



Zarlengo Foundation

Learning Evaluation Center

Getting Kids the Help they Need: IEPs, 504 Plan,
and Psychoeducational Evaluations



Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

When a student requires special education services, they are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law that mandates what states must offer to students with disabilities. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the framework used to plan and implement goals for children with disabilities in public schools.

- ◆ If a student is facing difficulties in school even after receiving interventions, or if they have evident needs for additional support, it is important to consider conducting an evaluation to determine their eligibility for special education services. Parents/guardians must provide consent and can request a psychoeducational evaluation at any time.
- ◆ After consent is signed, public schools have 60 days to determine if a student is eligible for special education services. This determination is made through a psychoeducational evaluation process conducted by a school team that typically includes parents, teachers, and various specialists.
- ◆ IDEA defines children with disabilities as individuals aged 3 to 21 who, due to one or more of the following conditions, are unable to receive reasonable benefit from general education alone and need special education and related services:

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| Autism | Orthopedic impairment |
| Deaf-blindness | Other health impairment |
| Deafness | Specific learning disability |
| Emotional disturbance | Speech or language impairment |
| Hearing impairment | Traumatic brain injury |
| Intellectual disability | Visual impairment, Including Blindness |
| Multiple disabilities | Developmental Delay (ages 3 to 9) |

- ◆ If a student is deemed eligible for special education services in one or more of these categories, the team must meet within 30 calendar days to develop an IEP. If a parent or guardian disagrees with the team's findings, they have the option to request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) that the school must pay for.
- ◆ The IEP is a legally binding document that outlines the services and support the student will receive. The goals in the IEP must be measurable, and the student's progress toward those goals must be monitored. The entire team must review the IEP at least once a year, with a reevaluation conducted every three years. Private schools can offer special education services, but are not required to.



504 Plans

Another way a student with a disability can access support in public schools is through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which is a piece of federal civil rights law that bans discrimination of individuals with disabilities in settings that receive federal funds.

- ◆ Section 504 requires that students with disabilities have equal access to public education. Section 504 also requires that a student with a disability can participate equally in athletics or extracurricular activities and be protected from bullying and harassment based on disability.
- ◆ Under Section 504, a student with a disability has a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.” Physical or mental impairments include mental health conditions such as ADHD, depression, and anxiety. Major life activity is defined broadly and can include things like learning, concentrating, reading, and thinking.
- ◆ Section 504 requires that “a group of knowledgeable persons draw upon information from a variety of sources” to decide if a student with a disability requires reasonable accommodations or modification to ensure equal access to their education. Schools are responsible for identifying students with disabilities who may be eligible for accommodations under Section 504. Schools typically have 504 Coordinators.
- ◆ Once a student is identified as having an impairment under Section 504, then the student is considered to have a disability and is eligible for protections, services, and reasonable accommodations.

| IEP | 504 Plan |
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| Specialized instruction or therapy is required for the student to be successful at school | The student does not require specialized instruction or therapy |
| IEP includes specific goals, objectives, assessments, and accommodations that have to be completed within a specific time | Student requires accommodations and may need some supportive services |
| Identifies specific conditions within identified disability categories | Disability = physical/mental difficulties that limit one or more major life activities |
| Addresses the special education needs of children age 3 through 21 years or the completion of a high school diploma | Protections extend for a lifetime and apply to schools and community settings receiving federal funds |



Psychoeducational Evaluations

School-based and private psychoeducational evaluations have some important differences. Here are four key distinctions to consider:

- ◆ Purpose: School-based evaluations are mainly done to determine if a student is eligible for special education services or support within the school system. They focus on identifying and addressing specific educational needs that may affect the student's academic performance. Private evaluations, on the other hand, can be conducted for various reasons, such as providing diagnostic clarity for neurodevelopmental and behavioral health conditions or offering treatment recommendations across settings.
- ◆ Timelines and Resources: School-based evaluations are subject to specific timelines and resources determined by educational regulations and institutional procedures. Private evaluations often offer flexibility in terms of scheduling and parameters for conducting the assessment.
- ◆ Cost: School-based evaluations are typically funded by the school district and are provided at no cost to families. In contrast, private evaluations are usually not covered by educational funding (except in the case of IEEs) and need to be paid for by the family. Private evaluations may be covered by some health insurance providers.
- ◆ Recommendations: School-based evaluations primarily focus on determining eligibility for special education services and developing IEPs or 504 Plans. These plans outline specific accommodations or services that the school will provide to support the student's learning needs. Private evaluations often provide recommendations that can inform the development of IEPs and 504 Plans, and also consider resources beyond educational services. Private evaluations may suggest interventions, therapies, and accommodations in various settings as well as guidance for addressing social and emotional challenges.

Both types of evaluations can be valuable in understanding a student's strengths and challenges. School-based evaluations are crucial for accessing support within the educational system, while private evaluations can provide comprehensive assessment and personalized recommendations that extend beyond the school setting. The choice between private and school-based evaluations depends on the specific needs and goals of the family.



What Can Families Do After a Diagnosis?

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|  <p>Get more information</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Talk with the professional that provided your child's diagnosis to answer:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– What are your child's key strengths?– What are your child's key areas of challenge?– How can your child be best supported at home and in school?◆ Review information and resources using reliable sources, such as understood.org, ldaamerica.org, dyslexia.yale.edu, or chadd.org. |
|  <p>Talk to your child</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Have conversations with your child. Sample starters include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– We all have things we are good at. We learned that you are really good at ____, ____, ____, and ____.– We all have things that are harder for us. We learned that it is harder for you to ____ and ____.– Your strengths and challenges fit with what we call (diagnosis).– There is a lot we know about (diagnosis) and so much we can do to help you do your best. |
|  <p>Build your child's strengths</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Celebrate and build your child's strengths.◆ Work with your child to find activities that align with their strengths and allow them to shine.◆ Point out what your child does well by labeling things like persistence, curiosity, and kindness when you see it. Catch them doing well often.◆ Create a supportive community of people who see your child's strengths and can help them build skills. |
|  <p>Reduce your child's challenges</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Discuss evaluation results with your child's pediatrician.◆ Partner with your child's school to develop accommodations and interventions, such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 504 Plan, Individualized Education Program (IEP), multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) plan, or a private school plan.◆ Get help from outside professionals when needed (e.g., tutor, therapist, executive functioning coach, or mentor). |
|  <p>Promote wellness</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Set aside time each day for your child to relax and pursue interests outside school-related tasks. Help them find things they enjoy doing.◆ Regular physical exercise, connection with people they care about, good sleep, and healthy eating will all support wellbeing.◆ Talk about a growth mindset. ideas.classdojo.com/b/growth-mindset. |