

ADHD

Information for Educators

ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) makes it difficult for children to control their behavior. ADHD is one of the most common childhood disorders, affecting 4-12 percent of school-aged children. While it is more common in boys, girls can also be diagnosed with ADHD.

Treatment and support can help students with ADHD manage their symptoms and succeed in school. Students with ADHD are most successful when teachers and parents work together.

Common ADHD Symptoms

Children with ADHD may exhibit some or all of the following symptoms.

Inattention

- ▶ Has a hard time paying attention or daydreams
- ▶ Often does not listen
- ▶ Pays little to no attention to details
- ▶ Becomes bored quickly
- ▶ Has difficulty beginning and completing tasks

Hyperactivity

- ▶ Cannot stay seated or is constantly moving
- ▶ Frequently squirms and fidgets
- ▶ Talks too much

Impulsivity

- ▶ Acts without thinking
- ▶ Interrupts others
- ▶ Exhibits unsafe behavior, such as running into the street without looking

The term ADD (attention-deficit disorder) is sometimes used when a student has Inattentive Type ADHD. A student with ADD does not have symptoms of hyperactivity or impulsivity.

Treating ADHD

The outlook for children who have received an ADHD diagnosis is good, as long as they receive the proper treatment and support. The following are possible treatment options: behavior therapy, individual and family counseling, medication, school accommodations and modifications.

Teachers can help by providing feedback as to how well treatments are working in the classroom, and by helping IEP and 504 team members address symptoms and develop solutions.

Supporting Students with ADHD

Teachers play a crucial role in helping students with ADHD achieve success. Here are a few ways you can support students with ADHD.

- ▶ **Establish rules.** Establish classroom rules and expectations so that all students are clear on which behaviors are acceptable and which are not.
- ▶ **Reduce distractions.** Seat students with ADHD in low distraction areas of the classroom, and be mindful of the students who are seated around them.
- ▶ **Provide structure.** Help students with ADHD stay on task by giving them simple instructions and providing frequent, clear feedback on what they should be doing. Also, help these students break large assignments down into smaller tasks.
- ▶ **Encourage active participation.** Strategies like writing answers on the board, choral response, and creative group activities can keep students with ADHD more engaged.

Be patient, provide encouragement, and give frequent praise for small achievements.

Be sure to also support the parents of your students with ADHD. Provide suggestions, encouragement, and praise for their child whenever possible.

For more information, visit chadd.org.

Autism

Information for Educators

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a developmental disability that can vary greatly in severity. Because ASD can impact the way a child learns, communicates, and interacts with others, it's important that teachers stay informed and adaptable when working with students on the autism spectrum.

Signs and Symptoms

The following are some of the signs and symptoms of ASD. These signs usually appear in early childhood.

- ▶ Isn't interested in or has difficulty relating to others
- ▶ Avoids eye contact
- ▶ Has a hard time talking about his/her own feelings
- ▶ Does not recognize the feelings of others
- ▶ Resists or doesn't express physical affection
- ▶ Repeats certain words or actions frequently
- ▶ Has trouble adapting to new routines
- ▶ Has obsessive interests
- ▶ Has delayed speech or language skills
- ▶ Has flat or inappropriate facial expressions

Screening and Diagnosis

If a child is diagnosed with autism, his/her diagnosis includes the following more specific conditions.

- ▶ Autistic disorder
- ▶ Asperger's syndrome
- ▶ Pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS)

Be informed about the particular diagnosis your student has received. Because students on the autism spectrum exhibit a wide range of characteristics, needs, and abilities, it's important for teachers to understand where they fall on the spectrum, and what that means for their educational needs.

Issues and Solutions

The following are common classroom issues and behaviors that students with ASD sometimes exhibit, as well as what teachers can do to help.

- ▶ **Interrupting or making irrelevant comments.** Gentle reminders to take turns while speaking, and to stay on topic, will help students with ASD learn speech etiquette.
- ▶ **Difficulty adapting to change.** If there is to be a change in the routine (e.g., a substitute teacher, field trip, etc.), give your student ample warning, and provide reassurance that he/she will have support through the change.
- ▶ **Difficulty understanding and following social norms.** Students with ASD may exhibit behaviors that are inappropriate for the situation (e.g., talking with an “outside” voice in class). Gently help students learn appropriate social behaviors, and acknowledge positive group/social interactions when they occur.
- ▶ **Trouble staying on task.** Provide your student with frequent, clear feedback on what he/she should be doing. It can also be helpful to show students with ASD how to break down large assignments into smaller, less daunting tasks.
- ▶ **Sensory sensitivities.** Allow for appropriate coping strategies, such as taking breaks, wearing a hood, or putting on sunglasses. Also be aware of sound levels in the classroom. For example, if a student has sensory issues and you’re showing a video, you might discuss its content with him/her ahead of time.

Most importantly, be patient, provide encouragement, and give frequent praise.

Be sure to also support the parents of your students with autism. Provide suggestions, encouragement, and praise for their child whenever possible.

For information on ASD, visit autism-society.org.

Asperger's Syndrome

Information for Educators

Asperger's syndrome is a developmental disorder that can cause significant social impairments. Asperger's Syndrome is now considered part of the Autism Spectrum rather than a distinct condition.*

Autism and Asperger's

Asperger's syndrome is often characterized as a less severe form of autism. There are, however, a number of differences.

- ▶ Speech delays are often less pronounced in children with Asperger's, which means that they are often diagnosed later than other children on the autism spectrum.
- ▶ Asperger's syndrome typically does not include cognitive or intellectual impairment. While they can suffer from learning disabilities like any other child, children with Asperger's typically have average or above average intelligence.

Signs and Symptoms

Because children with Asperger's are usually diagnosed later than other children on the autism spectrum, teachers need to be especially observant, and watch for the following.

- ▶ Awkward or poor social skills
- ▶ Obsessive routines and/or patterns
- ▶ Poor eye contact or staring at others
- ▶ Inappropriate behaviors / odd mannerisms
- ▶ Intense interest in specific topics
- ▶ Frustration in group/social situations – not understanding why they're not accepted
- ▶ Hypersensitivity to light and/or sounds

**While Asperger's is no longer considered separate from Autism Spectrum Disorder, some parents might find it helpful to seek out Asperger's-specific resources and support.*

Issues and Solutions

The following are common classroom issues and behaviors that students with Asperger's sometimes exhibit, as well as what teachers can do to help.

- ▶ **Interrupting or making irrelevant comments.** Gentle reminders to take turns while speaking and to stay on topic will help students with Asperger's learn speech etiquette.
- ▶ **Difficulty adapting to change.** If there is to be a change in the routine (e.g., a substitute teacher, field trip, etc.), give your student ample warning. Also provide reassurance that he/she will have support through the change.
- ▶ **Difficulty understanding and following social norms.** Students with Asperger's may exhibit behaviors that are inappropriate for the situation (e.g., talking with an "outside" voice in class). Gently help students learn appropriate social behaviors, and acknowledge positive group/social interactions when they occur.
- ▶ **Trouble staying on task.** Provide your student with frequent, clear feedback on what he/she should be doing. Also, help students with Asperger's break larger assignments down into smaller, less daunting tasks.
- ▶ **Sensory sensitivities.** Allow for appropriate coping strategies, such as taking breaks, wearing a hood, or putting on sunglasses. Also be aware of sound levels in the classroom. For example, if a student has sensory issues and you're showing a video, you might discuss its content with him/her ahead of time.

Most importantly, be patient, provide encouragement, and give frequent praise.

Be sure to also support the parents of your students with Asperger's. Provide suggestions, encouragement, and praise for their child whenever possible.

For more information, visit autism-society.org.

Dyslexia

Information for Educators

Dyslexia is a learning disability that affects the part of the brain that processes language. Words and letters appear “mixed up” to people with dyslexia, though their vision and intelligence are unaffected by dyslexia.

Because the effects of dyslexia are so closely tied to academic performance, it’s important for teachers to be aware of dyslexia symptoms, and know how to support students with dyslexia.

Symptoms

Dyslexia is often not diagnosed until a child is school aged. However, before starting school, children with dyslexia often learn to talk late, have problems learning new words, and have a hard time remembering words and names.

Once a child with dyslexia is in school, the following symptoms often emerge:

- ▶ Reading below grade level
- ▶ Difficulty spelling
- ▶ Difficulty finding the right words when answering questions
- ▶ Avoiding reading or activities involving reading
- ▶ Taking a long time completing reading and writing assignments
- ▶ Difficulty reading aloud
- ▶ Mispronouncing words, even familiar ones
- ▶ Trouble remembering the sequence of events
- ▶ Difficulty memorizing things
- ▶ Difficulty telling or remembering a story

Children with dyslexia are also at a greater risk for ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder).

If you suspect a student has dyslexia, or if he/she has been diagnosed, watch for ADHD symptoms as well.

Supporting Students with Dyslexia

Teachers play a large role in supporting students with dyslexia, and in helping them overcome the challenges they experience in school.

The following are some tips for working with and supporting students with dyslexia in your classroom.

- ▶ **Build confidence.** Students with dyslexia often struggle with self-confidence when it comes to learning, and they may at times want to give up without even trying. Provide lots of encouragement and give praise for small achievements.
- ▶ **Be flexible with written work.** Accepting typed rather than handwritten work, or occasionally allowing test questions to be answered orally, can help students with dyslexia build confidence in their abilities.
- ▶ **Vary methods of delivery.** If possible, try to use a variety of instructional strategies, including oral, visual, and written content. Students with dyslexia will likely feel more confident working with oral and visual elements.
- ▶ **Give students a break from reading aloud.** Reading aloud, especially in front of a class, can be a great source of stress for students with dyslexia. If possible, don't make reading aloud a requirement for these students, unless they are able to read with confidence.
- ▶ **Check understanding.** Check in with students to make sure they understand assignments or how to do a task, especially if directions are written.
- ▶ **Listen and reassure.** Students with dyslexia can sometimes feel "dumb" or discouraged by school. Help students work through frustrations and reassure them that they are smart and capable; their brains just work a little differently.

For more information, visit dyslexiaida.org.

Learning Disabilities

Information for Educators

Learning disabilities impact specific academic skills, such as reading, writing, or math. They also often impact a child's organization and time management skills, attention, and/or memory.

Individuals with learning disabilities don't see, hear, or understand things the same as other students. And because their brains are wired differently, they often have difficulty learning in a traditional classroom.

Learning disabilities are not caused by intellectual or physical disabilities. In fact, individuals with learning disabilities typically have average or above average intelligence.

Specific Learning Disabilities

While learning disabilities are unique to each individual, the following are some of the most common learning disabilities.

- ▶ **Auditory Processing Disorder** is a condition that affects how someone receives verbal information and processes meaning.
- ▶ **Dyscalculia** impacts a person's ability to use and understand math. In addition to having difficulty in math class, individuals with this condition may have a hard time counting, using money, and/or telling time.
- ▶ **Dysgraphia** affects fine motor skills. Someone with this condition usually has illegible handwriting, and may also have issues with spacing, spelling, and putting thoughts into written words.
- ▶ **Dyslexia** affects the part of the brain that processes language. Words and letters appear "mixed up."

Signs of Learning Disabilities

- ▶ Extreme disorganization and/or poor time management skills
- ▶ Difficulty with one school subject in particular
- ▶ Very slow doing homework
- ▶ Memory problems
- ▶ Difficulty focusing on details
- ▶ Trouble expressing oneself out loud or in writing
- ▶ A growing dislike of, or frustration with, school

If you have concerns or suspect a student may have a learning disability, discuss your concerns with the student's parents and/or counselor.

Support for Students with Learning Disabilities

Students with diagnosed learning disabilities are usually eligible to receive help and support through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan.

- ▶ An IEP is a document designed to meet the unique needs of a child who is eligible for special education services. An IEP often includes individualized, one-on-one instruction or tutoring.
- ▶ A 504 plan is developed to ensure that students with disabilities receive the support and accommodations they need to succeed in the general classroom. Accommodations often include extended test time, alternate test delivery methods, and more.

Teachers play a crucial role in helping a child with a learning disability succeed. A teacher's support, patience, and encouragement can go a long way in helping a child with a learning disability grow, thrive, and succeed in school.

Also support the parents of your students with learning disabilities. Provide suggestions, encouragement, and praise for their child whenever possible.

For more information, visit LDAmerica.org

Intellectual Disability

Information for Educators

An intellectual disability limits an individual's thought processes (their ability to learn and understand). An intellectual disability also negatively impacts a person's social and life skills—skills used in everyday situations.

While individuals with an intellectual disability need support, they can learn, grow, and thrive, both in and out of the classroom.

Limitations and Characteristics

Individuals with an intellectual disability experience limitations in the following two areas:

Intellectual functioning – the ability to learn, reason, and problem solve. Intellectual functioning is typically measured with an IQ test. An IQ test score of 70-75 or below indicates impaired intellectual functioning.

Adaptive behavior – conceptual, social, and practical skills

- ▶ *Conceptual skills*: language, reading and writing, money, time, and number concepts
- ▶ *Social skills*: interpersonal skills, self-esteem, the ability to follow rules, and the ability to determine if someone is trustworthy
- ▶ *Practical skills*: daily living tasks (e.g., hygiene, housekeeping), job skills, transportation, use of money, health care, routines, and personal safety

It's important to remember that all people with intellectual disabilities are different, and that they are likely to be more skilled in some areas than they are in others. It's also important to remember that with ongoing support, these individuals can grow in the above areas throughout their lives, especially in adaptive behaviors.

Supporting Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Students with an intellectual disability are eligible for an IEP (Individualized Education Program), and are likely receiving special education services. Because the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) states that students should be placed in the least restrictive environment, intellectually disabled students are placed in a general classroom when it's appropriate.

Here are some tips for working with IEP teams and special education faculty—and some ways for you to support students who have intellectual disabilities.

► **Provide the services and supports included in the IEP.** First and foremost, be aware of any accommodations or modifications that you are required to provide.

Depending on the individual, students with intellectual disabilities may need such things as a quiet workspace, increased safety measures, or assistive technology. Students with intellectual disabilities may also benefit from specific teaching strategies, such as frequent repetition of concepts, more hands-on and visual activities, or peer tutoring.

► **Help advance the goals of the IEP.**

As a teacher, you can provide an IEP team with valuable insights regarding a student's classroom behavior and academic progress. An IEP team will also be interested in knowing what intervention strategies you have used, as well as any suggestions or concerns you may have.

Students with intellectual disabilities are capable of growing and learning just like any other student. Be a point of comfort and encouragement for your students, and don't underestimate them.

For more information, visit aaidd.org.

Speech or Language Impairment

Information for Educators

Speech and language impairments impact a person's communication, articulation, and voice. Because a speech or language impairment can adversely affect a child's academic performance and social development, it's important to support these students as much as possible.

Speech Impairment

Speech impairment refers to a range of disorders that impact the way a person speaks. Speech impairment can have a variety of causes and symptoms, as well as a wide range of severity.

- ▶ **Speech sound disorders** impact an individual's ability to articulate certain letters or sounds (e.g., pronouncing an "r" like a "w").
- ▶ **Stuttering** occurs when the flow of speech is disrupted by involuntary repetitions or abnormal hesitations (pausing).
- ▶ **Apraxia, verbal dyspraxia,** and **dysarthria** are impairments caused by injury or a neurological condition. They impact the motor functions involved in speech, such as the brain's ability to control the mouth and throat.

Language Impairment

Language impairment impacts a person's ability to understand or use language.

- ▶ **Language-based learning disabilities** impact listening, comprehension, and speech.
- ▶ **Specific language impairment** refers to instances when a child's language abilities do not develop normally, and the impairment cannot be attributed to physical or mental impairment.
- ▶ **Selective mutism** is a disorder that is marked by a child's refusal to speak despite being physically and intellectually able to do so.

Support Your Student

Speech and language impairments can impact a child's ability to communicate, participate in class, and make friends. It is, therefore, important for teachers to support these students and see that they get the help and support they need. Teachers can make a huge difference in how a student with a speech or language impairment feels about school.

- ▶ **Learn all you can.** Speech and language impairments are all different. If you have a student in your class with a speech or language impairment, learn all you can about that impairment, as well as how it affects that individual student's learning.
- ▶ **Communicate regularly with parents.** Regularly give and receive updates on the student's progress at school and at home.
- ▶ **Participate in IEP/504 teams.** Students with a diagnosed speech or language impairment are typically eligible for an IEP or 504 plan.

As a teacher, you can provide an IEP or 504 team with valuable insights regarding a student's classroom behavior and academic progress. An IEP or 504 team will also be interested in knowing what intervention strategies you have used, as well as any suggestions or concerns you may have.

- ▶ **Support your student.** Be patient, supportive, and encouraging—and look for ways to build your student's skills and confidence.

Children with speech and language impairments are often at risk for bullying. Regularly check in with these students to ask how things are going, and emphasize that they can come to you with any issues or concerns they may have.

- ▶ **Ask for help.** If you would like information on how to help a student with a particular speech or language issue, talk to the IEP or 504 team, or to the student's speech therapist.

For more information, visit www.asha.org/public.

Giftedness

Information for Educators

Children are characterized as gifted when their ability in a certain area is significantly above the norm for others their age. They may have superior cognitive ability, be very creative, or be gifted in an academic subject, such as math or science.

Characteristics

All gifted children are different, but the following are some of the most common characteristics of gifted children.

- ▶ Is a fast learner
- ▶ Has an excellent memory
- ▶ Has a large vocabulary at a young age
- ▶ Enjoys puzzles and solving problems with numbers
- ▶ Has a keen sense of humor and a vivid imagination
- ▶ Understands abstract ideas at a young age
- ▶ Is intensely curious and asks lots of questions
- ▶ May have a heightened emotional sensitivity to social/humanitarian issues

Twice-Exceptional

A child is considered twice-exceptional if he/she is identified as gifted, but also has one or more disabilities (e.g., physical disability, learning disability, speech or language impairment, autism).

Twice-exceptional children often get frustrated in school, and sometimes have behavioral issues. As a result, twice-exceptional children can be especially challenging for teachers.

If you have a twice-exceptional child in your class, work with his/her IEP or 504 team to develop personalized strategies that effectively address the student's needs, and enable him/her to thrive and grow.

Strategies for Gifted Students

The following are examples of strategies designed to help gifted and talented (GT) students get the most out of school.

- ▶ **Acceleration:** Moving through the curriculum at a faster rate than is typical (e.g., skipping a grade, taking Advanced Placement courses)
- ▶ **Curriculum compacting:** Reducing the amount of time gifted students spend on subjects they've already mastered
- ▶ **Grouping:** Putting similarly gifted students together, giving them access to more complex material, and providing them with a peer group

Supporting Gifted Students

Here are some ways you can support gifted students.

- ▶ **Be flexible.** Gifted students come with a variety of talents and maturity levels. Be flexible in meeting the needs of different types of students.
- ▶ **Plan for independent work.** Have challenging independent work available for students who finish their assigned work early.
- ▶ **Allow for higher level learning.** Encouraging critical thinking and asking open-ended questions gives gifted students (and non-gifted students) an opportunity to demonstrate their level of thinking.
- ▶ **Be judicious.** While it may seem like a good idea to put gifted students in charge of groups or ask them to tutor other students, many would rather not be put in these positions.
- ▶ **Monitor perfectionism.** Gifted students can be very hard on themselves. This can sometimes lead to perfectionism, which can cause stress and anxiety. Be sure to praise effort as well as results.

Remember, gifted students can excel in one area and struggle in another. Try to be patient and adaptable.

For more resources and assistance in working with gifted students, visit nagc.org.

IEP

Information for Educators

An IEP, or Individualized Education Program, is a document created to address the unique needs of a child eligible for special education services. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlines what IEPs should generally include, IEPs vary greatly from state to state, school to school, and child to child.

IEP Eligibility

The following are the 13 categories of disabilities that make students eligible for special education services and an IEP.

- ▶ Specific learning disability
- ▶ Other health impairment (includes ADHD)
- ▶ Autism spectrum disorder
- ▶ Emotional disturbance
- ▶ Speech or language impairment
- ▶ Visual impairment, including blindness
- ▶ Deafness
- ▶ Hearing impairment
- ▶ Deaf-blindness
- ▶ Orthopedic impairment
- ▶ Intellectual disability
- ▶ Traumatic brain injury
- ▶ Multiple disabilities

The Initial Evaluation

Once a student has been identified as possibly needing special education services, whether by parent request or school identification, the child is evaluated by the school.

The teacher's role in this process is to provide information on the student's current performance in the classroom. This feedback will help ensure that students get the support and services they need.

Each IEP is unique, and the services outlined in an IEP will vary from student to student.

Contents of an IEP

IEPs are personalized for each child, but all IEPs contain the following information.

- ▶ Current educational performance levels
- ▶ Measurable annual goals (what the child is expected to do or learn in the next 12 months)
- ▶ The specific educational services to be provided to the student (e.g., tutoring, speech therapy, specialized instruction) and how these services will be implemented

Once an IEP is created, there is an IEP meeting during which all aspects of the IEP are explained to the student's parent(s).

The Teacher's Role

Even if most of the services provided to students on an IEP occur outside of the general education classroom, general education teachers play an important role in the successful development and implementation of IEPs. You can help your students succeed by doing the following.

- ▶ **Provide the services and supports included in the IEP.** Be aware of the accommodations or modifications you are required to provide, and understand your student's disability so that you will know how to best help him/her succeed in your class.
- ▶ **Help advance the goals of the IEP.** As a teacher, you can provide an IEP team with valuable insights regarding a student's classroom behavior and academic progress. An IEP team will also be interested in knowing what intervention strategies you have used, as well as any suggestions or concerns you may have.

An IEP is a legally binding document and public schools and teachers are required to provide the services outlined in a student's IEP.

For more information, visit understood.org.

504 Plan

Information for Educators

A 504 plan is developed to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same education as their non-disabled peers.

A 504 plan doesn't provide individualized instruction; however, it does provide students with various accommodations so they are able to succeed in the regular classroom.

504 Eligibility

Students with any disability may be eligible for a 504 plan, as long as the disability substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., learning).

A 504 plan has a wider range of eligibility than an IEP, which makes a 504 plan an option for students who don't qualify for special education services under IEP requirements.

The 504 Plan Process

Anyone (e.g., doctor, parent, teacher) can refer a student for a 504 plan. However, it's up to the school to determine if a student is eligible—and if a 504 plan is needed to help that student succeed in school.

Once a student is identified as needing a 504 plan, a team will determine what accommodations are to be included in the plan.

Different schools deal with 504 plans differently. Most 504 plans are written, but this isn't a requirement. It is a good idea, but also not a requirement, to review a student's 504 plan annually. During the annual meeting, which should include the parent(s), the team can determine if the 504 plan should continue, and if so, if any changes should be made.

A 504 plan is a legally binding document and public schools are required to provide the accommodations included in a student's 504 plan.

Accommodations

504 plans provide students with accommodations to help them succeed in the regular classroom, alongside their peers.

The following are some examples of accommodations provided in 504 plans. The majority of these are implemented and managed by the classroom teacher.

- ▶ Extended test times
- ▶ Alternative testing (oral delivery of questions)
- ▶ Technology aids
- ▶ Modified textbooks
- ▶ Peer assistance with notetaking
- ▶ Specific seating assignment
- ▶ Adjusted class schedules
- ▶ Behavior management support

Teacher Responsibilities

Teachers play an important role in the successful development and implementation of 504 plans. Help your students succeed by doing the following.

- ▶ **Provide the services included in the 504 plan.** First and foremost, be aware of any accommodations you are required to provide. Also, understand your student's disability so that you will know how to help and support him/her in your class.
- ▶ **Help advance the goals of the 504 plan.** As a teacher, you can provide a 504 team with valuable insights regarding a student's classroom behavior and academic progress. A 504 team will also be interested in knowing what intervention strategies you have used, as well as any concerns or suggestions you may have.

For more information, visit understood.org.

IEP vs. 504 Plan

Information for Educators

Both an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and a 504 plan help students with disabilities get the support they need to succeed in school. IEPs and 504 plans have a number of similarities, but there are also some significant differences.

For students with conditions that adversely impact their education, a well written, well implemented IEP or 504 plan will help ensure that they get the support and services they need.

	IEP	504 Plan
Legal Basis	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
Purpose	To provide individualized special education services for eligible students	To modify a student's educational program in the regular classroom setting
Eligibility	Students must have one or more of the 13 disabilities listed by IDEA as eligible to receive services. The disability must also adversely impact a child's academic performance.	Students must have a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., learning). Section 504 has a broader definition of disability than IDEA.
Contents	An IEP is a written document developed by an IEP team. It details a student's current educational performance, services, goals, accommodations, modifications, placement, and more.	There is no standard form for a 504 plan. Most 504 plans are written, but it is not a requirement. 504 plans generally include accommodations, and information on who provides them.

IEP or 504 Plan?

Both an IEP and a 504 plan are legally binding documents, and public schools are required to implement the services, accommodations, and/or modifications provided in them.

Many students qualify for both an IEP and a 504 plan. In these cases, it's up to the parents and the school to work together to come up with the support plan that's best for that particular student.

When an IEP is Appropriate

- ▶ An IEP is the best choice if a student needs services that must occur outside the general classroom.
- ▶ Examples of services provided may include, but are not limited to: tutoring, speech therapy, specialized instruction, and occupational therapy.
- ▶ If the student is below grade level in achievement, an IEP may be the best option, though there are many other factors to consider as well.

When a 504 Plan is Appropriate

- ▶ A 504 plan is appropriate when students generally function well in the regular classroom, but need extra supports (accommodations) to perform at their best.
- ▶ A 504 plan may include accommodations such as extended test time, audio textbooks, a specific seating assignment, or peer assistance with notetaking. While rare, 504 plans can include modifications such as alternative testing (fewer or different questions) or less demanding assignments.
- ▶ Teachers should be instrumental in deciding what kinds of accommodations are appropriate—especially since teachers are the ones who must implement and manage classroom accommodations.

Accommodations that are included in 504 plans (e.g., extra test time, adaptive tools, extra breaks) may also be included in IEPs.

Special Education Terms

Information for Educators

Teachers play a crucial role in helping their students get the support they need to succeed. Familiarity with these special education terms and acronyms will help you better understand and support your special education students.

- ▶ **504 Plan:** A plan developed to ensure that students with disabilities receive the accommodations they need to succeed in the regular classroom
- ▶ **Accommodations:** Alterations that enable a student to work around a disability, without a change in the curriculum (e.g., giving answers orally, having extra time on assignments)
- ▶ **Annual Review (AR):** Yearly meeting of an IEP team to assess a student's needs and progress
- ▶ **Assessment:** An evaluation used to identify a student's strengths, weaknesses, and progress
- ▶ **Assistive Technology (AT):** Technology devices used to help students perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for them
- ▶ **Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP):** A plan specifically targeting one to three of a student's undesirable or disruptive classroom behaviors
- ▶ **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** The right to equal educational opportunities
- ▶ **Individualized Education Program (IEP):** A document that defines the special education services to be delivered to students who qualify, as defined by IDEA (There are 13 categories of disabilities that make students eligible for an IEP.)
- ▶ **IEP Team:** The group of individuals (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, special education staff) who meet to make decisions on a student's IEP

- ▶ **Inclusion:** The opportunity for students with disabilities to learn alongside their non-disabled peers in regular education classrooms
- ▶ **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** The law that guarantees educational equality for students with disabilities
- ▶ **Intelligence Quotient (IQ):** The score derived from cognitive (intelligence) testing
- ▶ **Interventions:** Instructional methods designed to target a student's educational needs
- ▶ **Least restrictive environment (LRE):** A requirement stating that, as much as possible, students with disabilities must be taught in the same setting as students without disabilities
- ▶ **Modifications:** Changes (or adaptations) to what is being taught or expected of a disabled student, making it possible for him/her to participate in a classroom with students who have no disabilities (e.g., having easier or shorter assignments)
- ▶ **Outcomes:** The specific, short-term, measurable goals included on an IEP
- ▶ **Performance-based tests:** Assessments that measure a student's academic performance and eligibility for special education services
- ▶ **Resource Teacher:** A special education teacher who helps students with learning difficulties
- ▶ **Response to Intervention (RTI):** The process by which the success of an intervention is examined and modified
- ▶ **Special Education:** Instruction that is specifically designed to bolster the success of qualified students

For a comprehensive list of terms, visit specialeducationguide.com/special-education-dictionary.