

DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE IEPs FOR STUDENTS WITH ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION



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According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 1 in 5 students have a mental health condition. The most common is anxiety, followed by depression.¹ Students with disabilities, including students with mental health disabilities, must have an appropriate Individualized Education Program (IEP) in order to be supported and successful in school. Some students may be eligible for a 504 plan instead of an IEP. Both can help support students with special mental health needs.

ANXIETY

In addition to anxiety, other considerations must be given to school refusal which could be anxiety related to trauma at school, or bullying. Parents should make sure that all incidents are reported to the teacher and principal, and that effective bullying prevention and resolution techniques are used to investigate the cause and intervene, including appropriately dealing with the bully(ies). Other families may find that a child with intellectual/developmental disabilities has severe separation anxiety. This can be addressed by allowing the child/parent to visit the school before the child will attend. Also, the parent could gradually increase the time away from the child. Sometimes this is best accomplished using a behaviorist.

School accommodations for anxiety can range from calming techniques, teaching strategies, class environment, and testing situations. For calming, students may try relaxation techniques, classroom breaks, or even calling a parent, but only if the parent agrees this helps. Teaching/ environmental strategies could include giving advance notice before transitioning to a new activity, giving extra time, or letting the student know about changes, such as substitute teachers. For testing, again providing extra time or a quiet area, and letting the student know about upcoming exams, helps ease anxiety. (See Resources section).

According to Kids Health,² teachers can help students with anxiety by:

- ▶ *finding out which techniques work at home*

- ▶ *giving students extra time*
- ▶ *letting students know what to expect*
- ▶ *providing structure in the school day*
- ▶ *modifying assignments and reducing workloads when necessary*
- ▶ *giving the students breaks when needed*
possibly modifying the school day or shortening classes

DEPRESSION

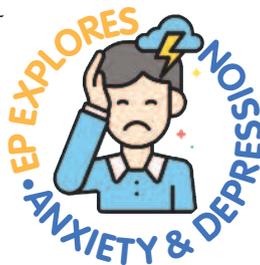
Many of the same techniques can be used for children with depression. It is vital to employ positive reinforcement and avoid any negative approaches such as punishment, or shame and blame. Children with depression may already experience low self-esteem. Positive strategies could include:

- *allowing more time*
- *breaking down assignments into smaller tasks*
- *offering extra help such as tutoring*
- *offering counseling at school*

BASIC PROTECTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

IEPs can include emotional supports, such as goals/objectives in the social/emotional section of the IEP. Counseling or social skills can be related services on an IEP. Or a 504 Plan could have accommodations such as coming into the classroom after the class has settled down to reduce anxiety due to noise or using seating preferences.

Besides goals/objectives and appropriate supports and services, other safeguards include functional behavioral assessments, positive behavioral interventions and supports, behavioral intervention plans, and manifestation determinations. A Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) determines the function of the behavior; for example, is the student seeking attention, resorting to escape/avoidance of demands, etc. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are then put into place (see www.pbis.org). This means that the IEP now includes a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP). A manifestation determination decides if the behavior is the result of the child's disability prior to deciding on a change in placement. Children with special needs have the right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the



COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING : A PHILOSOPHY

- ❑ "If kids could do well they would do well." If the kid had the skills to exhibit adaptive behavior, he wouldn't be exhibiting challenging behavior.
- ❑ "Behind every challenge behavior is an unsolved problem and a lagging skill."

least restrictive environment (LRE). This means that the student has the right to attend the school s/he would have attended if s/he didn't have a disability.

Children with challenging behaviors are often disproportionately segregated from their peers. They are often disciplined differently as well, sometimes not getting early intervening services for as long, or as much as, other children. Included in discipline may be the inappropriate use of restraints or seclusion, often resulting in injury or even death. The NAMI National Restraints Committee noted that restraints are ineffective at behavioral management and experienced as trauma by students subjected to them. NAMI addresses restraints in schools in their policy platform "Services and Supports for Children, Adolescents, Young Adults and Families".³

It is beyond the scope of this article to document the entire IEP or 504 processes. For a good overview, see "Putting a Plan in Place

to Help Your Child Succeed in School" in Resources. If families need help in developing an appropriate IEP or 504 Plan for their child with mental illness, they can contact their Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center to explain the process. PTIs can also help parents with discipline issues, including eliminating restraints which should never be included in IEPs. The Center for Parent Information and Resources also has a resource collection on Positive Behavior Supports and on Mental Health Resources (*see Resources, below*).

Students with anxiety or depression make up the majority of mental health conditions to be addressed at school. However, IEPs are individualized and students with other mental health conditions can also benefit from these accommodations as well as appropriate supports and services under an IEP or 504 Plan. •

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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References

1. <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/May-2018/Ensuring-Your-Child-is-Supported-at-School>
2. <https://kidshhealth.org/en/parents/anxiety-factsheet.html>
3. <https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Policy-Platform/4-Services-and-Supports-for-Children-Adolescents>

RIISING ABOVE : RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS WITH ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION



NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS

Ending the Silence - for Families, Professionals, & Students

www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-Ending-the-Silence

Putting a Plan in Place to Help Your Child Succeed at School
(IEP Basics)

www.nami.org/blogs/nami-blog/september-2015/putting-a-plan-in-place-to-help-your-child-succeed

Services/Supports for Students

www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Policy-Platform/4-Services-and-Supports-for-Children-Adolescents



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

"Depression: Supporting Students at School"

www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Handouts/Families%20and%20Educators/Depression_Supporting_Students_at_School.pdf



HOW THE ALSUP (ASSESSMENT OF LAGGING SKILLS AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS) WRITES YOUR IEP FOR YOU

Dr. Ross Greene of Collaborative and Proactive Solutions
(CPS) podcast

www.blogtalkradio.com/drrossgreene/2017/10/10/the-alsup-writes-your-iep-for-you



PARENT TRAINING AND INFORMATION CENTERS

www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center

Positive Behavior Supports Resource Collection

www.parentcenterhub.org/pbs-resources

Mental Health Resources

www.pathlms.com/naccho/courses/5037



POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

"Unfair Access to Healthcare Affects Our Families" blog

www.pbis.org



for learning & attention issues

UNDERSTOOD.ORG

"Can an IEP or 504 Plan Include Something About Getting Emotional Support at School?"

www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/ieps/can-an-iep-or-504-plan-include-something-about-getting-emotional-support-at-school

"At a Glance: Classroom Accommodations for Anxiety"

www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/instructional-strategies/at-a-glance-classroom-accommodations-for-anxiety