



### **What is the difference between a 504 plan and an IEP?**

A 504 plan provides basic accommodations in the classroom such as greater access to the restroom, allowing for eating/drinking at certain times typically not allowed, or alternative options for physical education. An IEP provides interventions such as taking tests in a separate room, access to closed captioning with video instruction, and more. A 504 can be established without parent involvement, but an IEP must involve parents. Both plans provide for accommodations, but only an IEP provides for specialized instruction for students in grades K–12, while a 504 plan can serve students at both the K–12 and college levels.

A 504 plan is intended for children with a wide range of disabilities who are, nevertheless, able to participate and succeed in a general education classroom. An IEP is intended for children who are not able to learn at the same pace as their peers and who require special education services. Some children with Alport syndrome qualify for an IEP, particularly those who wear hearing aids for hearing loss caused by Alport syndrome, or for those who are experiencing symptoms of end stage renal failure.

### **Who qualifies for a 504 plan?**

To be protected under Section 504, a student must be determined to: (1) have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or (2) have a record of such an impairment; or (3) be regarded as having such an impairment.

**For every student with a chronic illness**, federal legislation guarantees that schools must make any reasonable accommodation to allow the student to receive public education.

### **How does chronic illness affect education?**

Children with a chronic condition, particularly those with severe symptoms, are more likely to be hospitalized frequently or longer, or miss school more regularly, which can interrupt their school attendance and engagement in learning and social interactions that are vital for academic performance.

### **What should I ask for in a 504 plan?**

During the 504 plan meeting, share what you know about your child's personality, interests, strengths, and struggles. Describe how your child manages homework and studying for

tests. Also, tell the team about any activities outside of school. This will give the school insight into your child's abilities and interests.

**Source: *Nationwide Children's Hospital Social Work Department:*  
504s and IEPs**

It is best to discuss 504 plans and/or IEPs with your child's school as early as possible. Provide the school with diagnosis specific resources to ensure that staff are knowledgeable about your child's diagnosis. Establishing a plan early will impact whether they receive services as they transition to higher levels of education.

For older students, reach out to their school's office of disability rights to understand what accommodations they can make for your child.

Involve your child in decisions about their healthcare. Allow your child to advocate for themselves and the services they believe they need. Some children may be more concerned with missing recess and play times with peers, while others may be more concerned about missing homework. Some teens may value extra time between classes to use the restroom.

Accommodations for children with chronic illness are governed by federal law, specifically Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (amended in 2008). Section 504 governs all school aged children, even into college. As a federal law, it extends to students at all schools that received federal funding (private schools, while possibly exempt from Section 504, are still governed by the Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA], which enforces the same standards).

**Key Tip:**

Schools are not legally required to evaluate your child based upon your request alone. A school must be convinced that your child is suffering from an impairment that is substantially limiting a "major life activity" for your child. When requesting a 504 evaluation from your child's teacher, it is helpful to provide documentation from your child's healthcare provider/s. This should explain the nature of your child's illness and detail exactly how the condition impairs his/her/their education and other life activities. **In the case of Alport syndrome, this is not challenging related to hearing loss, but can be more complex if associated only with the renal aspects of the disease. It can be that chronic kidney disease makes it more challenging for your child to recover from typical child illnesses such cold and flu, including spilling blood/protein with upper respiratory infections. Your child will experience more fatigue and longer recovery time, leading to more absences. This can be documented by your child's healthcare provider.**

A 504 plan is unique to each particular child. There is no standard plan, and there are no basic accommodations that are guaranteed under the law. What the law requires is that every child be given access to Free Appropriate Public Education. This means that every school district is required to provide accommodations, aids, and services that meet the educational needs of your child.