

Tips For Parents

BE AND STAY INFORMED

About Your Son and/or Daughter's Diagnosis

Did you know that about 20-25% of any given school population receive Special Education, either through an IEP or 504 plan? That 1 in 20 have a sensory processing issue? That 17% of US school children experience some form of Dyslexia? That 11% of children ages 4-17 experience ADHD? That 1 in 48 children have autism? That many children experience more than one condition also experience other conditions as well?

Take time to learn more about your child's condition(s). Read and research. Talk with other parents, school resource professionals, and community service providers to learn more about what to expect as you navigate this journey with your child. Investigate therapies and plan components that can be helpful to your child.

About FAPE (free and appropriate public education) and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is an educational right of children with disabilities in the United States that is guaranteed by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973^[1] and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under Section 504, FAPE is defined as "the provision of regular or special education and related aids and services that are designed to meet individual needs of handicapped persons as well as the needs of non-handicapped persons are met and based on adherence to procedural safeguards outlined in the law." Under the IDEA, FAPE is defined as an educational program that is individualized to a specific child, designed to meet that child's unique needs, provides access to the general curriculum, meets the grade-level standards established by the state, and from which the child receives educational benefit.^[2] The United States Department of Education issues regulations that define^[3] and govern^[4] the provision of FAPE.

To provide FAPE to a child with a disability, schools must provide students with an education, including specialized instruction and related services, that prepares the child for further education, employment, and independent living.

Keep and Organize Paperwork

Make sure to keep copies of all report cards, progress reports, multidisciplinary evaluations, IEPs, medical records, helpful homework samples and other documents. They can provide insights into your child's learning issues and how much progress he's making. If your child has an IEP, you can create an IEP binder to keep all your paperwork in one place.

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Build and Maintain Relationships

Get to know your child's teachers as well as other members of your child's "team" (resource counselor, the school psychologist, speech therapist and any other providers who are working with your child, for example. Building relationships with the whole team can help keep the lines of communication open. There's less chance of misunderstanding if everyone knows and talks to each other. Adversarial relationships do not help anyone, especially your child.

Ask questions

It's important to make sure you fully understand your child's program and accommodations before you give your consent to services. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification, request further evaluations, or express your disagreement with the school's recommendations regarding services. It's a good idea to get any requests in writing. Keep copies of these requests and use a communication log to keep track of who you spoke to and when.

Remember that you're part of the team

Parents shouldn't feel pressured by school staff to make a decision. Keep in mind that you're an equal member of the decision-making team. So, while it's important to be receptive to the school staff's thoughts, you don't have to agree to something you think goes against what's best for your child.

Know Your Child's Rights

Learn about your child's rights to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Your child might have the right to extra time on tests and other accommodations or modifications. Stay informed about your school's legal obligations to provide your child an evaluation and other services. You can also speak with your local Parent Training and Information Center about finding a parent advocate to help you during important meetings.

Talk to Your Child

Touch base with your child about how school is going. It's important to know if he's using the accommodations on his IEP or 504 plan or if he's spent time with X, Y, or Z as planned. This helps you make sure the plan is being implemented. Teach your child phrases he can use to self-advocate when you're not there with him.

Learn the Lingo

Learn terms you may hear from educators, health-care providers and other professionals. It can help you to understand, for example, whether the speech

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therapist and other service providers are “pushing in” (working with your child in the classroom) or “pulling out” (taking your child to a separate location). This information can guide questions to ask your child. For instance if he says he didn’t go to speech class one day, you might ask, “Did the speech therapist come into the classroom?”

Communicate Regularly

IEP meetings and parent-teacher conferences are good opportunities to get an update on your child’s progress. But there are also other times and ways to get updates. You can email his teacher with questions. PTA meetings may provide insight into curriculum changes and other resources that could affect your child. It’s helpful to fill out a contact list, too. Keep it handy so you know who at school to reach out to about various topics.