



# Parent Advocacy Tool Kit

Support, Questions,  
and Confidence for  
Every Meeting

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# WELCOME



Welcome, parents! This tool kit is here to support you.

This provides information and worksheets to help you navigate the IEP or 504 Plan process.

Remember, you don't need to be an expert to advocate for your child's needs.

- The IEP/504 process is a team effort, and you are an important part of the team. Don't be afraid to ask questions and share your thoughts.
- Feel free to take notes and jot down ideas—this is for you to use in a way that's most helpful.
- You can advocate with confidence and kindness.

You are your child's best advocate. Don't be afraid to ask questions, request clarification, or speak up if something doesn't feel right.



Let this guide support you in advocating with confidence, clarity, and kindness.





# PARENT TIPS ENCOURAGEMENT

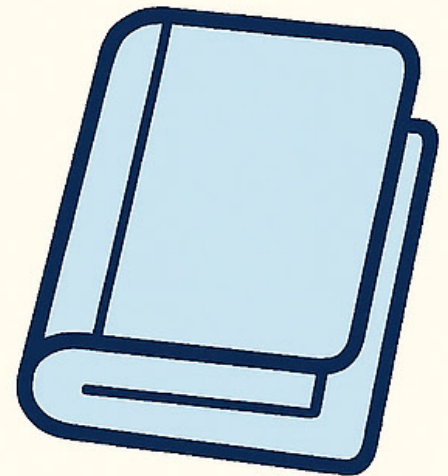
- You're allowed to ask for clarification.
- You know your child best.
- It's okay to take a break and come back with questions.
- Start with the positives and go from there.
- Your input is valuable to the team.
- Build relationships whenever possible.
- It's fine to say, "I would like to think about this."
- Explore options and ask about other supports.
- Take notes and ask for copies of any documents shared.
- Remember to trust your instincts — you've got this.



# DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

Keep these documents organized in a binder or folder.

- Copies of the IEP and/or 504 Plan
- Copies of signed consent forms
- Evaluation reports
- Meeting notices
- Emails or notes from the school
- Doctor's notes
- Behavior or support plans (if applicable)
- List of parent's concerns and anticipated goals
- Formulate a list of questions to ask during the meeting





# SCHOOL SUPPORT GLOSSARY



**IEP:** Individualized Education Program – a legal plan outlining special education services.

**504 Plan:** Provides accommodations for students with disabilities in general education.

**RTI:** Response to Intervention – early help through tiered academic or behavior support.

**BIP:** Behavior Intervention Plan – strategies to improve behavior based on data.

**FAPE:** Free Appropriate Public Education – ensures every child receives suitable education.

**LRE:** Least Restrictive Environment – supports inclusion with general education peers.

**Accommodations:** Adjustments that help a child learn without changing the curriculum.

**Modifications:** Changes to what a child is expected to learn.

**Evaluation:** Assessments used to determine if a child qualifies for support services.

**Advocate** Someone who supports or speaks up for your child's needs at school.

# WORDS TO KNOW: PARENT-FRIENDLY GLOSSARY



## **EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR (ESY)**

Additional instruction during summer break for students who need it.



## **FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT (FBA)**

Evaluation to understand the reasons behind challenging behaviors



## **SELF-CONTAINED CLASSROOM**

Special education class with a smaller number of students



## **TRANSITION SERVICES**

Support to help students prepare for life after high school



## **RELATED SERVICES**

Additional help, like OT, PT, Speech, and counseling



# IEP

# 504 Plan

Falls under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)



Falls under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

For students ages 3-21



For students ages 3-22

Focuses on providing individualized education and services



Focuses on removing barriers to accessing an education

Has a narrower definition of a disability



Has a broader definition of a disability

Provides postsecondary transition services



Provides postsecondary transition services

# QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK

## Before the meeting:

### The IEP/504 Process



- How is an IEP different from a 504 plan

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- What happens during an IEP/504 evaluation?

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- Can I bring someone with me to the meeting?

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- What if I disagree with the IEP or 504?

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- How can I advocate for my child during the meeting?

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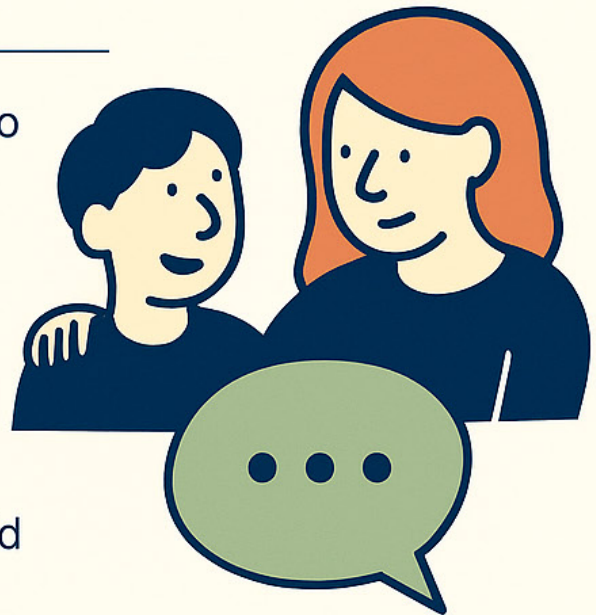
- What are my rights if the school isn't following the plan?

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- Can I request an independent evaluation?

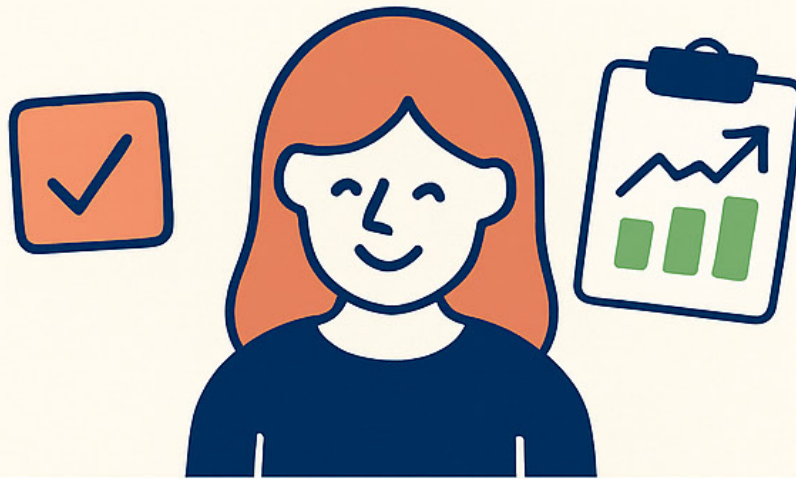
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# Your Child's Needs and Strengths



- \* What is my child's present level of performance?
- \* How are my child's skills lacking, and what can be done at home to support development?
- \* What are the specific goals and objectives for my child's education?
- \* What are the research-based strategies and interventions that will be used?
- \* Are the goals and objectives measurable, and how will progress be tracked?
- \* What are the anticipated outcomes and functional skills to be gained?
- \* What supports are in place when my child is struggling, emotionally or behaviorally?

# IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT



- Who will be working with my child, and what experience do they have?
- What training have staff received to support my child's needs?
- How will communication be maintained between home and school?
- How frequently will progress be reviewed and shared with me?
- What happens if the plan isn't working, or if my child needs more support?
- How will my child be included with their peers?
- If a paraprofessional is assigned, how will a positive relationship be established?



# PARENT ADVOCACY ORGANIZER



Use this page to prepare for your child's IEP/504 meeting and keep track of important notes.



**Meeting Date & Time:**

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**Who Will Be There:**

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**Your Concerns:**

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**Services You'd Like Considered:**

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**Ideas That Might Help Your Child:**

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**Questions I Want to Ask:**

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# YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTH SNAPSHOT

Fill this out to show your child's positive qualities and motivations



\* My child shines when...

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\* What excites or motivates my child is...

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\* My child is really good at...

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\* Others often notice that my child...

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\* My child needs help with...

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\* One thing I love about my child is...

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# NOTES FROM DOCTORS, PROVIDERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Use this page to collect input from professionals and support people outside the school system. Their insights can help strengthen your child's support plan.

**Name/Title:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes or Recommendations:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Name/Title:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes or Recommendations:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
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**Name/Title:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes or Recommendations:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# WHAT'S IN MY CHILD'S PLAN?

## Decoder

Term	What this means at school
<p>✓ <b>Accommodations</b> Example: Preferential seating</p>	<p>My child will sit close to the teacher.</p>
<p>✓ <b>Services</b> Example: Speech-language therapy</p>	<p>My child meets with the speech teacher twice a week.</p>
<p>✓ <b>Goals</b> Example: Improve decoding skills</p>	<p>My child will get better at sounding out words.</p>
<p>✓ <b>Testing Supports</b> Example: Extended time on assessments</p>	<p>My child gets more time on tests.</p>





# BEHAVIOR & EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS SNAPSHOT



## **Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP):**

Strategies based on data to address challenging behaviors.

## **Counseling Services**

Working with a school counselor or therapist to build emotional skills.

## **Check-In/Check-Out System**

Regular meetings with a teacher or staff member to set and review goals.

## **Emotional Regulation Support**

Assistance with managing emotions and developing self-regulation strategies.

## **What works well for my child at home:**

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# MEETING SUMMARY

**Date and Type of Meeting:**

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**People Who Attended:**

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**Decisions Made:**

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**Follow-Up Steps:**

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**Parent Concerns or Next Questions:**

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# ANNUAL REFLECTION



What worked this year:

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What didn't:

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Hopes for next year:

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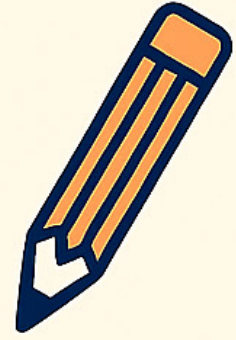
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# NOTES FOR NEXT YEAR'S TEACHER



**Strengths:**

**Triggers to avoid:**

**Best communication methods:**

**Tips that help at home**



# RESOURCES FOR NY PARENTS



## NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Information on rights, special education services, and policies.

[www.nysed.gov/special-education](http://www.nysed.gov/special-education)



## PARENT TO PARENT OF NYS

Support, advocacy, and connection opportunities for families of individuals with special needs.

[parenttoparentnys.org](http://parenttoparentnys.org)



## ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK

Resources and legal help for NYC families navigating special education issues.

[advocatesforchildren.org](http://advocatesforchildren.org)



## INCLUDEnyc

Support, guidance, and advocacy resources for young people and their families

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



# WHERE TO LEARN MORE

(NY State – Part 2)

Additional supports for families across New York.



## EARLY CHILDHOOD DIRECTION CENTERS (ECDC)

Supports and services for children with developmental disabilities.

[www.npwtrd.ny.gov](http://www.npwtrd.ny.gov)



## DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW YORK)

Protection and advocacy for individuals with disabilities in NY.

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



## NYSED SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT CENTERS

State-funded centers that help families navigate special education processes.

[www.nysed.gov/special-education/parent-centers](http://www.nysed.gov/special-education/parent-centers)



## NY ABLE

Achieving a Better Life Experience savings plan for people with disabilities.

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





# WHERE TO LEARN MORE



(National)

Additional supports for families across the country.



## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Official information from the U.S.  
Department of Education.

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)



## UNDERSTOOD

Information and resources about learning  
differences and attention issues.

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



## CENTER FOR PARENT INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Information for parents of children with  
disabilities.

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



## COUNCIL OF PARENT ATTORNEYS AND ADVOCATES (COPAA)

Legal and advocacy resources for  
protecting your child's rights.

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



# WHERE TO LEARN MORE



(National - Part 2)

Additional supports for families across the country.



## **PARENT TO PARENT USA**

Support for parents of children with disabilities.

[www.p2pusa.org](http://www.p2pusa.org)



## **ADA NATIONAL NETWORK**

Guidance and support on the ADA and disability rights.

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



## **OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS**

Information and guidance about education discrimination.

[www2.ed.gov/ocr](http://www2.ed.gov/ocr)



## **WRIGHTSLAW**

Information about special education law and advocacy.

[www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)









