



# Education and School Support for Autistic Students

A Guide for Parents and Educators

## Parent Rights in Schools

As a parent of an autistic student, you have important rights to ensure your child receives the appropriate education and support. This guide aims to empower you with the knowledge to advocate effectively for your child's needs.

## Understanding IEPs (Individualized Education Programs)

**What is an IEP?** An IEP is a legally binding document created for students with disabilities who require specialized instruction and related services to access their education. It outlines specific goals, accommodations, modifications, and services tailored to the student's individual needs.

### Who Qualifies?

- Students with a diagnosed disability (including autism) that *adversely* affects their educational performance.
- Requires specialized instruction to make progress.

### What an IEP Includes:

- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance.
- Measurable annual goals.
- Specific special education and related services.
- Accommodations and modifications.
- Participation in state and district-wide assessments.
- Dates, frequency, location, and duration of services.

## Parent Rights:

- **Right to participate** in all IEP meetings.
- **Right to review** all educational records.
- **Right to consent** to the IEP and any changes made to it.
- **Right to request** an independent educational evaluation (IEE) if you disagree with the school's evaluation.
- **Right to due process** if you have a dispute with the school.

## Understanding 504 Plans

**What is a 504 Plan?** A 504 Plan provides accommodations and supports for students with disabilities who do *not* require specialized instruction but need assistance to access the general education curriculum. It is based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a civil rights law.

### Who Qualifies?

- Students with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., learning, concentrating, communicating).
- Does not require specialized instruction.

### What a 504 Plan Includes:

- Specific accommodations to address the student's needs.
- Related aids and services.
- May include modifications but usually focuses on accommodations.
- Regular review and updates to ensure effectiveness.

## Parent Rights:

- **Right to participate** in the development of the 504 Plan.
- **Right to be informed** of your child's rights under Section 504.
- **Right to request** a 504 Plan evaluation.
- **Right to an impartial hearing** if you disagree with the school's decisions.

# Accommodations vs. Modifications

It's essential to understand the difference between accommodations and modifications as they play distinct roles in supporting autistic students.

## Accommodations:

- Changes *how* a student learns the material.
- Do not change the content or expectations.

## Examples:

- Extended time on tests.
- Preferential seating.
- Use of assistive technology.
- Providing visual supports.
- Breaking down tasks into smaller steps.

## Modifications:

- Changes *what* a student is expected to learn.
- Adjust the content or expectations.

## Examples:

- Simplified reading assignments.
- Reduced number of test questions.
- Alternative projects.
- Grading based on effort rather than mastery of content.
- Modified curriculum.

# Key Parent Rights Summary

Here's a recap of your essential rights as a parent of an autistic student:

- **Active Participation:** You have the right to be an active and informed participant in all decisions regarding your child's education.
- **Access to Information:** You have the right to access and review all of your child's educational records.
- **Informed Consent:** Your consent is required for evaluations, IEPs, and any significant changes to your child's educational program.
- **Advocacy:** You have the right to advocate for your child's needs and to seek support from advocacy organizations.
- **Due Process:** You have the right to due process if you disagree with the school's decisions and cannot resolve the issue informally.

## Next Steps

By understanding your rights and the support systems available, you can empower your autistic student to thrive in their educational journey. Don't hesitate to reach out to school staff, advocacy groups, and other parents for guidance and support.

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