

SCHOOL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ADHD

School-related interventions for ADHD can be categorized as either accommodations or self-directed strategies.

- **Accommodations** are interventions requiring the assistance of others. This usually means teachers, paraprofessionals, school counselors, and parents.
- **Self-Directed Strategies** are techniques that the student learns and uses with little or no assistance from others. They often involve learning meta cognitive strategies, organization skills, and new habit patterns.

Most accommodations should evolve to self-directed strategies. 504 Plan or IEP accommodations should usually have built-in plans to gradually develop into self-directed strategies. I have seen many 504 Plan accommodations which are helpful but keep students dependent on special help from school staff. After a period of time, the team decides that the school has carried out the accommodation long enough and that the student should now be able to do okay without the special help. The major problem with this is that the student was never taught the skills necessary to do well without the accommodation. Therefore, if it is at all possible, the 504 Plan Accommodation should include a written plan for helping the student develop a self-directed strategy to replace the accommodation.

Example: An afternoon checkout to help the student organize for homework is a common, simple, and powerful accommodation. The teacher, an aide, or possibly a peer assures that homework assignments are clearly written down in an agenda book, that the student understands what is to be done, and that the necessary materials are gathered to take home. At the beginning of the school year, the teacher might give the student a paper with the assignments already written down and the homework is marked with a highlighter. The teacher hands the necessary material to the student and watches while it is placed in the backpack. Later, the student becomes responsible for copying the assignments from the board, the teacher checks to see if it is written correctly, and tells the student to get the necessary books or other materials. Later the student is just asked if he has the material needed for homework. The accommodation might be faded out by checking every other day for a while, then twice a week, and then once a week. The teacher might help the student to develop ways to remind himself to complete the necessary steps. At that point, the accommodation has become a self-directed strategy. A self-directed strategy doesn't always mean that the student does everything for himself without any help from others. It does mean that the student initiates asking for the help.

Accommodations for ADHD students can be accomplished informally by meeting with the teacher and discussing what interventions might be helpful for the student. Discuss both your child's strengths and needs. This may work well if you have a good relationship with the teacher and there is only one teacher. A downside is that an informal plan is not written and sets no precedence for the next year. It is often best to ask for a 504 Plan.

504 Plans: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that schools getting federal dollars must make reasonable accommodations for persons with certain conditions that affect their ability to benefit from education. ADHD was included as a possible handicapped condition in a memorandum from the United States Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Dated September 16, 1991. Two things are required to begin the 504 Plan process.

1. Confirmation that the child has an ADHD diagnosis, usually accomplished with a letter or report from a physician or psychologist.
2. A request for the parent that a 504 Plan meeting is desired. The principal is often the best person to contact for this request, because they are responsible for 504 Plans at their school. A phone call is usually enough. If this doesn't work, a certified or registered letter may be sent.

Special Education Services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Accommodations can also be made through an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Almost all of the ADHD students who have an IEP, have it because of learning disabilities or more serious disorders. Few of my patients have an IEP due solely to ADHD, although this is technically possible under the "Other Health Impaired" category. One advantage of an IEP is that school should have more resources to carry out an IEP than a 504 Plan. A child who receives special education services under IDEA also has more rights and protections than the child with a Section 504 Plan. For more information about Section 504 and special education plans go the following web sites:

- <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/sec504.index.htm>
- www.fetaweb.com

Use the Educational Accommodations Checklist to brainstorm which strategies might be the most helpful for your child. Select ten or less strategies to discuss in the 504 Plan or IEP meeting. In my experience, coming up with several critical accommodations that give the "most bang for the buck" and are actually consistently used, is better than trying to have numerous accommodations which are not consistently followed. For more potential accommodations, go to www.wrightslaw.com/info/sec504.accoms.mods.pdf

You also need to weigh the helpfulness of the accommodation with possible negative emotional/motivational effects on your child. One list of accommodations I've used included using a study carrel in the classroom to minimize distractions. Some kids feel humiliated and get teased when interventions that set them obviously apart from other students are used. Give your child a chance to think about and give feedback about the possible accommodations. Ideally, your child should be part of the team that devises the 504 Plan or IEP.

My personal favorite accommodations include:

- Specific classroom seating – often near the teacher, away from distractions, and near peers that model good attention and study habits.
- Afternoon Checkout – discussed earlier.
- Increased communication with parents.
- Brief one-to-one help to be sure the student is getting started on an assignment correctly.