

Self-Advocacy Best Practices

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Communication

Whether a student is on a 504 plan or IEP, it is best practice to communicate with the school – teachers and administration – via email. Even if you have a phone conversation with school staff, it is recommended that you follow up after the phone call via email documenting the phone conversation. Having communication in writing with the school will provide you with an accurate record of actions taking place or any actions being denied or refused.

Records

Keep a copy of all 504 or IEP records. This includes amendments to the plans, FBAs, BIPs, and meeting notes. This also includes any written communication about discipline (expulsions, suspensions) and changes to any plans.

Remember, you can ask the school to fix their notes if they do not accurately reflect what was agreed to.

Keeping a record of the important documents in the student's education is key in the event of any life changes, such as moving to a different school district. If there is dispute with the school, it may also be necessary to present the records as evidence. It is best practice to take your own meeting notes as well as keeping a record of the notes the school took.

Disagreements

If you do not agree with either a statement or part of the IEP or 504 plan, you should document the disagreement. The disagreement you have should be made in writing. This could be done in the IEP or 504 meeting notes, IEP or 504 plan, through a follow up email to the 504 or IEP team, or in an internal conflict resolution meeting with the school.

Your Experts

You are entitled to bring your own experts to the 504 or IEP meeting. This can include anyone with relevant information on the student, including doctors,

therapists, or an advocate. You may also bring evaluations completed by other specialists outside of the school district for the team to consider.

Changes with the student

If there are changes with the student, for example they are on a new medication or a new behavior is happening, call an IEP or 504 team meeting to discuss these changes with the school. Keep the team informed in writing. This creates a record of the change that shows everyone was made aware of it. This also assures the student is receiving the appropriate services for their needs.

Meeting Reminders

You can call an IEP or 504 meeting when changes occur or when you believe it is necessary. However, remember that an annual meeting is required to review goals and progress of the student. If you move to a different school district or new school, be sure to request a meeting to discuss the plan for the student's education at the new school. When the student is transitioning from grade to grade (such as from middle school to high school), make sure a meeting is called with the new staff who will be handling the student's services. It is best practice to have a representative from the student's previous school at the initial meeting with the new school for the representative to inform the new staff about the student.

Self-Advocacy

Remember, you are your own expert. You are part of the team and have a say in the educational decisions being made.

Sample Letters

Please see the following sample letters regarding best practices in special education:

- 1. Request for an IEP Meeting**
- 2. Document IEP Problems**

3. Revoking Consent

4. Request for Records

5. Request an Interpreter/Translation

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