

# Fact Sheet

News from the IBD Help Center

## **SCHOOL ACCOMODATION (504) PLANS & INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASES (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, and side effects of treatment. However, 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 (in remission) at the beginning of the school year, but may experience active symptoms (flare up) later in the school year. Just because you have a plan in place, does not mean you must use all of the accommodations.

### **What is a 504 Plan?**

Section 504 is the part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which applies to persons with disabilities. Section 504 is a civil rights act which protects the civil and constitutional rights of persons with disabilities. A "504 Plan" is an action plan developed by the school, the parents/guardians, and the student. The plan attempts to prohibit discrimination against students with disabilities, so that they may achieve their academic goals. It should contain a list of accommodations, or adjustments, which may be required by a child with IBD to ensure that they are treated fairly and have the same access to education as other students. This law typically applies to public schools – but can also apply to private schools, if the school receives federal funding.

### **What is an IEP?**

An Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is a plan or program established for a child who has an intellectual or learning disability and requires specialized instruction and related services. For students who require specialized instruction, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) controls the procedural requirements, and an IEP is developed. The IDEA process is more involved than Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and requires documentation of measurable growth.

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

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

### **Does a medical diagnosis of IBD meet the requirements to receive accommodations under Section 504?**

Yes, IBD patients meet the requirement of Section 504 for having a chronic illness because IBD impacts at least one major life activity, in this case, toileting is considered a major life activity, and can cause a substantial limitation on the

student's ability to achieve their academic goal. Although the student meets the requirements, both the caregiver and student must request accommodations.

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

### Plan?

- 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

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

Some important points to keep in mind when establishing a 504 Plan with your child's school are listed below:

- Contact the school about developing a 504 Plan for your child. The initial request for a 504 Plan can be verbal or in writing. It can come from the parents/guardians or the school.
- Get a letter/note from your child's doctor or a medical report which confirms your child's diagnosis of IBD.
- Set up a meeting with the guidance counselor or referred point person with the school (i.e., Director of Special Services) to discuss the development of a 504 Plan.
- Ensure that all of your child's teachers are aware of, and understand, the plan. The plan is a shared responsibility, and clear communication about your child's health situation and education needs is important. Include anything you think your child may need for the year (even if he/she is currently in remission). A plan may be setup prior to the school year. Changes can be made at the school's discretion and at the parent's request throughout the year.
- 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 the plan.
- You are able to make changes to the plan. However it is important to keep open communication with the school about any health situations which do arise for your child.
- The plan is only good for one year. Therefore, a plan must be created or updated annually even if your child had no changes in their health.
- Establish with the school when your child is entitled to home tutoring. Each school district may have different guidelines for how many consecutive absences per week would entitle him/her to home tutoring. Your child is entitled to home tutoring at no cost.

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

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

- View the Foundation's "*Guide for Parents*" brochure
- Share the Foundation's "*A Guide for Teachers and other School Personnel*" brochure with your child's school district

You can view and print out copies by visiting the following link: [online.cdfa.org/brochures](http://online.cdfa.org/brochures). Or, you can request free copies by sending an email to the Foundation's IBD Help Center at: [info@crohnscolitisfoundation.org](mailto:info@crohnscolitisfoundation.org).

## What are some of the Do's and Don'ts of creating a 504 Plan?

Do's	Don'ts
<b>DO</b> include your child in identifying accommodations that may help him/her succeed in school.	<b>DON'T</b> assume your child is aware of or using the accommodations available to him/her.
<b>DO</b> be specific about what accommodations are needed instead of saying "as needed."	<b>DON'T</b> assume that the school is implementing your child's 504 Plan
<b>DO</b> include why, what, where, when, who, and how accommodations will be implemented.	<b>DON'T</b> assume every teacher, substitute, coach, staff, or administrator knows your child's accommodation needs.
<b>DO</b> develop a plan even if your child is healthy and doing well at the beginning of the school year.	<b>DON'T</b> 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.
<b>DO</b> continually check in with your child and their teachers to see if the plan is working. For example, does leaving the cafeteria five minutes before the end of the period give the student enough time to go to the restroom before going to class? Would ten minutes be better? Is the student accommodated to make up missed classwork during time out of the classroom? Should your child's locker be located next to the restroom or near the nurse's office?	<b>DON'T</b> play the blame game. It can be easy to blame the school for disappointments or a slow moving process. Blame can typically lead to an ill will situation. Avoid blame and keep calm. 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?

Parents can request a due process hearing if they do not agree with the school district's evaluation decision. Parents should review "Notice of Parents and Student Rights" under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 for more information. Parents can also file a complaint with the school district's 504 Coordinator. This position may be called by another name in different school districts.

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

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. Physical education accommodations can be written into a 504 Plan.

## Does my child have to be struggling with classes or failing before he/she can get accommodations?

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

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

Yes. But, students with school accommodations do not automatically qualify for College Board accommodations. You must apply well in advance of the test in order for the student to get accommodations. Your child's guidance counselor can provide further information about implementing accommodations outside of the 504 Plan. Students 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.

## What is the difference between accommodations in college and elementary/high school?

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 his/her own behalf. Colleges are not allowed to ask students if they have a disability or health issue. Students must voluntarily disclose that they have IBD, provide documentation, and request support or accommodations. The college is not required to evaluate the student to determine which accommodation is needed.

Colleges offer an array of support, but your child must seek out these supports. It is best to seek them out at the beginning of the semester or before the student is at risk of failing or dropping out of a course.

## Final Thoughts

- You are your child's best advocate. Take an active role early. 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 he/she will need to advocate for themselves.
- Enlist the help of your child's health care 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 at calling 1.888.MY.GUT.PAIN (888-694-8872) or emailing: [info@crohnscolitisfoundation.org](mailto:info@crohnscolitisfoundation.org).

## Crohn's & Colitis Foundation Resources

The following brochures can be found by visiting: [online.ccfaf.org/brochures](http://online.ccfaf.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 program: <http://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/get-involved/camp-oasis/>
- Website for teens with IBD: [www.justlikemeibd.org](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.collegeboard.org/students-with-disabilities/eligibility)
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates: [www.copaa.org](http://www.copaa.org)
- US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights: [www.hhs.gov/ocr](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr)

December 2016