

# 6 Steps to Navigating the School System

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS





# A Guide for Parents of Children With ADHD

## 6 Steps to Navigating the School System

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If your child has Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), school can be challenging. As a parent, finding help can be tough as well.

To make the process a little easier, Shire developed *6 Steps to Navigating the School System*. For example, in Step 3: Request an evaluation, we outline how to ask your child's school for learning accommodations. And in Step 5: Know the lingo, we cover the most common jargon you're likely to see.

Take some time to go through this brochure. Though if you're in a rush or just need the main points, flip to the last page.

Seeking and securing learning accommodations is an ongoing process. Hopefully you will find *6 Steps* useful throughout. Keep it on hand as you continue to work toward what's best for your child.



## STEP 1

# Talk With Your Child's Doctor

### If your child has ADHD, the first step begins with his or her doctor

Have an open and honest dialogue with the doctor about any symptoms your child may be experiencing, like inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Discuss how those symptoms may be affecting your child at home, at school, and in social situations. Your child will need formal documentation of an ADHD diagnosis to obtain learning accommodations.

### Alternatively, you may prefer to begin the process by speaking with your child's school

You could start by talking with the school and requesting an evaluation of your child. (See Step 3 for suggestions on how to go about it.) You could then make an appointment with your child's doctor to ask about ADHD and share the school's findings.



## STEP 2

# Know Your Child's Rights

### Let's start with the big picture

Before you request help from your child's school, it's important to be aware of what help may actually be available.

There are two federal civil rights laws that protect the educational rights of children with ADHD and other disabilities: Section 504, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These laws provide guidance for the education of all students with disabilities in public schools that receive federal funds.

- Both laws guarantee children with disabilities a "free appropriate public education" (or FAPE), meaning it's free to parents and children, generally provided in the public school, and appropriate for the child
- Both recommend that children be educated in the "least restrictive environment," with nondiscriminatory evaluations and assessments and periodic reevaluation
- Section 504 defines disability more broadly than IDEA, so it may be less burdensome to qualify for and may get implemented faster
- IDEA is best known for its main provision, the IEP, or Individualized Education Program. An IEP can be harder to qualify for and can take longer to get, though it may offer more comprehensive educational benefits





## Which program is right for your child?

Everyone's circumstances may be a little different. Section 504 is for children whose educational needs can be addressed through changes in the general curriculum and classroom. An IEP provides a more comprehensive educational plan as compared to Section 504.

### Examples of Section 504 accommodations

- A more structured learning environment
- Modified tests and homework assignments
- Learning aids like computer-assisted lessons
- The option to use a tape recorder for class
- Simplified or repeated instructions
- Visual study aids
- Modified class schedules and more time on tests
- An extra set of books for home

### ■ Does your child need extra time for their SAT?

Having a Section 504 plan or IEP in place may help as part of the process for requesting accommodations for standardized testing.

This brochure is focused on Section 504. For more information on IDEA, check out Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) at [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org).



## IEP vs Section 504

Below are the main points on IEPs and Section 504 plans, so you can get the gist of each and decide what's right for you and your child.

Common Name	IEP	Section 504
<b>Full name</b>	Individualized Education Program	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
<b>In a nutshell</b>	A structured and individualized learning plan designed to meet the needs of children with disabilities who require learning support outside the regular classroom	A less comprehensive learning plan, for children who can be taught in their regular classroom, given reasonable accommodations
<b>To qualify</b>	The child's disability must impact educational performance	The child has a disability that "substantially limits" a major life function like learning or concentrating
<b>The details</b>	Parent and teacher jointly decide child's needs, services, and anticipated outcomes	Parental involvement in making decisions is not required (though parents are usually included)
	Federal government mandates portfolio of services	School decides what services to offer
	IEP must be in writing	A 504 plan can be oral or written
	Services are provided either in a separate classroom or in the regular classroom	Services are generally provided in the regular classroom, though occasionally in special education classrooms, as determined by the school
	Provides for services like tutoring and speech therapy	Less likely to offer more costly services such as speech therapy
<b>Good to know</b>	Must include a transition plan for children age 16 and older to prepare the child for life after high school	Transition plan is optional
	It takes more than an ADHD diagnosis; there is a rigorous process to qualify	Section 504 is not limited to general education services. A child may receive any service or support their 504 team deems necessary
<b>Time period covered</b>	Through high school	May apply through technical school, college, or university
<b>How long to get services?</b>	2 to 3 months for evaluation of eligibility; varies by state	Evaluation and implementation process is usually quicker than an IEP





## STEP 3

# Request an Evaluation

### How the process works

Once you have spoken with your child's doctor and have a basic understanding of your child's educational rights, the next step is to start a dialogue with administrators or teachers at your child's school.

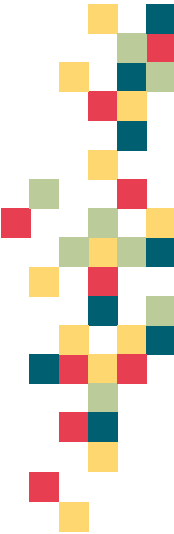
- Place your request for an evaluation in writing
- Sign a permission slip for testing of your child
- The school has between 30 days and 6 weeks to complete its evaluation of your child's need for educational services (varies by state), although implementation may take longer



### How does the school decide whether to grant services to your child?

To determine eligibility for services under Section 504, a school may consider several sources of information on your child, including:

- Grades over the past several years
- Teacher reports
- Information from parents or other agencies
- State assessment scores or observations from other school-administered tests
- Discipline reports
- Attendance records
- Health records
- Adaptive behavior information



## Writing your child's school

To request an evaluation, write a letter to your child's principal. If it's accurate and appropriate, consider including phrases which make clear what you are requesting and why, such as "struggling in school," "may need special help," "requesting an evaluation," and "develop an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or a 504 Accommodation Plan, depending on my child's needs."

## Can a school deny services?

Yes. A letter from your child's physician is helpful, though not sufficient, to get accommodations. Your child also must meet eligibility requirements.

There are many reasons why learning accommodations may be denied. Some may include:

- The school may not agree that special services are necessary
- The evaluation process may not have been done properly
- The school may lack sufficient funding

If your child was denied learning accommodations, it may be because he or she didn't qualify for IDEA. Your child may be eligible for accommodations another way: Section 504. If your child is struggling but does not qualify for an IEP, ask that he or she be considered for accommodations under Section 504.

## What happens if you do not agree with the results of the evaluation process?

You can request follow-up meetings to provide additional information and/or obtain an advocate in support of your child's application.

You may also ask for another evaluation. It will require working with the school through appeal procedures. You may be responsible for some costs during the appeal, although some of these expenses may be paid or reimbursed by the school.

- **Before requesting learning accommodations for your child, consider the pros and cons.**





## STEP 4

# Take an Active Role

### Supporting your child

Like many parents, you want to do what's best for your child. It all starts with taking a leadership role in forming relationships and working with the various people who will be treating and educating your child.

It's been said that a child with ADHD will have the best chances for a successful school year if parents are able to make these relationships positive, where parents and teachers work together in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. So keep the lines of communication open with your child's teachers and all involved parties, including guidance counselors and the staff at your child's school.

Of course, taking an active role does not come easily to everyone. It involves becoming more knowledgeable about ADHD, and more understanding of the needs of a child with ADHD.



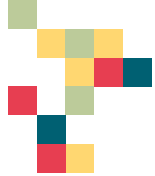
### Participating in team meetings

If your child is found eligible for learning accommodations, many states require that the school start with a planning meeting in which you and your child's teachers and other school personnel discuss your child's academic needs. To get the most from these meetings, consider these tips:

- Prepare for meetings by learning about how your child is doing in school and what kinds of support and accommodations may be helpful and available
- Try to enter meetings with an open mind and a cooperative spirit
- Don't be afraid to ask questions
- Request a copy of any reports or paperwork discussed
- Take notes
- If the school allows it, bring someone with you such as a family member or advocate
- Keep a file on your child that includes all copies of testing, reports, health records, and other important data
- Keep a log of communications with the school and others, including dates of doctor appointments and summaries of conversations

■ **Even when things feel challenging, try to keep the relationships positive.**





## Reviewing your child's learning plan

As a parent you are entitled to review your child's Section 504 plan or IEP at any point during the school year. You may request a review of the plan or any services, programs, or special placements. Keep in close communication with your child's team to monitor progress and make changes as needed.

## Teaching your child to become a self-advocate

Try getting your child to become a "self-advocate." Get them involved in setting and working toward their educational goals from the get-go. Being a self-advocate means things like:

- Offering input on accommodations
- Choosing goals that match their interests and skills
- Developing a plan to attain their goals, evaluate their performance, and make adjustments as needed

Realistically your child will not achieve independence overnight. It's a process that can take many years. Better to involve them sooner than later; for the earlier they take an active role, the more engaged they are likely to be, and the more satisfied you may be.

Granted you'll need a good dose of patience and excellent communication skills. But the more your child feels a sense of control, the more they'll feel able to solve their problems and take charge of their lives. Ultimately you're encouraging them to become more self-reliant and in control.



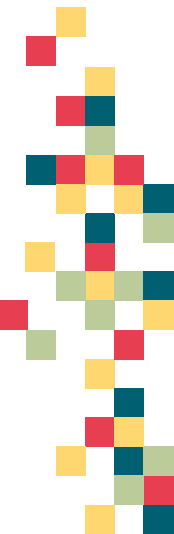
## Planning for college, career, and beyond

Whether your child has a Section 504 plan or an IEP, by the time your child is 16, their team should be developing a transition plan to address your child's future, including college, career, or independent living.

Collaborate with your child's team to identify goals and services necessary to make the transition from today to tomorrow. Look to develop measurable post-secondary goals, like "upon completing high school, my child will enroll in courses at Ocean County Community College" or "my child will obtain a 4-year degree from a liberal arts college with a major in child development." Measurable simply means it's easy to determine if the goal has occurred.

When your child's transition plan is developed, you may want to consider inviting someone who is knowledgeable about vocational issues — possibly a representative from a vocational school or the state Vocational Rehabilitation Services. They can offer guidance on specific courses your child may need to take to pursue their career of choice.

To help your child become more invested in the process, school personnel can work with your child to make a "transition assessment portfolio." It's where all transition assessment data are kept. Using a transition assessment portfolio is a great way to maintain ongoing dialogue between your child, family, case managers, and other members of the IEP team, and to keep plans on track.





## STEP 5

# Know the Lingo

### Common terms, jargon, and frequently heard acronyms

- **Accommodations** — Changes made in schoolwork to enable students with a disability to learn without affecting the content of what they are learning.
- **Modifications** — A modification is a change that is made to the content of what a student is learning because a disability interferes with their ability to learn at the same pace as peers without disabilities.
- **FAPE** — Free Appropriate Public Education. Section 504 and IDEA both guarantee FAPE: education that's free to parents and children, generally provided in the public school, and appropriate for the child.
- **LRE** — Least Restrictive Environment. A principle of IDEA and Section 504. Encourages keeping children in the regular classroom with modifications and support and placing them in special classrooms only if necessary.
- **Section 504** — Federal civil rights law that protects individuals from discrimination by any program or activity that receives federal funding, such as public schools.
- **Section 504 Coordinator** — Required by law, each local school system has a person who responds to questions and concerns from families about matters relating to Section 504.

- **IDEA** — Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Federal civil rights law that mandates FAPE, a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities who need special education services, and provides for an IEP, or Individualized Education Program.
- **Special Education** — Educational services designed to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities, provided either in the regular classroom or via specialized instruction.
- **IEP** — Individualized Education Program. Mandated by IDEA. A written agreement between parent and school that states the child's current academic and functional performance, services and accommodations required, and measurable annual goals for what the child is supposed to achieve. As a child gets older, they play a more direct role in shaping this conversation.
- **Self-advocacy** — The practice of becoming your own spokesperson and setting and working toward your goals.





## STEP 6

# Find ADHD Resources

You want more details on educational rights for children with ADHD. Check out [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org).

You'd like to file a complaint. Go to [www.hhs.gov/ocr](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr) and click "How to File a Complaint."

You're wondering if there's a support group near you. Try [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com).

You want more info on IDEA and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Visit [www.help4ADHD.org](http://www.help4ADHD.org) and search for your topic of interest.



# A Guide for Parents of Children With ADHD

## 6 STEPS TO NAVIGATING THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

### Step 1: Talk with your child's doctor

If your child has ADHD, get an ADHD diagnosis in writing. You'll need it to pursue disability and ADHD-related educational services.

### Step 2: Know your child's rights

Section 504 and IDEA both protect the rights of children with disabilities, including ADD and ADHD. Section 504 is mainly for children who just need support in their regular classroom. IDEA (best known for the IEP, or Individual Education Program) is more for children who need special education services.

### Step 3: Request an evaluation

To apply for services under Section 504 or IDEA, you need to provide the school with a request in writing. If it's accurate and appropriate, consider including phrases which make clear what you are requesting and why, such as "struggling in school" and "requesting an evaluation."

### Step 4: Take an active role

For parents, it's meeting with the school and keeping the lines of communication open and the conversations positive. For your child, it's about becoming a self-advocate, choosing goals that match their skills and interests, and being their own spokesperson.

### Step 5: Know the lingo

Every system has its fancy words and terminology, and the educational system is no exception. Learn the jargon.

### Step 6: Find ADHD resources

Seek advice on dealing with your school. Find advocacy and support groups. Maybe consider joining a group of other parents. There are organizations out there that may be able to help.



## Where can I get more information about ADHD?

For more information, visit  
[www.ADHDandYou.com](http://www.ADHDandYou.com).

Keep this guide as a handy resource to help  
navigate your child's school system.

This resource is sponsored by  
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