

Make Accommodations Meaningful

Build Student Understanding of
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DESCRIPTION

This guide is designed to help teachers and case managers support students in understanding their IEP or 504 accommodations. Before students can confidently use their accommodations or advocate for themselves, they need to know what their accommodations are, why they have them, and how they are meant to support their learning. This guide offers a student-centered and strength-based opportunity to build that foundation.

PREP TIME

5-10 minutes

ACTIVITY TIME

10-20 minutes

MATERIALS

Template to guide the discussion

Implementation Guidance

This activity provides a simple, low-prep way to help students build a clearer understanding of the accommodations listed in their IEP or 504 plan. It can be easily integrated into advisory time, individual check-ins, or support sessions. To prepare, review the student's plan in advance so you're ready to explain each accommodation and how it supports their learning. Also, some students are hesitant to use accommodations. Review suggestions below for tips on how to reframe accommodations for these students.

During the meeting, walk through each accommodation together—focusing on what it is, why it's included, and when it might be most helpful. Although it can be a casual conversation, either you or the student can take notes so they can easily remember important points from the conversation. Before wrapping up, take time to discuss the teacher's, student's and parent/caregiver roles in making sure accommodations are offered, used, and adjusted if needed. You can also schedule a follow-up meeting to check in on how things are going or preview future sessions focused on strengthening the student's self-advocacy skills and confidence in asking for support.

If you decide to use this tool in a meeting that includes parents or caregivers, there is also a note sheet for them below.

Tips for Talking with Students About Accommodations

Before you begin the “Understanding My IEP/504 Plan” activity with a student, it’s important to create a supportive and empowering tone. Many students—especially in middle and high school—feel hesitant to use their accommodations. They may worry it makes them look different, weak, or like they’re not capable. Some feel pressure to “prove they don’t need help,” while others aren’t yet sure how the accommodations connect to their learning needs. The more students understand their accommodations—and feel safe using them—the more likely they are to advocate for themselves and use the tools they need to succeed.

Frame the Conversation as a Step Toward Self-Advocacy

Before students can effectively advocate for their needs, they must first understand exactly what supports are available to them. Use the opening of the conversation to explain why you are reviewing their accommodations today: to build their foundational knowledge so they can self-advocate.

- Example: *“High school is about building the skills you’ll need for whatever comes next. One of the most important skills is self-advocacy, speaking up for what you need to be successful. Your teachers are responsible for putting these accommodations in place, but sometimes oversights happen, or you might decide you don’t actually need to use a certain tool on a specific day. Today our only goal is to review your accommodations, figure out what they mean in the classroom and talk about when you might use them. Once you understand what’s available to you, we can help you develop the skills and confidence to step in and speak up whenever you need to.”*

Normalize the Use of Support Tools

Emphasize that everyone learns differently, and everyone uses tools to succeed—planners, highlighters, calculators, even reminders on phones.

- Example: *“Accommodations are just tools to help your brain do its best work—just like athletes use special gear or musicians tune their instruments.”*

Reframe Accommodations as Strength-Based

Avoid talking about what a student “can’t” do. Instead, frame the accommodation as a support for their strengths.

- Example: *“You have really creative ideas. The extended time just gives you space to get them down without rushing.”* or *“Using accommodations is a sign you understand yourself and know what helps you succeed.”*

Acknowledge Feelings Without Judgment

Students may feel embarrassed, frustrated, or afraid to stand out. Acknowledge those feelings instead of dismissing them.

- Example: *“It makes sense that using something different in class can feel weird. You’re not alone—lots of students feel that way.”*

Encourage Reflection Over Proving Themselves

If a student says they “don’t need it” or “want to try without it,” validate the desire for independence—but keep the door open.

- Example: *“It’s okay to try without it. But if things get hard, it’s not failure to use your supports—it’s smart to use what’s available to you.”*

Build Trust and Invite Ownership

Let students take part in conversations about what works and what doesn’t. Involve them in decisions when possible.

- Example: *“Let’s talk about which classes it feels most helpful in, and where it doesn’t. You know yourself best.”*

Clarify That Using Accommodations is a Right—Not a Favor

Ensure students know accommodations are guaranteed supports, and teachers are required to offer them.

- Example: *“You don’t need to earn these—this is part of your plan because it supports your learning.”*

Language to Use in Conversations

Instead of saying.....	Try saying.....
“You have to use this.”	“You have the option to use this when it helps you.”
“You need this because you struggle.”	“This tool/accommodation helps support your learning style.”
“You’re supposed to use your accommodations.”	“You’re in charge of using these when they’re useful, let’s talk about how and when they help the most.”
“Do you really need this?”	“What does support look like when it’s working well for you?”

Understanding my 504 Plan

What is a 504 plan?

A 504 Plan is a way to help you succeed in school if you have a health condition, learning difference, or disability. It gives you **accommodations**—these are tools or changes that help you do your best in class.

I have a 504 plan because:

My Accommodations

Discuss your plan with your teacher or case manager and take notes below on your accommodations.

Accommodation	Purpose	When/how to use it

Roles & Responsibilities

Teachers	Student
Know and understand the student's IEP/504 plan and accommodations.	Know and understand your IEP/504 plan and accommodations.
Ensure all accommodations are provided consistently and accurately.	Ask for accommodations if they are not offered.
Offer accommodations to students and respect their decision to use or decline them.	Use your accommodations when you feel like they are helpful. It's okay to decline them.
Collaborate with the student and case manager if issues or concerns arise.	Tell your case manager and/or teacher if the accommodations are not working.

Next time we meet on _____ we will _____

_____.

For Parents & Caregivers:

Understanding My Child’s 504 Plan

What is a 504 plan?

A 504 Plan is a way to help your child succeed in school if they have a health condition, learning difference, or disability. It gives them **accommodations**—these are tools or changes that help your child do their best in class.

My child has a 504 plan because:

My Child’s Accommodations

Take notes below on your child’s accommodations.

Accommodation	Purpose	When/how to use it

Roles & Responsibilities

Teachers	Student	Parents & Caregivers
Know and understand the student's IEP/504 plan and accommodations.	Know and understand your IEP/504 plan and accommodations.	Know and understand my student's IEP/504 plan and accommodations.
Ensure all accommodations are provided consistently and accurately.	Ask for accommodations if they are not offered.	Check in periodically with your student to ensure accommodations are provided consistently and accurately.
Offer accommodations to students and respect their decision to use or decline them.	Use your accommodations when you feel like they are helpful. It's okay to decline them.	Respect your student's choice to decline an accommodation, but stay curious about their 'why'. Follow-up afterward to help them reflect on the outcome and adjust their approach if needed.
Collaborate with the student and case manager if issues or concerns arise.	Tell your case manager and/or teacher if the accommodations are not working.	Support your student in addressing concerns directly with their teacher or case manager. If issues persist, reach out to the school team to collaboratively problem-solve.

For Parents & Caregivers:

Understanding My Child’s IEP

What is an IEP?

An IEP, or Individualized Education Program, is a plan made for your child if they qualify for special education services. It helps make sure your child gets the support they need to learn and do their best in school.

The plan is written by an IEP team that includes their teachers, other school staff, your child, and hopefully you! Together you decide on your learning goals for the year and what kinds of help or tools (called accommodations or services) will support your child.

The IEP is a legal document, which means the school has to follow it. It helps make sure you have what your child has what they need to succeed in school in a way that works for **them**.

My child has an IEP because:

My Child’s Accommodations & Services

Below are your child's accommodations including details and their purpose.

Accommodation/Service	Purpose	When/how to use it

Roles & Responsibilities

Teachers	Student	Parents & Caregivers
Know and understand the student's IEP/504 plan and accommodations.	Know and understand your IEP/504 plan and accommodations.	Know and understand my student's IEP/504 plan and accommodations.
Ensure all accommodations are provided consistently and accurately.	Ask for accommodations if they are not offered.	Check in periodically with your student to ensure accommodations are provided consistently and accurately.
Offer accommodations to students and respect their decision to use or decline them.	Use your accommodations when you feel like they are helpful. It's okay to decline them.	Respect your student's choice to decline an accommodation, but stay curious about their 'why'. Follow-up afterward to help them reflect on the outcome and adjust their approach if needed.
Collaborate with the student and case manager if issues or concerns arise.	Tell your case manager and/or teacher if the accommodations are not working.	Support your student in addressing concerns directly with their teacher or case manager. If issues persist, reach out to the school team to collaboratively problem-solve.



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