

# IEP & 504: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

Your child has just been diagnosed with ADHD and requires school services and support. The two main options are an individual education program (IEP) or the Section 504 plan to accommodate your child's needs. Learn about the differences to help you understand what might work best for your child.

## IEP

### Purpose

Provides specialized instruction, accommodations, and services through a special education plan that meets the unique needs of the child.

## 504

Provides equal access to education for the child through accommodations and modifications to the learning environment.

### Law

Children with specific disabilities are protected under a federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), which guarantees free and appropriate public education regardless of abilities.

Children with conditions that cause them to struggle in school are protected under the federal civil rights law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prevents discrimination against them so that they can participate in all services provided by the school and receive an "appropriate" education.

### Eligibility

The child struggles in school due to a disability in at least one of the 13 categories identified by IDEA. The school must assess and document that the child has a disability before an IEP is developed.

The child has any disorder or condition that limits learning or other major life activities like concentrating, reading, and thinking. The school can use a diagnosis by a healthcare provider to develop a 504 plan.

### The Plan

Written and prepared by an IEP team that includes school personnel, the parents, and the child (when appropriate). The IEP describes the students' strengths and weaknesses, the learning goals for the child, and the services and support the school must provide.

Prepared by school personnel and parents. It describes the impact of the disability and the accommodations needed.

### How it plays out

An IEP can change what the child is expected to learn, setting different educational goals for the child than those for other students. IEPs come with special funding that allows for smaller classrooms or specialized individual instructions.

A 504 plan does not change what the child is expected to learn, but can change the way the child is taught and how tests and assignments are conducted. Section 504 plans do not come with funding. The school offers accommodations and services as part of their usual instructions.

