

Fact Sheet

News from the IBD Help Center

SCHOOL ACCOMODATION PLANS & INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE (IBD)

The symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) can be unpredictable and may vary in severity. Children with IBD may miss school for medical appointments, illness, disease flare-ups, or treatment side effects. At the same time, they are still responsible for learning and completing their schoolwork. To help students with IBD achieve their academic goals, it is important to have a school accommodation (504) plan.

The Crohn's & Colitis Foundation recommends that all students with IBD have a 504 Plan in place at the beginning of the school year, even if they are feeling well. Your child can be symptom free (or in remission) at the beginning of the school year but could experience active symptoms (flare up) later in the school year. Just because you have a plan in place does not mean your child must use all the accommodations.

What is a 504 Plan?

Section 504 of the [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) is a law which protects the civil and constitutional rights of persons with disabilities. Students with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis are protected under this for having a chronic illness. This is because IBD impacts at least one major life activity (using the restroom or toileting) and can cause a substantial limitation on the student's ability to achieve their academic goals.

A 504 Plan is an action plan developed by the school, the parents/guardians, and the student. The aim is to prohibit discrimination against students with disabilities so that they may achieve their academic goals. It should contain a list of accommodations or adjustments required by a child with IBD to ensure that they are treated fairly and have the same access to quality of education as other students. This law typically applies to public schools – but it can also apply to private schools if the school receives federal funding.

What is an IEP?

An Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is established for a child who has an intellectual or learning disability and requires specialized instruction and related services. Requirements for an IEP are determined by the U.S. Department of Education and are based on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA process is more involved than Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and may require additional documentation.

What is the difference between an IEP and a 504 Plan?

If your student has an IEP for special education AND also has IBD, the 504 accommodations related to their IBD will be incorporated into the IEP.

What types of accommodations can be helpful for students with IBD?

The types of accommodations that can be helpful really depend on your child and their needs. Commonly requested accommodations include:

- **Unlimited restroom access**
- Stop-the-clock-testing
- Options to make up missed class time for medical appointments and illness without penalty
- Tutoring after a specific period of absence due to disease flare up
- Full participation in extracurricular activities even after classroom absences

You and your child should work together to come up with a list of accommodations to request. It may also be helpful to seek suggestions from your child's healthcare team.

What if my child is learning remotely?

If your child is learning from home, here are some accommodations that may be helpful:

- Having permission to turn off, or stay off camera if they are not feeling well
- Being able to use the bathroom during class which may involve leaving and rejoining the online classroom without the teacher drawing attention to the student
- Agreeing upon a "code word" or notification that the student can use in a private chat to alert the teacher that they need to leave for a medical or bathroom need
- If the student needs to miss class due to medical needs, the lesson/ classwork can be made available to the student to learn on their own time

What are some of the first steps in creating a 504 Plan?

Here is some important points to keep in mind when establishing a 504 Plan with your child's school:

- Contact the school about developing a 504 Plan for your child. The initial request for a 504 Plan can be verbal or in writing and it can come either from you or the school
- Ask your child's doctor for a letter or a medical report that can confirm your child's diagnosis of IBD
- Set up a meeting with a guidance counselor or the referred point person at your child's school (i.e., Director of Special Services) to discuss the development of a 504 Plan
- Ensure that all your child's teachers are aware of and understand the details of the plan. The plan is a shared responsibility, and clear communication about your child's health needs is important. Make sure you include anything you think your child may need for the year (even if they are currently in remission). A plan may be setup prior to the school year, and changes can be made at any time at the school's discretion or your request.
- If the school tries to remove anything from the plan because they find that it is not currently necessary, emphasize that IBD symptoms change over time and may become active during the school year and therefore the accommodation should remain in place. It's important to keep open communication with your child's school about any additional health situations that arise.
- The plan is only valid for one year; therefore, a plan must be created or updated annually even if there were no changes in your child's health.
- Establish a plan for when your child needs to stay home for an extended period. Your child may be able to have access to home tutoring. Each school district may have different guidelines for how many consecutive absences per week would entitle them to home tutoring.

Many schools have their own version of a 504 Plan and it is perfectly appropriate to use the school's form. However, make sure you review it to ensure that it includes the accommodations your child needs.

Prior to meeting with your child's school, you may want to:

- View the Foundation's [Guide for Parents](#) brochure
- Share the Foundation's [Guide for Teachers and Other School Personnel](#) brochure with your child's teachers and school administrators

You can view and print out copies by visiting our website at <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/science-and-professionals/patient-resources/patient-brochures>. You can also request free copies of our brochures by sending an email to the Foundation's IBD Help Center at info@crohnscolitisfoundation.org.

What are some of the do's and don'ts of creating a 504 Plan?

Do's	Don'ts
DO include your child in identifying accommodations that may help them succeed in school.	DON'T assume your child is aware of or using the accommodations available to them.
DO be specific about what accommodations are needed instead of saying "as needed."	DON'T assume that the school is implementing your child's 504 Plan.
DO include why, what, where, when, who, and how accommodations will be implemented.	DON'T assume every teacher, substitute, coach, staff, or administrator knows your child's accommodation needs.
DO develop a plan even if your child is healthy and doing well at the beginning of the school year.	DON'T let your child talk you out of implementing a plan because they are "too embarrassed" or are doing well at the beginning of the school year.
DO continually check in with your child and their teachers to see if the plan is working.	DON'T get frustrated with the situation. Establishing accommodations can be a slow-moving process. Learn the facts and use your energy to advocate for your child.

What if my child's school does not approve or follow the 504 Plan?

You can file a complaint or request a due process hearing with a 504 coordinator if you do not agree with the school district's evaluation decision. You should review the Notice of Parents and Student Rights under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 for more information.

What are my rights if I disagree with the 504 Plan or any of its components?

If you disagree with the 504 Plan, you can express your views at the meeting and suggest alternatives. You may refuse to sign the plan until your concerns are addressed.

Is my child required to take physical education?

Children with IBD are not automatically excluded or excused from physical education. However, physical education accommodations can be written into a 504 Plan.

Does my child have to be struggling with classes or failing before they can get accommodations?

No. The law does not say your child must be failing or struggling with classes or subjects to qualify for accommodations. Even if your child is a straight A student they would still qualify for accommodations under the 504 Plan.

Can my child get accommodations for taking college boards, (i.e. PSAT, SAT, ACT, etc.)?

Your student can get accommodations while taking college board exams. However, students with school accommodations do not automatically qualify for college board accommodations. You must apply well in advance of the test for your student to get accommodations approved. Your student can work with their school to submit a formal request for college board accommodations if the following criteria can be met:

- The student has a documented disability including medical impairments, such as IBD
- The disability will impact the student's ability to participate in college boards in the usual manner and accommodation is needed.

Can college students receive accommodations?

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also protects students in higher education. However, unlike high school, the college student must seek out services and advocate on their own behalf. Colleges are not allowed to ask students if they have a disability or health issue and students must voluntarily disclose that they have IBD, provide documentation, and request support or accommodations. Colleges offer an array of support, but your child must seek out these supports. It is best to seek accommodations out at the beginning of the semester or before the student is at risk of failing or dropping out of a course.

While each college or university may differ in the exact accommodations offered to students who need them, below is a list of some important accommodations that may be included:

- **Priority Enrollment:** This allows students to have an earlier enrollment time for classes and build a schedule that works best for their IBD
- **Notetaking Support:** This allows other student volunteers to consistently take notes for students with IBD who may not be able to attend every class.
- **Adjusted Deadlines:** This allows students with IBD to get reasonable extensions on projects and assignments if necessary. It's important to note that the nature of deadline adjustments can vary from school to school
- **Adjusted Attendance:** These policies allow professors to work with students to come up with alternatives to making up attendance credit for missed classes
- **Exam Accommodations/ Extended Time:** This allows for extra time when taking timed exams. For students with IBD, this can mean "stopping the clock" when you need to use the bathroom and not losing time
- **Housing:** Depending on the types of housing offered, students may be able to request a certain type of room, such as one with your own bathroom, or a single room without roommates. Students may also be able to request certain things based on your medical treatment, such as having your own fridge or access to bathroom with a tub in case you require a sitz bath
- **Dining:** Students may be able to request a room with a kitchen if it's offered. Some colleges may also have a special kitchen that only certain students have access to. Students may be able to discuss having a different meal plan than what is offered to other students or have specially crafted meals specific to their diet
- **Mobility Accommodations:** Student may be able to request transportation to, from and in between classes, if getting around campus is a challenge due to fatigue, joint pain, or other IBD-related reasons

Final Thoughts

- You are your child's best advocate. Take an active role early and work with your school district and educate them about IBD as well as your child's needs
- Involve your child in the accommodation process because one day they will need to advocate for themselves
- Enlist the help of your child's healthcare provider, as they have likely helped many pediatric patients develop a 504 Plan. They can give you guidance on what accommodations have been most helpful for other patients.

For more information on this topic, check out the resources below or contact the Foundation's IBD Help Center by calling 1.888.MY.GUT.PAIN (888-694-8872) or emailing info@crohnscolitisfoundation.org.

Crohn's & Colitis Foundation Resources

The following brochures can be found by visiting: online.cdfa.org/brochures

- [Guide for Teachers](#)
- [Guide for Parents](#)
- [IBD & Me Activity Book \(for ages 8-12\)](#)
- [Pete Learns All About Crohn's & Colitis \(for ages 8 -12\)](#)
- [Guide for Teens with IBD](#)

Resources for children, teens, and young adults:

- Camp Oasis: <http://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/get-involved/camp-oasis/>
- Website for teens with IBD: www.justlikemeibd.org
- Website for college students with IBD: <http://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/campus-connection/>

Additional Resources

- American's with Disability Act: www.ada.gov
- American Diabetes Association: www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/parents-and-kids/diabetes-care-at-school/written-care-plans/section-504-plan.html
- College Boards: www.collegeboard.org/students-with-disabilities/eligibility
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates: www.copaa.org
- US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights: www.hhs.gov/ocr
- U.S. Department of Education: [//www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html)

June 2021