

What Every Pediatrician Needs to Know About ADHD and School

When you have diagnosed ADHD in a child, parents will often seek either special education services or accommodations in the classroom for their child. To seek these services, instruct the parent to write a letter to the principal requesting an educational evaluation for their child.

The parents will then usually ask that you send a letter to the school confirming the diagnosis and supporting their request. What information you include can make the difference between receiving educational assistance or not. Here is a quick overview of what criteria the school will be using. You should not recommend which of these programs a child would best be suited for, but be sure to address the child's issues related to the eligibility criteria.

504 Accommodations

Accommodations in the classroom are provided to students with disabilities who need minor modifications to have equal access to the educational process. The eligibility process is less stringent than in special education, and a 504 plan does not include any "services." In practice it is usually easier to get a 504 plan than special education services. When making a decision about eligibility, the school will be considering only how the ADHD affects the child in the educational setting, not at home or other settings.

Eligibility Criteria for 504 Accommodations

1. The child has a disability
2. *And* the disability *substantially* limits one or more major life activities. It is about the degree of impairment rather than the diagnosis.
3. The life activities specified in the law that are most related to ADHD are
 - a. Learning
 - b. Behavior
 - c. Concentrating
 - d. Thinking
 - e. Reading
 - f. Communicating
4. The condition must be chronic in nature (at least 6 months' duration).

Typical Accommodations for Children With ADHD

1. Classroom seating arrangements (front or back of class, standing desk, ability to get up and move during class).
2. Modified testing modes (oral testing, more time, testing in a quiet environment).
3. Simplified instructions (breaking complex tasks down into discrete steps, making sure all assignments are in writing and in the child's backpack).
4. Peer notes (getting a copy of the teacher's notes or another student's).
5. Positive behavioral interventions (contracts or charting to increase appropriate behaviors).

Special Education

Special education services are reserved for children with disabilities who need the most support. When making a decision about eligibility, the school will be considering only how the ADHD affects the child in the educational setting, not at home or other settings. The following criteria are used in determining eligibility:

1. Diagnosis of a disabling condition.
2. The condition is chronic in nature (lasting at least 6 months).
3. If ADHD is the primary diagnosis, then it must result in either limited alertness or heightened alertness to distracting stimuli resulting in limited alertness in the classroom setting.
4. The disabling condition must adversely affect the child's educational performance creating an "educational need." In other words, the child is unable to progress in the regular educational program without specialized instruction and needs more than accommodations in the classroom.
5. And the child must be in need of special education services.

In addition to the accommodations listed above, students in special education may receive services to address a particular academic problem area, such as instruction from a reading, math or special education specialist, or services to address behavior problems from a special education teacher, school psychologist, or counselor. Social skills training is another option. If you are aware of a particular area of services needed by a child, mention it in your letter.

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 Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
 Need more information? Contact CHADD at www.chadd.org or CHADD's National Resource Center on ADHD at www.help4adhd.org.
 CHADD

The recommendations in this publication do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or serve as a standard of medical care. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate. Original document included as part of *Caring for Children With ADHD: A Resource Toolkit for Clinicians*, 2nd Edition. Copyright © 2012 American Academy of Pediatrics. All Rights Reserved. The American Academy of Pediatrics does not review or endorse any modifications made to this document and in no event shall the AAP be liable for any such changes.

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