

# ADHD

## Information for Parents

ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) makes it difficult for children to control their behavior. ADHD is one of the most common childhood disorders, affecting 4–12 percent of school-aged children. While it is more common in boys, girls can also be diagnosed with ADHD.

Treatment and support can help students with ADHD manage their symptoms and succeed in school. It is, therefore, important for parents to get help for a child with ADHD as early as possible.

## Common ADHD Symptoms

Children with ADHD may exhibit some or all of the following symptoms.

### Inattention

- ▶ has a hard time paying attention or daydreams
- ▶ often does not listen
- ▶ pays little to no attention to details
- ▶ becomes bored quickly
- ▶ has difficulty beginning and completing tasks

### Hyperactivity

- ▶ cannot stay seated or is constantly moving
- ▶ frequently squirms and fidgets
- ▶ talks too much

### Impulsivity

- ▶ acts without thinking
- ▶ interrupts others
- ▶ exhibits unsafe behavior, such as running into the street without looking

*The term ADD (attention-deficit disorder) is sometimes used when a student has inattentive type ADHD. (A student with ADD does not have hyperactivity or impulsivity symptoms.)*

# Autism

## Information for Parents

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a developmental disorder that can vary greatly in severity. Because ASD can impact the way a child learns, communicates, and interacts with others, it's important that parents get help for a child with autism as early as possible.

## Signs and Symptoms

The following are some of the signs and symptoms of ASD. These signs usually appear in early childhood.

- ▶ Isn't interested in or has difficulty relating to others
- ▶ Avoids eye contact
- ▶ Has a hard time talking about his/her own feelings
- ▶ Doesn't recognize the feelings of others
- ▶ Resists or doesn't express physical affection
- ▶ Repeats certain words or actions frequently
- ▶ Has trouble adapting to new routines
- ▶ Has obsessive interests
- ▶ Has delayed speech or language skills
- ▶ Has flat or inappropriate facial expressions

## Screening and Diagnosis

If you and/or your child's pediatrician suspect ASD, your child will be thoroughly screened before being officially diagnosed. An autism diagnosis includes the following more specific conditions.

- ▶ Autistic disorder
- ▶ Asperger's syndrome
- ▶ Pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS)

*If your child is diagnosed with one of these conditions, your pediatrician may refer him/her to a specialist, or continue to work with you and your child's school to ensure that he/she receives support and services.*

# Asperger's Syndrome

## Information for Parents

Asperger's syndrome is a developmental disorder that can cause significant social impairments. Asperger's Syndrome is now considered part of the Autism Spectrum rather than a distinct condition.\*

## Autism and Asperger's

Asperger's syndrome is often characterized as a less severe form of autism. There are, however, a number of differences.

- ▶ Speech delays are often less pronounced in children with Asperger's, which means that they are often diagnosed later in life than other children on the autism spectrum.
- ▶ Asperger's syndrome typically does not include cognitive or intellectual impairment. While children with Asperger's can suffer from learning disabilities like any other child, they typically have average or above average intelligence.

## Signs and Symptoms

Because children with Asperger's are usually diagnosed later than other children on the autism spectrum, parents with concerns need to be especially observant and watch for the following.

- ▶ Awkward or poor social skills
- ▶ Obsessive routines and/or patterns
- ▶ Poor eye contact or staring at others
- ▶ Inappropriate behaviors / odd mannerisms
- ▶ Intense interest in specific topics
- ▶ Trouble adapting to new routines
- ▶ Hypersensitivity to light and/or sounds

*\*While Asperger's is no longer considered separate from Autism Spectrum Disorder, some parents might find it helpful to seek out Asperger's-specific resources and support.*

# Dyslexia

## Information for Parents

Dyslexia is a learning disability that affects the part of the brain that processes language. Words and letters appear “mixed up” to those with dyslexia, though their vision and intelligence are unaffected by dyslexia.

Because dyslexia causes reading difficulties and can negatively impact a student’s overall academic performance, it’s important for parents to get help for a child with dyslexia as early as possible.

### Symptoms

Dyslexia is often not diagnosed until a child is school aged. However, before starting school, children with dyslexia often learn to talk late, have problems learning new words, and have a hard time remembering words and names.

Once a child with dyslexia is in school, the following symptoms often emerge:

- ▶ Reading below grade level
- ▶ Difficulty spelling
- ▶ Difficulty finding the right words when answering questions
- ▶ Avoiding reading or activities involving reading
- ▶ Taking a long time to complete reading and writing assignments
- ▶ Difficulty reading aloud
- ▶ Mispronouncing words, even familiar ones
- ▶ Trouble remembering the sequence of events
- ▶ Difficulty memorizing things

*Children with dyslexia are also at a greater risk for ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder). If you suspect that your child has dyslexia, or if he/she has been diagnosed, be on the lookout for ADHD symptoms.*

# Learning Disabilities

## Information for Parents

Learning disabilities impact specific academic skills, such as reading, writing, or math. They also often impact a child’s organization and time-management skills, attention, and/or memory.

Individuals with learning disabilities don’t see, hear, or understand things the same as other students. And because their brains are wired differently, they often have difficulty learning in a traditional classroom.

Learning disabilities are not caused by intellectual or physical disabilities. In fact, individuals with learning disabilities typically have average or above average intelligence.

### Specific Learning Disabilities

While learning disabilities are unique to each individual, the following are some of the most common learning disabilities.

- ▶ **Auditory Processing Disorder** is a condition that affects how someone receives verbal information and processes meaning.
- ▶ **Dyscalculia** impacts a person’s ability to use and understand math. In addition to having difficulty in math class, individuals with this condition may have a hard time counting, using money, or telling time.
- ▶ **Dysgraphia** affects fine motor skills. Someone with this condition usually has illegible handwriting, and may also have issues with spacing, spelling, and putting thoughts into written words.
- ▶ **Dyslexia** affects the part of the brain that processes language. Words and letters appear “mixed up.”

# Intellectual Disability

## Information for Parents

An intellectual disability limits an individual’s thought processes (their ability to learn and understand). An intellectual disability also negatively impacts a person’s social and life skills—skills used in everyday life situations.

While individuals with an intellectual disability need support, they can learn, grow, and thrive.

### Limitations and Characteristics

Individuals with an intellectual disability experience limitations in the following two areas.

**Intellectual functioning** – the ability to learn, reason, and problem solve. Intellectual functioning is typically measured with an IQ test. An IQ test score of 70-75 or below indicates impaired intellectual functioning.

**Adaptive behavior** – conceptual, social, and practical skills

- ▶ **Conceptual skills:** language, reading, and writing, money, time, and number concepts
- ▶ **Social skills:** interpersonal skills, self-esteem, the ability to follow rules, and gullibility (the ability to identify and avoid being taken advantage of)
- ▶ **Practical skills:** daily living tasks (e.g., hygiene, housekeeping), job skills, transportation, use of money, health care, routines, and personal safety

*It’s important to remember that all people with intellectual disabilities are different—and that they are likely to be more skilled in some areas than they are in others. It’s also important to remember that with ongoing support, these individuals can grow in the above areas throughout their lives, especially in adaptive behaviors.*

## Speech or Language Impairment

### Information for Parents

Speech and language impairments impact a person's communication, articulation, and voice. Because a speech or language impairment can adversely affect a child's academic performance and social development, it's important that parents get help for their child as early as possible.

### Speech Impairment

Speech impairment refers to a range of disorders that impact the way a person speaks. Speech impairment can have a variety of causes and symptoms, as well as a wide range of severity.

- ▶ **Speech sound disorders** impact an individual's ability to articulate certain letters or sounds (e.g., pronouncing an "r" like a "w").
- ▶ **Stuttering** occurs when the flow of speech is disrupted by involuntary repetitions or abnormal hesitations (pausing).
- ▶ **Apraxia, verbal dyspraxia, and dysarthria** are impairments caused by injury or a neurological condition. They impact the motor functions involved in speech, such as the brain's ability to control the mouth and throat.

### Language Impairment

Language impairment impacts a person's ability to understand or use language.

- ▶ **Language-based learning disabilities** impact listening, comprehension, and speech.
- ▶ **Specific language impairment** refers to instances when a child's language abilities do not develop normally—and the impairment cannot be attributed to physical or mental impairment.
- ▶ **Selective mutism** is a disorder that's marked by a child's refusal to speak, despite being physically and intellectually able to do so.

## Giftedness

### Information for Parents

Children are characterized as gifted when their ability in a certain area is significantly above the norm for others their age. They may have superior cognitive ability, be very creative, or be gifted in a specific academic subject, such as math or science.

### Characteristics

All gifted children are different, but the following are some commonalities in the characteristics of many gifted children.

- ▶ Is a fast learner
- ▶ Has an excellent memory
- ▶ Has a large vocabulary at a young age
- ▶ Enjoys problem solving with numbers and puzzles
- ▶ Has a keen sense of humor and a vivid imagination
- ▶ Understands abstract ideas at a young age
- ▶ Is intensely curious and asks lots of questions
- ▶ May have a heightened emotional sensitivity to social/humanitarian issues

### Assessing Giftedness

Schools have a number of assessment strategies to identify gifted students, the most common being achievement and ability tests.

- ▶ **Achievement tests** measure a student's skills and knowledge, as compared to others at the same grade level.
- ▶ **Ability tests** provide information on intellectual giftedness, such as problem solving and abstract thinking.

*Tests do not capture all aspects of giftedness, and are not the only methods used by schools to identify gifted/talented (G/T) students.*

## IEP

### Information for Parents

An IEP, or Individualized Education Program, is a document created to address the unique needs of a child eligible for special education services. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlines what IEPs should generally include, IEPs vary greatly from state to state, school to school, and child to child.

### IEP Eligibility

The following are the 13 categories of disabilities that enable students to be eligible for special education services and an IEP.

- ▶ Specific learning disability
- ▶ Other health impairment (includes ADHD)
- ▶ Autism spectrum disorder
- ▶ Emotional disturbance
- ▶ Speech or language impairment
- ▶ Visual impairment, including blindness
- ▶ Deafness
- ▶ Hearing impairment
- ▶ Deaf-blindness
- ▶ Orthopedic impairment
- ▶ Intellectual disability
- ▶ Traumatic brain injury
- ▶ Multiple disabilities

### The Initial Evaluation

Once a student has been identified as possibly needing special education services, whether by parent request or school identification, the child is evaluated by the school.

If a student qualifies for services, a team uses the information from the evaluation to determine what services will best help that student succeed in school. The team then writes an IEP for the student.

Each IEP is unique, and the services outlined in an IEP will vary from student to student.

# 504 Plan

## Information for Parents

504 plans are developed to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same education as their non-disabled peers.

A 504 plan doesn't provide individualized instruction; however, it does provide students with accommodations to help them succeed in the regular classroom.

### 504 Eligibility

Students with any disability may be eligible for a 504 plan, as long as the disability substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., learning).

A 504 plan has a wider range of eligibility than an IEP, which makes a 504 plan a good option for students who don't qualify for special education services under IEP requirements.

### 504 Evaluation

504 plans often don't require extensive evaluations, but there are procedures to follow. Here's what you can do if you believe your child might qualify for a 504 plan.

- ▶ **Gather documentation** of your child's needs, such as medical diagnoses, grades, and any private evaluations that may have been done.
- ▶ **Send a request in writing** to the school's 504 coordinator documenting your child's needs. If you can't find the contact information on the school's website, contact the principal.
- ▶ Upon receiving your request, school officials will review your child's grades, test scores, medical history, and comments from teachers.
- ▶ **Collaborate on the 504 plan.** If your child qualifies, work with your school to find the best classroom accommodations for your child.

# IEP vs. 504 Plan

## Information for Parents

Both an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and a 504 plan help students with disabilities get the support they need to succeed in school. IEPs and 504 plans have a number of similarities, but there are also some significant differences.

If your child has a condition that adversely impacts his/her education, a well-written, well-implemented IEP or 504 plan will help ensure that your child gets the support and services they need.

	IEP	504 Plan
Legal Basis	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
Purpose	To provide individualized special education services for eligible students	To provide students support (accommodations) in the regular classroom setting
Eligibility	To be eligible for an IEP a child's school performance must be "adversely affected" by a disability in one of the 13 IDEA disability categories	Students must have a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., learning). Section 504 has a broader definition of disability than IDEA.
Contents	An IEP is a written document developed by an IEP team. It details a student's current educational performance, services, goals, accommodations, modifications, placement, and more.	There is no standard form for a 504 plan. Most 504 plans are written, but it's not a requirement. 504 plans generally include accommodations and information on who provides them.

# Special Education Terms

## Information for Parents

Navigating the special education services provided by your school can be confusing, and full of unfamiliar terms. The following are some of the terms you may hear as you work to support your child's success.

- ▶ **504 Plan:** A plan developed to ensure that students with disabilities receive the accommodations they need to succeed in the regular classroom
- ▶ **Accommodations:** Alterations that enable a student to work around a disability, without a change in the curriculum (e.g., giving answers orally instead of in writing)
- ▶ **Annual Review (AR):** Yearly meeting of an IEP team to assess a student's needs and progress
- ▶ **Assessment:** An evaluation used to identify a student's strengths, weaknesses, and progress
- ▶ **Assistive Technology (AT):** Technology devices used to help students perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for them
- ▶ **Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP):** A plan specifically targeting one to three of a student's undesirable or disruptive classroom behaviors
- ▶ **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** The right to equal educational opportunities
- ▶ **Individualized Education Program (IEP):** A document that defines the special education services to be delivered to students who qualify, as defined by IDEA (There are 13 categories of disabilities that make students eligible for an IEP.)
- ▶ **IEP Team:** The group of individuals who meets to discuss and make decisions on a student's IEP. An IEP team usually includes parents, teachers, counselors, and other special education staff.