at the *social and emotional learning* (SEL) impact as well. Social and emotional learning is the process where we address how children understand and manage their emotions. It’s another way of saying that we must consider helping the child’s *emotional regulation* skill development, another term you may have been hearing a lot of in recent years.

The message we give a child when we provide an accommodation or modification at home or school is as important, and sometimes *more* important, than the adaptation itself. We want to be cheering on their efforts and letting them know that we are not lowering our standards when we change the expectation. Rather, we are recognizing the ability they have now and are working *with them* to help them work toward achieving the expectation. We are their partner, their coach, and their cheerleader. And when they are ready, which we believe they will ultimately be, then we will continue to move the bar of the expectation forward.

“Remember the Stool” is a true-life example of how impactful a simple accommodation can be. This story cautions us not to overlook the simple, kind, and fair ways we can make a difference in the life of a child. Remember, fair does not mean equal. It means giving everyone what they need.

Remember, a simple accommodation stands to make a big difference in how we perceive our self-worth and what is possible.

Thanks to David Gitelson, for sharing a story about his childhood experience. 🍌

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## Remember the Stool

by David Gitelson

In fourth grade, Miss I broke the mold. Actually, she shattered it.

She wasn’t anything like the teachers I’d grown accustomed to in elementary school. She wasn’t eighty years old; more like twenty-five, I guessed.

She lacked the jowls, the wrinkles, and the snares that some of a certain age acquire.

Miss I, in fact, was young and beautiful, and if any boy in the class said he wasn’t in love with her, he was lying.

Her hair was jet black, her dark eyes glistened, her perpetual smile warmed the room.

When Miss I chose me to wash the blackboards, life couldn’t get better. It was the most wonderful job a student could have: water play at school.

I was good at it.

I was really good at it.

I was a blackboard washing artist.

My strokes were smooth, graceful, and masterfully swift.

Quickly, though, I came to realize a board washer had to be tall. And, as much as I wanted to be, I wasn’t.

Success eluded me, but not from a lack of trying... because I did. I really did.

Stretching my right arm high above my head, and jumping, short, quick jumps, I’d swipe at the board’s upper edge.

I’d come close... so, so close.

But consistency failed me, leaving small chalky blotches at the top of the board.

I prayed no one noticed.

But Miss I, who I wanted to please... did.

I hated being short, and I suspect she knew it.

With a pained, but sympathetic expression on her face, she softly told me, “We’ll find you a new job.”

How I hated those words.

Sauntering slowly back to my seat, staring straight ahead, humiliated, I could feel the eyes of my classmates on my back.

Years later, a friend with whom I shared this story asked, “Why didn’t she give you a stool?”

“Why didn’t she give me a stool?” I repeated the question.

“Why didn’t she give me a stool?”

I felt anger.

How could she have humiliated me? Hadn’t I admired her?

Had she betrayed me?

Or, I hoped, had it simply not occurred to her?

Since then, whatever I’m doing, when things get tough, I try never to forget... to remember the stool.

Children with ADHD®, designed to teach parents and caregivers how to manage and support their children’s unique needs successfully. Her workshops are offered nationwide by her staff of trained ADHD parent coaches. She is also a recognized keynote speaker and provides professional development for school districts nationwide, addressing how ADHD and executive function deficits impact children and how to help boost behavior and performance in school and at home. Through her ADHD Parent Coach Academy, she trains other professionals to become ADHD parent coaches.