

ADHD

Information for Parents

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. It is, therefore, important for parents to get help for a child with ADHD as early as possible.

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 hyperactivity or impulsivity symptoms.)

Treating ADHD

The outlook for children who have received an ADHD diagnosis is good, as long as they receive the proper treatment and support. Ask for input from your child's teachers, and discuss the following possible treatments with a counselor or therapist.

- ▶ Behavior therapy
- ▶ Individual and family counseling
- ▶ Medication
- ▶ School accommodations and interventions
Students with ADHD may be eligible for a 504 plan or an IEP (under the "other health impairment" category).

No one treatment is right for every child. You and your child's treatment team need to work together to make sure your child has the best chance at success.

Supporting Your Child

Parents play a crucial role in helping children with ADHD achieve success both in and out of the classroom. Here are ways you can support your child.

- ▶ **Create routines.** Have routines, from the time your child wakes up until bedtime. Stick to them.
- ▶ **Get organized.** Make sure everything has its own place and that your child consistently puts things in the correct place—especially important items like homework, backpack, and shoes.
- ▶ **Reduce distractions.** Provide an uncluttered, clean workspace for your child to do homework.
- ▶ **Break down large tasks.** Children with ADHD often become overwhelmed by large tasks. Help your child break large tasks and assignments into smaller, less daunting parts.
- ▶ **Be patient.** Find ways to diffuse difficult situations, and find calming strategies that work for your child.
- ▶ **Give praise.** Give frequent praise for small achievements.

For more information, visit chadd.org.

Autism

Information for Parents

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a developmental disorder that can vary greatly in severity. Because ASD can impact the way a child learns, communicates, and interacts with others, it's important that parents get help for a child with autism as early as possible.

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
- ▶ Doesn't 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 you and/or your child's pediatrician suspect ASD, your child will be thoroughly screened before being officially diagnosed. An autism diagnosis includes the following more specific conditions.

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

If your child is diagnosed with one of these conditions, your pediatrician may refer him/her to a specialist, or continue to work with you and your child's school to ensure that he/she receives support and services.

Treatments

There is no “cure” for ASD, but there are a number of treatments that can help individuals with ASD improve their learning, communication, and social skills.

- ▶ **Behavior and Communication Approaches.** Applied behavior analysis, occupational therapy, sensory therapy, self-management, and speech therapy are just a few of the many therapy options for children with ASD. Parents (with the help of their child’s therapist or physician) may need to experiment to determine which therapies are the most effective in helping their child.
- ▶ **Medication.** There is no medication to treat ASD, but some medications may treat related symptoms, such as depression or the inability to focus.
- ▶ **Alternative Approaches.** While approaches such as dietary changes and vitamin regimens are not scientifically supported, many parents find alternative approaches helpful to discuss in conjunction with other treatments.

Supporting Your Child

ASD can be challenging for children and parents, but with support and patience, children with ASD can thrive. Here’s how you can help.

- ▶ **Create routines.** Have routines, create schedules, and stick to them. If there will be a change in the schedule, prepare your child in advance.
- ▶ **Praise good behavior.** Praise your child when he/she exhibits appropriate behavior or learns a new skill. Be specific in what you are praising.
- ▶ **Create a safety zone.** Be aware of your child’s sensory sensitivities, and make sure your child has a place in the home where he/she feels safe and can unwind and relax.
- ▶ **Connect with your child.** Respond to the nonverbal cues your child uses to communicate.

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

Asperger's Syndrome

Information for Parents

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 in life than other children on the autism spectrum.
- ▶ Asperger's syndrome typically does not include cognitive or intellectual impairment. While children with Asperger's can suffer from learning disabilities like any other child, they 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, parents with concerns 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
- ▶ Trouble adapting to new routines
- ▶ 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.*

Treatments

There is no “cure” for Asperger’s, but there are a number of treatments that can help improve communication and social skills.

- ▶ **Therapy.** Cognitive behavioral therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy are just a few of the many therapy options for children with Asperger’s. Parents (with the help of their child’s therapist or physician) may need to experiment to determine which therapies are the most effective in helping their child.
- ▶ **Medication.** There is no medication to treat Asperger’s, but some medications may treat related symptoms, such as depression or anxiety.
- ▶ **Alternative Approaches.** While approaches such as dietary changes and vitamin regimens are not scientifically supported, many parents find alternative approaches helpful to discuss in conjunction with other treatments.

Supporting Your Child

Asperger’s can be challenging for children and parents, but with support and patience, children with Asperger’s can thrive. Here’s how you can help.

- ▶ **Guide your child through new situations.** Allow your child to experience new situations and expand his/her comfort zone—with your support.
- ▶ **Teach social skills.** Teach, review, and practice social skills and strategies.
- ▶ **Praise good behavior.** Praise your child when he/she exhibits appropriate behavior. Be specific and clear about the behavior you’re praising.
- ▶ **Be patient.** Find ways to diffuse difficult situations or outbursts, and find calming strategies that work for your child.
- ▶ **Develop and maintain routines.** Have routines, create schedules, and stick to them.

For more information, visit autism-society.org.

Dyslexia

Information for Parents

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

Because dyslexia causes reading difficulties and can negatively impact a student’s overall academic performance, it’s important for parents to get help for a child with dyslexia as early as possible.

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 to complete reading and writing assignments
- ▶ Difficulty reading aloud
- ▶ Mispronouncing words, even familiar ones
- ▶ Trouble remembering the sequence of events
- ▶ Difficulty memorizing things

Children with dyslexia are also at a greater risk for ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder). If you suspect that your child has dyslexia, or if he/she has been diagnosed, be on the lookout for ADHD symptoms.

Diagnosing Dyslexia

Dyslexia can't be diagnosed with one test. If you have concerns and/or a family history of dyslexia, it's important to closely monitor your child's academic performance, especially in regard to reading.

If you and/or your child's teacher or doctor suspect dyslexia, an educational psychologist or doctor will likely review some or all of the following before making a diagnosis:

- ▶ Your child's overall development
- ▶ Your child's educational performance and results from academic testing
- ▶ Your family history
- ▶ Questionnaire responses from you, your child's teacher(s), and your child
- ▶ Results from other psychological testing

Getting a formal dyslexia diagnosis is a crucial step in helping your child qualify for an IEP or 504 plan. With an IEP or 504 plan, your student can receive the educational accommodations (e.g., extra time on tests) that will help your child succeed in school.

What Parents Can Do

The following are ways you can support your child's success.

- ▶ **Be aware and act early.** Early intervention can greatly improve outcomes for children with dyslexia.
- ▶ **Encourage reading time.** Read together as a family, and make reading a part of your everyday routine. Look for ways to make reading fun.
- ▶ **Work with your child's school.** Keep up to date on your child's progress in school and update your child's teacher(s) on his/her progress at home, especially with regard to homework. If your child has an IEP or 504 plan, attend meetings and actively participate.

For more information, visit dyslexiaida.org.

Learning Disabilities

Information for Parents

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, 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

If your child seems to be having trouble with schoolwork, be on the lookout for the following.

- ▶ 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 him/herself out loud or in writing
- ▶ A growing dislike of, or frustration with, school

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

Supporting Your Child

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.

Parents play a crucial role in helping a child with a learning disability succeed both in and out of school. A parent's support, love, and encouragement will help a child with a learning disability grow, thrive, and succeed in school.

For more information, visit LDAamerica.org

Intellectual Disability

Information for Parents

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 life situations.

While individuals with an intellectual disability need support, they can learn, grow, and thrive.

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.

Work with Your Child's School

Students with an intellectual disability are eligible for an IEP (Individualized Education Program).

An IEP will include the specific educational services that are to be provided, along with information on how the services are to be implemented.

Here's how you can be an advocate for your child.

- ▶ **Work with the school.** Regularly communicate with the school to give and receive updates on your child's progress.
- ▶ **Be prepared for IEP meetings.** When you and your child's IEP team meet, come prepared with specific questions and/or concerns.
- ▶ **Be patient.** It can take some time to find the right program for your child. Remember, your child's needs may also change over time.

Help Your Child Succeed

Parents play a crucial role in helping their child thrive and grow. Here's what you can do.

- ▶ **Provide support.** Look for ways to help your child develop, grow, and have a positive educational experience.
- ▶ **Encourage independence.** Help your child learn self-care skills (e.g., personal hygiene).
- ▶ **Give your child tasks to do.** Giving your child small household chores and responsibilities can help build self-confidence and independence.
- ▶ **Praise your child.** Reward responsible behavior, independence, and any growth in abilities.
- ▶ **Provide encouragement and support.** Your support, love, and encouragement are crucial to your child's success, both in and out of school.
- ▶ **Be optimistic.** Like all children, children with intellectual disabilities grow and change over a lifetime.

For more information, visit aaidd.org.

Speech or Language Impairment

Information for Parents

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 that parents get help for their child as early 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.

When to Get Evaluated

The following are some tips to keep in mind if you are unsure when (or if) to have your child evaluated for speech issues.

- ▶ If your child doesn't talk very much or seems to be behind in his/her language development, talk to your child's doctor.
- ▶ Take note of whether or not others can understand your child's speech. If non-family members have a difficult time understanding your child, discuss this with your child's doctor.
- ▶ Trust your instincts. If you think something isn't right, it doesn't hurt to get an evaluation.

Be an Advocate for Your Child

A speech or language impairment can impact a child's ability to communicate, participate in class, and make friends. It is, therefore, important for parents to be an advocate for their children, and to see that they get the help they need.

- ▶ **Communicate with the school.** If your child has been diagnosed with a speech or language impairment, regularly communicate with your child's teacher, counselor, and/or anyone else involved in your child's success in school. If your child has an IEP or 504 plan, come to meetings with questions and updates.

- ▶ **Support your child.** Be patient, supportive, and encouraging—and look for ways to work with your child at home.

Children with a speech or language impairment are often at risk for bullying. Regularly check in with your child to ask how things are going at school, and emphasize that he/she can talk to you about anything, anytime.

- ▶ **Ask questions.** If there's ever anything that confuses or concerns you, ask questions and get clarification.

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

Giftedness

Information for Parents

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 a specific academic subject, such as math or science.

Common Characteristics

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 problem solving with numbers and puzzles
- ▶ 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

Assessing Giftedness

Schools have a number of assessment strategies to identify gifted students, the most common being achievement and ability tests.

- ▶ **Achievement tests** measure a student's skills and knowledge as compared to others at the same grade level.
- ▶ **Ability tests** provide information on intellectual giftedness, such as problem solving and abstract thinking.

Tests do not capture all aspects of giftedness, and are not the only methods used by schools to identify gifted/talented (G/T) students.

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 exhibit behavioral issues. Parents of twice-exceptional children need to work especially close with educators to make sure their children get the support they need.

Strategies for Gifted Children

Once a student has been identified as gifted, there are a number of strategies to help him/her get the most out of school. Here are a few examples.

- ▶ **Acceleration:** Moving through the curriculum at a faster rate than is typical (e.g., skipping a grade, taking Advance Placement courses)
- ▶ **Curriculum compacting:** Providing students with more intellectually challenging content
- ▶ **Gifted programs:** Putting similarly gifted students together, providing them with more complex material and a peer group

Supporting Gifted Children

Parents play a crucial role in helping their child have an enriching educational experience.

- ▶ **Be involved.** Take an interest in what your child is learning in school, and look for ways to help your child develop his/her talents and skills.
- ▶ **Nurture your child's curiosity.** Visit museums and nature centers, and look for ways to encourage and support your child's interests.
- ▶ **Monitor perfectionism.** Gifted children can be very hard on themselves. Encourage, but don't push, your child. Also help your child manage any frustration he/she may experience.

For more information, visit nagc.org.

IEP

Information for Parents

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.

If a student qualifies for services, a team uses the information from the evaluation to determine what services will best help that student succeed in school. The team then writes an IEP for the student.

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).

Be an Advocate for Your Child

The following are ways you can be an advocate for your child—and ensure that your child is getting the support and services he/she needs.

- ▶ **Work with the school.** Regularly communicate with the school to give and receive updates on your child's progress.
- ▶ **Be prepared for IEP meetings.** When you and your child's IEP team meet, come prepared with questions and/or concerns.
- ▶ **Support your child.** Be patient, supportive, and encouraging, and look for ways to work with your child at home.
- ▶ **Ask questions.** If there's ever anything that confuses or concerns you, ask questions and get clarification.

The best thing you can do for your child is to work together with the teachers and educators at your child's school. Like you, they want your child to thrive and succeed in school.

For more information, visit understood.org.

504 Plan

Information for Parents

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 a good option for students who don't qualify for special education services under IEP requirements.

504 Evaluation

504 plans often don't require extensive evaluations, but there are procedures to follow. Here's what you can do if you believe your child might qualify for a 504 plan.

- ▶ **Gather documentation** of your child's needs, such as medical diagnoses, grades, and any private evaluations that may have been done.
- ▶ **Send a request in writing** to the school's 504 coordinator documenting your child's needs. If you can't find the contact information on the school's website, contact the principal.

Upon receiving your request, school officials will review your child's grades, test scores, medical history, and comments from teachers.

- ▶ **Collaborate on the 504 plan.** If your child qualifies, work with your school to find the best classroom accommodations for your child.

Accommodations

The following are examples of accommodations provided in 504 plans.

- ▶ Extended test times
- ▶ Technology aids
- ▶ Modified textbooks
- ▶ Adjusted class schedules
- ▶ Peer assistance with notetaking
- ▶ Verbal testing
- ▶ Specific seating assignment
- ▶ Behavior management support

Be an Advocate for Your Child

The following are ways you can be an advocate for your child—and ensure that your child is getting the support and services he/she needs.

- ▶ **Work with the school.** Regularly communicate with the school to give and receive updates on your child's progress. Like you, everyone in the school wants your child to thrive and succeed.
- ▶ **Ask questions.** If there's ever anything that confuses or concerns you, ask questions and get clarification.
- ▶ **Be prepared for 504 plan meetings.** Meetings are not required, but an annual meeting is always a good idea. Before a new school year, call the school and ask for a 504 plan review. When you and your child's 504 team meet, come prepared with questions and/or concerns.
- ▶ **Support your child.** Be patient, supportive, and encouraging—and look for ways to work with your child at home.

For more information, visit understood.org.

IEP vs. 504 Plan

Information for Parents

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.

If your child has a condition that adversely impacts his/her education, a well-written, well-implemented IEP or 504 plan will help ensure that your child gets the support and services he/she needs.

	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	To be eligible for an IEP, a child's school performance must be "adversely affected" by a disability in one of the 13 IDEA disability categories	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's not a requirement. 504 plans generally include accommodations, and information on who provides them.

The Right Choice for Your Child

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

When an IEP is appropriate

- ▶ An IEP is the best choice if a student needs services that must occur outside the regular classroom.
- ▶ Examples of services provided may include, but are not limited to: tutoring, speech therapy, specialized instruction, 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.
- ▶ Examples of accommodations include, but are not limited to: extra test time, audio textbooks, a specific seating assignment, peer assistance with notetaking, extra time on projects, oral tests.
- ▶ While rare, 504 plans can provide modifications such as alternative testing (fewer or different questions) and less demanding assignments.

Many accommodations offered by 504 plans (e.g., extra test time, adaptive tools, extra breaks) may also be offered by IEPs, so it's important to focus on the whole child rather than individual problems and solutions when making a decision.

If your child is eligible for an IEP and/or a 504 plan, educators at your child's school will do everything in their power to help your child succeed. If you have any concerns, ask questions, and get clarification.

Special Education Terms

Information for Parents

Navigating the special education services provided by your school can be confusing, and full of unfamiliar terms. The following are some of the terms you may hear as you work to support your child's success.

- ▶ **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 instead of in writing)
- ▶ **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 who meets to discuss and make decisions on a student's IEP. An IEP team usually includes parents, teachers, counselors, and other special education staff.

- ▶ **Inclusion:** The opportunity for students with disabilities to learn alongside their non-disabled peers in general 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., giving a student an easier assignment)
- ▶ **Outcomes:** The specific, short-term, measurable goals included in 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.