

How to advocate for your child at school

An informed parent is an empowered parent



www.epilepsyallianceamerica.org

Set your child up for success at school

Children with epilepsy often struggle with academic achievement. Difficulties in school may be due in part to the etiology (the cause or causes of the condition), the common co-existing conditions associated with epilepsy, or the side effects from antiepileptic drugs (AEDs). Children may struggle with memory issues, excessive fatigue, mental health issues, behavioral and social issues. Empowering parents to advocate for their children is essential to ensuring the safety and success of students with epilepsy.

Is epilepsy effecting your child's academic performance?

The earlier parents and teachers are able to identify learning difficulties, the easier it will be to get your child on the right track. Most children with epilepsy can attend school and participate in everyday activities. Some children with epilepsy may need additional support.

Factors related to seizures that can affect learning include:

- Difficulty following directions or paying attention
- Difficulty understanding or retaining information
- Lack of organization
- An increase in negative behaviors
- Being tired or having trouble staying awake
- Missing information during class if having absence seizures

Social Consequences of Epilepsy

Emotional, behavioral and relationship difficulties are common:

- Difficulty making new friends
- Social Isolation: Feeling "different" from their peers
- Many children with epilepsy experience bullying and teasing from their peers

Ensure your child has the support to which they are legally entitled

There are two different policies followed by school districts that provide students with identified disabilities or certain medical diagnoses protection.

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) covers children with specific conditions such as intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbances, speech and language difficulties and hearing impairments under special education.
- Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act protects children who need extra help in the classroom who don't qualify for special education services under IDEA. This law prohibits schools from discriminating against students because of physical and mental impairments.
- Missing school for doctor visits or hospital stays

In one report, 63% of children who had epilepsy had a depressive or anxiety disorder.

Find out how the Member Organizations of Epilepsy Alliance America can support you in advocating for your child at school. And, get answers to your frequently asked questions about IEPs and 504 Plans.



Thank you to for provide funding for the creation of this resource



Frequently Asked Questions

What is an IEP and a 504 Plan?

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 plans are written legal documents put in place by the school to outline how a child with a qualified disability will learn within the classroom setting. Modifications to curriculum through an IEP or accommodations through a 504 plan will be customized for each child dependent on if the child qualifies for special education services or a 504 plan. The goal is to provide the best learning environment where the child can be successful with the least restrictions. Both medical and educational needs are important in either the IEP or 504 Plan; however, the Individualized Education Program is managed annually with specific measurable goals to account for learning areas whereas a 504 plan may not be as closely monitored.

What is the difference between an IEP and a 504 Plan?

The way in which a child will qualify for services is the main difference between the two options. It is important to note that not every child with a disability will qualify for an IEP or 504 plan.

504 plans help children who do not qualify for special education services but still require accommodations such as special seating, extra time on tests or time to make-up work due to missing class for doctor appointments.

Under IDEA, an IEP requires that a student be fully evaluated for special education services in areas such as memory, cognitive functioning, executive functioning, reasoning, verbal and non-verbal communication, behavior, math, reading and/or writing skills. This evaluation paints a more precise picture of the child's strengths and challenges within the school environment. Once testing is completed, a team including the school psychologist and parents will devise special goals and outcomes in the areas a child needs extra help with. These goals are measurable and reviewed by the IEP team (including parents) annually. During this annual IEP meeting, goals will be adjusted and new measures put in place as the team recognizes areas of change.

An IEP places the child into the special education system based on their testing scores and requires that they receive specialized instruction to make progress in school. A 504 plan does not require the child to test into services, but rather provide accommodations your child needs to succeed in the classroom.

Which plan is the better option for my child?

The concerns of children and the specific needs to be successful in an academic environment will depict which plan would be better for them. For example, speech services twice a week versus needing preferential seating in the classroom to minimize distractions. When the student is able to function within the regular classroom environment with accommodations put into place, a 504 plan is the least restrictive. When the student with a qualified disability requires more than just a few accommodations, an IEP is the better choice as specific services are put into place to monitor and evaluate the progress.

I think my child would benefit from a school assessment. What's next?

As a parent, write a brief letter to the school describing the academic concerns you have for your child, listing examples and areas of concern. This letter needs to request that the school begin the assessment process for special education. Date and sign the letter before giving it to the school.

What does a school assessment cover?

Assessments can cover health and development, intellectual abilities, motor abilities, vision, hearing, language function, general abilities, academic performance, social and behavioral issues and/or self-help and vocational abilities and interests. The assessment should be comprehensive enough to identify all of your child's special education needs.

