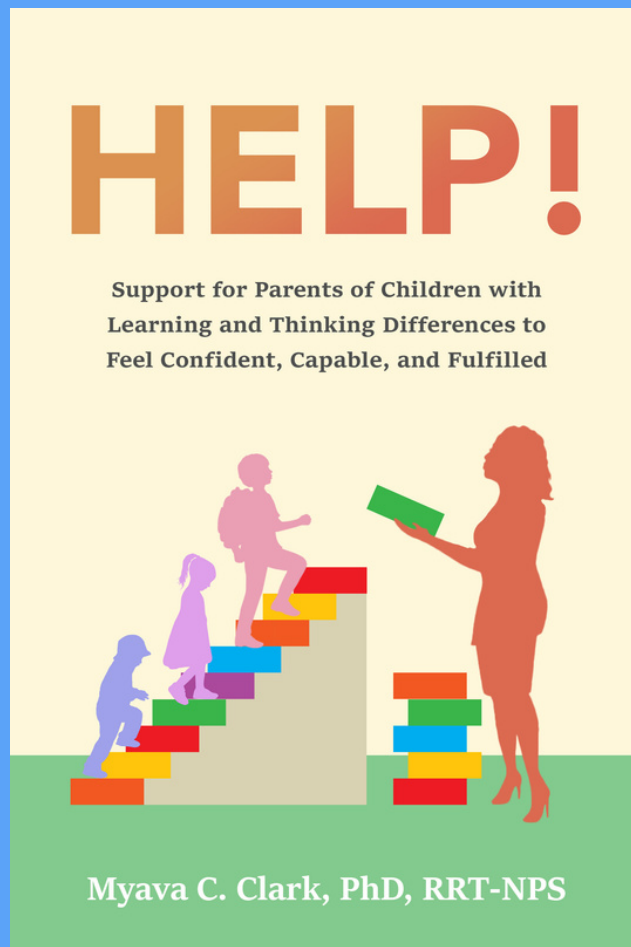


The IEP Quick Reference Guide





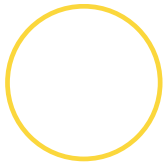
Hello,

Thank you for reading *HELP! Support for Parents of Children with Learning and Thinking Differences to Feel Confident, Capable, and Fulfilled*. I am Dr. Myava Clark and I am the mother of Chris Clark Jr. The stories in *HELP!* are based on Chris' personal experiences. The purpose of my writing *HELP!* was to empower parents with tools and resources that will help you become stronger advocates for your children. These resources included a literature review of sources from people well versed in the special education process.

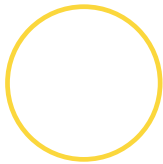
Our goal for the **IEP Quick Reference Guide** was to provide parents and caregivers with a tool that you can use to help prepare you for the IEP process. This tool will help you become a better advocate for your child as you navigate through special education. We hope that you find the **IEP Quick Reference Guide** useful! Buckle up and join the ride as we go on this journey together.

Sincerely,
Dr. Myava and Chris Clark

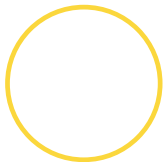
Individual Education Program (IEP) Checklist



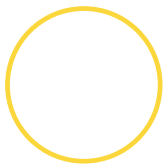
Define Individual Education Plan



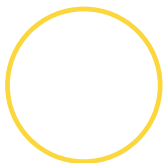
Request an Education Evaluation



Create an Evaluation Team



Get an Individual Education Plan



List what's Included in an IEP

HELP!

Support for Parents of Children with Learning and Thinking Differences to Feel Confident, Capable, and Fulfilled



Myava C. Clark, PhD, RRT-NPS



Individual Education Program (IEP)

What is an IEP?

According to Gail Belsky, Executive Editor at Understood, an Individualized Education Program (IEP), also referred to as an Individualized Education Plan, is "a map that lays out the program of special education instruction, supports, and services kids need to make progress and thrive in school. IEPs are covered and protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They're created for eligible kids who attend public school, which includes charter schools." (1) IEPs aren't offered at private schools, but students with learning and thinking differences can request special education accommodations through an Individual Service Plan (ISP). Each state handles education programs and services plan a little differently, but all states have an initial assessment or an eligibility assessment.

The eligibility assessment process starts with an informational meeting. A case manager is responsible for working with you to make sure that your child's special education services are put into place. (2) The case manager will walk you through the process and answer your questions along the way. If your child is eligible for special education services, the case manager will become your primary contact person.

Is your child eligible for special education?

According to Kristin Stanberry, "not every child with learning and thinking differences is eligible for special education services. To decide if your child needs special education, the school district has to do an educational evaluation and an eligibility determination." (3) An eligibility determination consists of two parts. The school must determine that your child has a learning disability such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, Autism spectrum disorder, or an emotional disturbance. Next, they must determine if your child's disability warrants special education services. The determination of a covered disability and the severity of the disability are both handled by the school district. However, they make these determinations with your permission and input. If your child does not qualify for special education services, you still have options. Children who do not qualify for special education service can still take advantage of an independent education evaluation (IEE). An IEE is conducted by a professional who is not employed by the school.

Who can request an education evaluation?

It may be difficult for you to decide if you should have your child evaluated for special education services, even when you see your child struggling in school. Fear of having your child labeled or worrying about how other children will treat your child may cause you reservations. These concerns are normal. I recommend that you contact a Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) in your state to ask questions about your State's specific rules.

Who's on the evaluation team?

According to Amanda Morin at Understood, these are the individuals who participate on your child's evaluation team: (4)

- Administrator. The administrator runs the meetings. It can be the principal or the IEP coordinator.
- General education teacher. They report on what's working and what's not working for your child in the classroom.
- Special education teacher. They observe your child in the general education classroom and they work with the classroom teacher to provide instruction and best techniques that can work for your child.
- Parents or guardians. You can provide concerns and successes about how your child is doing at home. You can also be a part of the review process, as your child's special education plan is discussed.
- School psychologist. The psychologist completes a full assessment of your child to determine eligibility for special education. They interpret results for the team, help set up a plan that works for your child and provide support for teachers as needed.
- Specialists. They evaluate areas such as speech and language, motor, and everyday function skills. Specialists include speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and mental health professionals.

What to expect from the school evaluation process?

A school evaluation process, also called a comprehensive educational evaluation, measures a student's challenges and strengths. These evaluations are a multi-step process because a single test or assessment would not provide all the information an IEP team needs to make decisions about the services, supports, and interventions your child may need.

What's included in an IEP?

If you've never seen an IEP before, the documents can be difficult to decipher. The IEP covers everything from testing results to goals for progress. It also spells out how to accomplish the goals. There may be language and terms that are unfamiliar to you and it is important for you to speak up if you are unclear on anything. Although it can be a little intimidating, you have the right to a complete understanding. (5) Do not move forward without being comfortable with the IEP because the IEP should explicitly state how the school plans to help your child improve and build their skills.

Who gets an IEP?

IEPs are a part of public education and they are free. They are given to eligible children ages three and up who attend public or charter schools. Private schools don't offer IEPs, but they may offer an Individual Services Plan (ISP), but you may need to pay the cost for the evaluation. (6) The IEP process begins with an evaluation that shows your child's strengths and challenges. Having an IEP protects you and the school in the case legal action is needed, it gives you an opportunity to make decisions about your child's education, and it sets boundaries for in-school discipline. (7)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, to be eligible for an IEP, children must have one or more of the following thirteen conditions: (8)

- Specific learning disability (SLD) such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, or written expression disorder (digraphia).
- Other health impairments such as ADHD.
- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- Emotional disturbance such as an anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or depression.
- Speech or language impairment such as stuttering, trouble pronouncing words or making sounds with the voice, or problems that make it hard for a child to understand words or express themselves.
- Visual impairment such as partial sight and blindness (If eyewear can correct a vision problem, then it does not qualify).
- Deafness, including children who cannot hear most or all sounds, even with a hearing aid.
- Hearing impairment such as hearing loss not covered by the definition of deafness.
- Deaf-blindness such as children who have both severe hearing and vision loss.
- Orthopedic impairment seen in children who lack function or ability in their bodies such as cerebral palsy.
- Intellectual disability, including children who have below-average intellectual ability, poor communication, self-care, or social skills, or conditions such as Down syndrome.
- Traumatic brain injury caused by an accident or some kind of physical force.
- Multiple disabilities.

How to navigate IEP meetings.

Your child's special education program begins with an IEP meeting. There will be at least four people from the school at the meeting, in addition to any specialist who may attend the meeting. You can bring your own people to support you, including a special education advocate and an attorney. (9) everyone will have a turn to share their thoughts about your child's needs, goals, services, and supports in the IEP. You can expect the team to go over and explain the evaluation results in detail at your child's first meeting. Navigating IEP meetings can be stressful for some parents and knowing what happens at IEP meetings could possibly make it easier to navigate them.

Stay on top of your child's IEP

Generally, the IEP continues throughout your child's education. You must stay on top of the IEP to make sure that the plan is working, and your child is making progress. The more involved you are with the plan, the better you will be at advocating for your child's needs. If at any time, you feel like your child is not progressing, you can call for an IEP meeting to discuss your concerns. (10) You should keep regular contact with your child's teachers about the IEP. This will allow you to identify how much your child is improving. The team will meet every year to discuss your child's IEP to meet your child's changing needs. You will continue to meet with the IEP team and develop a plan for transition out of an IEP toward the end of high school.

Myths about IEPs

Myths about IEPs and special education can keep people from seeking out IEPs for children who need support. According to Morin, these are some of the more common myths: (11)

- Children who have IEPs must be in a separate classroom. *Most children who get special education services through an IEP are in the same classroom as children who do not have an IEP. This is the way that the law says it should be.*
- Special education is only for children with severe physical and intellectual disabilities. *Most children have a specific learning disability such as dyslexia (reading challenges) and dyscalculia (math challenges).*
- Getting services is always a battle. *Although there are stories of parents who had to "fight" to get services for their children, there are plenty of stories about the process going well. It is important for you to know your child's rights because that can make the difference.*
- Children who receive special education will be labeled forever. *Special education focuses on services and supports based on a child's needs, not a label.*
- Children who get special education must take ADHD medications. *IDEA states that schools can't require a child to take medication to get services and the decision to take medication is yours to make. I recommend that you consult your child's doctor when you are faced with this decision.*
- Special education services are expensive, so other children will lose out on activities. *Public and charter schools get federal funding for special education programs. All children are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and if special education services are needed for your child, the schools get the money [to provide your child's supports and services].*

How to respond to a school's denial of services

According to attorney Andrew M.I. Lee, "[i]f a school will not evaluate your child, denies special education, or reduces your child's services, you need to have a plan." (12) Here is Lee's list of ten things to consider and how to respond when a school denies services:

- You may want to bring a copy of the regulations and share it with the school officials if the school says that your child is passing all their classes and they don't need special education.
- If the school says they are removing your child's services because your child is getting good grades, you can challenge the school's decision by filing for mediation or due process, which will trigger "stay put" rights. Stay put rights prevent the removal of services until the challenge is settled.
- A school cannot deny your child an IEP if they are a magnet or charter school because all public schools are required by IDEA to provide a free, appropriate public education to children with disabilities. Magnet schools and charter schools are public schools, and therefore they must provide special education through IEPs.
- Schools cannot try response to intervention services before providing your child special education services. Response to intervention (RTI) is a schoolwide approach for identifying and helping struggling students and RTI cannot be used to delay or deny services.
- Children can get special education services under IDEA if they have a disability in one of the thirteen categories. A child who has emotional or behavioral issues that prevent them from participating and progressing in school and/or accessing the curriculum may qualify for an IEP.
- Schools cannot refuse to provide accommodations or services claiming they do not have adequate funding. The U.S. Department of Education says even if schools have budget concerns, that does not change their legal obligation to your child.

- A school cannot have a blanket prohibition against services that may be best for your child.
- Under IDEA, students must receive special education services in the "least restrictive environment." This means, when possible, your child should be able to participate in the general education classroom.
- The IEP team makes decisions about a child's educational needs and no one outside the team can decide a child's placement or services. This would be a violation of the IDEA.
- IDEA specifically requires that the IEP team include a school representative who knows the school district's resources and curriculum. This person must have the authority to approve your child's special education services and the technology needs.

Steps to take if a school denies your child services.

Lee has also reported about what to do if our child was evaluated and the school denied special education services. According to Lee in an article published on Understood there are ten published on Understood there are ten options to consider in this situation: (13)

- Understand the school's reasons. If the school denies services to your child, the school must explain its decision in writing.
- Contact a Parent Training and Information Center. IDEA requires that each state have a Parent Training and Information Center The purpose of PTI is to give parents the skills and information they need to work with schools to provide special education services.
- Talk to an education advocate. An education advocate helps you navigate the evaluation process for your child, in the school system.

- Consider a 504 plan. If your child is not eligible for services under IDEA, check to see if support is available under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Ask about extra help for your child. The school may offer one-on-one tutoring, peer mentoring, and special help with a reading specialist for struggling students who do not qualify for an IEP or a 504 plan.
- Get help outside of school. Look up local learning centers in your area to determine what businesses or groups provide out-of-school programs for children who are struggling in school.
- Explore an independent educational evaluation (IEE). An IEE is conducted by someone who is not employed by the school, an outside professional. This can be useful if you want to challenge the school's denial of services.
- Ask for mediation. One way to try to get the school to change its decision is to ask for mediation. As a neutral professional, the mediator will work to bring you and the school together to find a solution.
- Consider filing a due process complaint. A due process complaint is a semi-formal proceeding where you and the school present evidence to an impartial hearing officer who decides if your child is eligible for services.
- Plan for a new evaluation. Collect and save all your evaluations, emails between you and the teacher, and all supporting documents that describe your child's struggles. With supporting evidence, you may be in a better position to request a new evaluation the next school year.

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

Some students get support at school under a 504 plan, rather than an IEP. Both can provide support like accommodations and assistive technology. However, a 504 plan is not part of special education and it serves a different purpose than an IEP. Both 504 plans and IEPs are designed to help students thrive in school. They are covered by different laws and work in different ways, but the end goal is the same. (14)

What is a 504 Plan?

A 504 plan allows the school to support a student with a disability and remove barriers to learning. 504 plans are covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The goal is to give the student equal access at school through accommodations to prevent discrimination and protect the rights of children with disabilities in school. Accommodations do not change what children learn, they just change how children learn it.

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Chris Clark Jr.

Chris Clark Jr. graduated from high school in 2016. He attended community college for social work. When Chris was a teenager, he was very inappropriate, when he started out on social media. He would befriend people who he should not have befriended, such as adults he did not know in real life. Chris would also share inappropriate posts made by other people. Chris even experienced bullying which eventually caused him to have anxiety and later depression, as a result of social media. Fortunately, Chris Sr. and Chris Sr.'s friends taught him how to become appropriate on social media. Therefore Chris came up with the idea of CASEN (Collaborative Advancement for Social-Emotional Needs) to help prevent other kids from struggling on social media like he did when he first started.

"I want to prevent kids from struggling on social media and have a safe social space."

Dr. Myava Clark

Dr. Myava Clark has a PhD in Professional Studies which includes a degree in both Leadership & Administration and Higher Education. Dr. Clark is a wife and mother of two. She is a registered respiratory therapist and a neonatal pediatric specialist, as well as a college professor. Both her children have special needs: her son has learning differences and her daughter has medical challenges. Dr. Clark started CASEN (Collaborative Advancement for Social-Emotional Needs) with her son, Chris Clark Jr. to support parents of children with learning and thinking differences, as they meet the needs of their children. For more information about Dr. Clark and CASEN, head on over to her website, www.casenllc.com

"Everyone needs a safe space to feel trusted, respected, and valued. CASEN is that safe space!"