



## Differentiating between an IEP (Individualized Education Program) and a 504 Plan

Understanding the difference between an IEP (Individualized Education Program) and a 504 Plan can be confusing and often difficult to navigate. Learn when your child would benefit from one or the other, and how to initiate the process for evaluation, development and implementation of special education services.

| <b>What is the difference between an IEP and 504 Plan?</b>   |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <b>IEP</b>  | <b>504 Plan</b>  |
| <b>Purpose</b>   | For students who need specialized instruction, and related services tailored to their educational needs.  | For students who need accommodations and modifications to access general education, and remove barriers to learning.   |
| <b>Eligibility</b>   | Requires a specific diagnosis that significantly impacts educational performance.   | Requires a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities.   |
| <b>Age Criteria</b>  | Eligible for students from ages 3 to 18, with some states increasing the age to 21.   | Can be used for any student with a qualifying disability throughout their K-12 education.  |
| <b>Goals</b>   | Includes annual goals and benchmarks to measure progress.   | Typically doesn't include specific goals and benchmarks.   |
| <b>Duration of Plan and Review*</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Annual Review:</b> An IEP is reviewed at least once a year to ensure that the student's goals are being met and to make any necessary adjustments to the plan.</li> <li>● <b>Three-Year Reevaluation:</b> Every three years, the student should undergo a full reevaluation to determine if they still qualify for special education services.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Annual Review:</b> A 504 Plan is reviewed annually to ensure that the student's accommodations are still appropriate and effective.</li> <li>● <b>Reevaluation:</b> A reevaluation is typically conducted every three years to determine if the student still needs a 504 Plan. However, this can vary depending on the student's specific needs and circumstances.</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>*It's important to note that both IEPs and 504 Plans can be terminated if the student no longer needs the services or accommodations provided by the plan. This could happen if the student's needs change or if they graduate from high school.</i></p> |   |  |

### **Which plan is right for your child?**

The determination is made by a team of professionals who will assess your child's needs and determine the most appropriate plan. A parent should advocate for their child, to make sure the best outcome is achieved.

### **Who initiates the request for a child to be evaluated for an IEP or 504 Plan?**

Parents or teachers can initiate the process:

- Parents or guardians can express concerns about their child's learning or behavior to the school.
- Parents can request an evaluation to determine if their child is eligible for an IEP or 504 Plan.
- The request should be made in writing to the school's special education or 504 coordinator.
- Teachers or other school personnel may observe that a child is struggling academically or behaviorally.
- Teachers or other school personnel can recommend that the child be evaluated for special education services or a 504 Plan.
- The school will then initiate the evaluation process.

### **What is the evaluation process:**

Once a referral is made, the school will conduct a comprehensive evaluation to determine if the child is eligible for an IEP or 504 Plan. This evaluation may include:

- Review of the child's academic records
- Psychological testing
- Speech and language assessment
- Occupational therapy assessment
- Physical therapy assessment
- Medical evaluations

### **Plan Development:**

- If the child is found eligible, an IEP or 504 Plan will be developed.
- This is done through a collaborative process involving parents, teachers, and other relevant professionals.
- The plan will outline the child's needs, goals, and the accommodations or services they will receive.

### **Important Considerations:**

- Parents have the right to request an independent evaluation at their own expense if they disagree with the school's evaluation.

- Parents should be actively involved in the entire process, from the initial referral to the development and implementation of the plan.
- It's important to advocate for your child's needs and ensure they receive the appropriate support and services.

### **Do students have both an IEP and a 504 Plan?**

Yes, a student can have both an IEP and a 504 Plan, but it's not very common. If a child qualifies for an IEP, they should only have an IEP and not a separate 504 Plan. The IEP should include all services and support the student needs.

However, in some rare cases, a student may have both plans:

- **Temporary Needs:** If a student with an IEP experiences a temporary disability, such as a broken arm, they might need additional accommodations for a short period. In this case, a 504 Plan could be created to address these temporary needs.
- **Additional Accommodations:** If a student with an IEP requires additional accommodations beyond what is included in their IEP, a 504 Plan could be created to address these specific needs.

It's important to note that having both plans can be confusing and may lead to unnecessary paperwork and coordination. If a student is eligible for an IEP, it's usually best to have just one plan that addresses all of their needs.

### **How is an IEP and 504 Plan funded?**

IEP: Mandated and funded by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law that ensures students with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

504 Plan: Mandated and funded by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability

Teacher can initiate the process:

*While the federal government sets the guidelines for both plans, states have some flexibility in implementing them. This means that specific requirements and procedures for IEPs and 504 Plans may vary slightly from state to state.*

**If you have any concerns about your child's educational needs, it's always best to talk to their school and discuss the most appropriate plan for them.**

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Resources:

[www.theedadvocate.org](http://www.theedadvocate.org)

<https://www.understood.org/en>

<https://www.additudemag.com/504-plan-for-adhd-accommodations-at-school>