



Advocating for Yourself in Middle School and High School

How To Get What You Need

You should always be able to have the accommodations you need in school for your disability or health care needs. Sometimes it just takes some extra effort to get what you need. Just because you have a disability it doesn't mean you can't do as well as the other kids in school, you have the same rights to succeed.

By law every school has a process [a set way] for you to talk to teachers and others about what you need. Sometimes this plan or process is called an Individual Education Plan [IEP], a 504 plan, or sometimes something else.

Step 1: Evaluate what you need

Sit down with your parents and decide what accommodations you need based on your disability. For example, extra time on tests, a note taker, or two sets of books. Only pick accommodations that are necessary for your disability. For example, I knew I didn't need a program on my computer that read my book to me, so I didn't ask for it. People with different disabilities need different things.

Step 2: Find a helpful resource at school

This could be a teacher, vice-principal or counselor, who is willing to work with you and make sure you get what you need. Ask other kids who get accommodations at school what works for them, or talk to the principal about what is available. Once you find a helpful resource, have a meeting with that person and see what they can do to help you advocate for yourself. This resource will serve as your case worker.

Step 3: Talk to your teachers

Try to have a meeting with all your teachers, with your parents and your case worker present. With the help of your parents and others, you should advocate for yourself. The teachers have overall power in the classroom, so it's important that they understand your needs. If a meeting is not possible, have your case worker or parents write a letter. If you are in high school go talk to your teachers, express your needs and let them know that they can contact your parents or case worker with any questions. If a teacher is unwilling to work with you, see what your case worker can do. If that does not work, talk to the administration [the principal or even your school board], about the problem. Teachers can't discriminate against you.



Step 4: Have a follow up meeting

Several times during the school year you should stop by to talk to your case worker and let them know how everything is going. Half way through the year you should have a meeting with your parents and case worker, and try to have one teacher present, to talk about what is working for you and what isn't.

Other forms of advocating for yourself and getting what you need

- Know about your disability so you can explain it [if needed] to teachers or others.
- There is a difference sometimes between advocating for yourself for what you want to do and advocating for what you need to get schoolwork done. If you're not sure ask a friend, parent or teacher if they think it is something you need to get schoolwork done. This doesn't mean you can not advocate for what you want in other areas, it just may make more sense to do it at a different time or with different people.
- You can get extended time on standardized tests, including the SAT, ACT and AP tests.
- If you feel that a student doesn't understand your disability, first talk to them and see if you can open their eyes to the wonderful person you are. If that doesn't work don't be afraid to get the teacher or administration [principal or school board] involved.
- If you feel you are being mistreated by any adult go to someone you trust IMMEDIATELY.
- There are other kids who are going through the same things, don't be afraid to express yourself.
- Be proud of who you are, always.

For more information check out:

Beach Center on Disability - <http://www.beachcenter.org/>

National Disability Rights Network - <http://www.napas.org/>

Also, websites about your specific disability may have ideas for school accommodations.