

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

A federal law which requires schools to identify and evaluate students with disabilities who require special education services. This also requires that schools provide a blueprint for their education -- an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) All children under law are entitled to a "Free and Appropriate Public Education; a placement must be made that allows each child's educational needs to be met.

IDEA also stipulates that services must be provided in the least restrictive environment and that whenever possible disabled children should be integrated with children who do not have disabilities. This is "inclusion." For those with autism or mental illness, disability can be called "serious emotional disturbance" or ED.

Section 504 – For those with "moderate impairment" does not require a formal evaluation of the disability and only includes accommodations that can be implemented at the school building level.

IEP -- Schools are required to evaluate student's special needs upon parental request. Testing to evaluate disability and set a baseline must be done by the school district, at no cost to parents. Independent assessment is also advised. Experts recommend that parents compile a binder of all communications with school district/special ed officials, medical records, testing and other assessment reports.

The IEP should lay out, in measurable terms, academic and if appropriate, emotional, behavioral and social/life skill goals. Some parents bring a therapist or other expert to the IEP meeting. An IEP staffing is required annually.

Common accommodations for mental illness/attention difficulties

- Extended time on tests or assignments
- Reduced homework
- A supervised, quiet space if needed during the school day
- Books on tape
- Extra copies of textbooks for home use
- An aide or note taker
- Teachers lecture notes
- Seating in the front of the classroom
- Testing in quiet space, without distractions
- Tutoring at home
- Treatment by school counselor or psychologist

Other educational options – a graduated process

Therapeutic Day School

Residential Treatment Center