

Questions for Parents to Ask about School Adaptations

A child with a disability who has an Individualized Education Program* (IEP) or Section 504 Accommodation Plan may need extra help and support to participate in school. It takes thoughtful planning to choose adaptations, based on your child's disability, to help your child learn or have access to learning.

- First, some definitions: In this article and in the context of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, **adaptation** refers to both accommodations and modifications.
- An **accommodation** gives the student equal access and opportunity to benefit from the educational program. The assignment, test, or policy is the same as for the other students. However, consideration is given to the student's need to have changes made due to his or her disability. For example, a child who is easily distracted, may need to take a test in a quiet room.
- A **modification** alters what is expected of the student. For example, the student may do only part of an assignment or the teacher may assign an easier task.

For a child with a disability, both accommodations and modifications must be available. Appropriate accommodations vary with individual circumstances such as a child's age, disability, school class or setting, and whether the child is served under IDEA or Section 504. The following questions may help you think about what kinds of accommodations and/or modifications your child may need. Once the IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan includes them, the education team will use them to teach your child.

Review Current Accommodations and Modifications

- What are the accommodations and modifications in my child's current IEP or 504 plan now? Do they work for my child?

- Does the school implement the accommodations and modifications in my child's plan?
- Does the IEP or 504 plan state that my child will have an adaptation or does it use phrases like may have, when available, would benefit from, or if necessary? If those phrases are present, the team has not actually stated when and under what circumstances the school provides accommodation or modification. This vague language makes it difficult for the school staff to follow the IEP or 504.
- Are all of the listed accommodations and modifications still necessary? Are they necessary in every school environment? If not, where are they still necessary?
- Can teaching my child a skill eliminate the need for any of the current accommodations and modifications?

Use Evaluation to Determine Need for Accommodations and Modifications

- With what is my child having difficulty in school?
- What accommodations or modifications does my child's most recent evaluation summary report recommend? Are those adaptations in the IEP or 504 plan?
- What accommodations and modifications do outside evaluations suggest?
- Does my child need an evaluation in any of the following areas?
 - Assistive Technology
 - Communication
 - Limited English Proficiency
 - Braille, if my child is visually impaired
 - Alternative communication, if my child is deaf or hard of hearing
 - Behavior (including Functional Behavioral Assessment)

Consider New Accommodations and Modifications

- What accommodations and modifications worked in the past?
- What accommodations and modifications do we use at home and in the community?
- Does my child know of any accommodations and modifications that might be helpful?
- Are there special events (field trips, performances) or different situations (bad weather, upcoming hospitalization) that may require specific accommodations and modifications?
- Are the adaptations flexible for changes in health or medications?
- Has the team discussed accommodations or modifications for state and district-wide assessments?
- Is regular home/school communication needed? If so, is the method clearly defined?
- Has the team discussed if my child needs accommodations or modifications of any district policies, including behavior policies?
- Will the accommodations and modifications help my child participate effectively in the general curriculum or regular education classroom?
- If my child is moving to a new school or setting, what accommodations and modifications will my child need in the new environment so he or she can learn?

Accommodations and Modifications and the Child

- Do any of the current accommodations and modifications interfere with my child's ability to interact with classmates? Can the school make the adaptations less disruptive?
- Can my child learn self-advocacy skills so that he or she can state the need for the accommodations and modifications? If so, who will teach the skills?
- Who will train my child to use assistive technology?
- Do any of the current accommodations and modifications make school "too easy" for my child?
- Is my child challenged to learn new skills?
- Do my child's classmates understand my child's disability and the need for accommodations and modifications? Is my child comfortable with classmates learning more about the disability and why he or she needs the adaptations?

Accommodations and Modifications and the School Staff

- Are accommodations and modifications written clearly and specifically so they can be done consistently?
- Is it clear who is responsible for providing each one?
- Is it clear who will communicate the accommodations and modifications to other staff members?
- How will the staff obtain training and information necessary to meet my child's needs?
- Who will educate staff about
 - My child's health and safety needs?
 - The impact of my child's disability?
 - Assistive technology for my child?
 - Appropriate methods to communicate with or redirect my child?
 - Implementing a positive behavior intervention plan?
- Does the IEP clearly define the service times needed to provide the accommodations and modifications?
- What are the plans to repair or replace any assistive technology equipment?
- How will the school inform substitute teachers or personnel about providing adaptations listed in my child's IEP or 504 plan?

Your answers to these questions may help you think about appropriate and effective accommodations and modifications for your child. You can then brainstorm with your child's education team to choose the adaptations that give your child access to an appropriate, meaningful education.

* All references to IEP (Individualized Education Program) include IIIP (Individual Interagency Intervention Plan) and IFSP (Individual Family Service Plan).