

The Difference Between IEPs and 504 Plans

Adapted from The Understood Team (<https://www.understood.org> for extended details.)

	IEP	504 Plan
Basic Description	A blueprint or plan for a child’s special education experience at school.	A blueprint or plan for how a child will have access to learning school.
What it Does	Provides individualized special education and related services to meet the unique needs of the child. These services are provided at no cost to parents.	Provides services and changes to the learning environment to meet the needs of the child as adequately as other students. As with IEPs, a 504 plan is provided at no cost to parents.
What Law Applies	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) This is a federal special education law for children with disabilities.	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 This is a federal civil rights law to stop discrimination against people with disabilities
Who Is Eligible	To get an IEP, there are three requirements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A child has one or more of the 13 specific disabilities listed in IDEA. Learning and attention issues may qualify. 2. The disability must affect the child’s educational performance and/or ability to learn and benefit from the general education curriculum. 3. There is a need for specially designed instruction. 	To get a 504 plan, there are two requirements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A child has any disability, which can include many learning or attention issues. 2. The disability must interfere with the child’s ability to learn in a general education classroom. Section 504 has a broader definition of a disability than IDEA. That’s why a child who doesn’t qualify for an IEP might still be able to get a 504 plan.
Who Creates the Program/Plan	IEP team including the child’s parent	A 504 plan is created by a team of people who are familiar with the child and who understand the evaluation data and special services options; parents included.
What’s in the Program/Plan	The IEP sets learning goals for a child and describes the services the school will give her. It’s a written document.	There is no standard 504 plan. It generally includes specific accommodations, supports or services for the child.
Parent Notice & Consent	When the school wants to change a child’s services or placement, it has to tell parents in writing before the change. Parents also have “stay put” rights to keep services in place while there’s a dispute. Consent is needed for initial testing or IEP services.	The school must notify parents about evaluation or a “significant change” in placement. Notice doesn’t have to be in writing, but most schools do so anyway. Consent is needed for evaluation.