

# Summary of Service Plans

Children with hearing loss need specialized support to give them better language access and their best chances for success. It is never too early to start your child on their language journey, and studies show that the earlier children with hearing loss receive intervention services, the better their language and academic outcomes will be!

When enrolled in public school, students have legal rights to receive the support they need to access appropriate instruction. Read more below to learn about the type of service plans your child might need throughout their education.

## Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)

When a child is less than three years old, they can receive Early Intervention (EI) in their home or in specialized centers. An Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) is written with the family and an EI provider. This plan includes different areas of a child's development, such as communication skills or motor skills, the type and amount of services and the names of the providers who will work with a family. The IFSP ends when a child turns three years old and transitions into school-aged services.

For all children with hearing loss, it is also essential to include early intervention providers who have expertise in hearing loss. Most general EI providers do not have a background in hearing loss, therefore they will not be experts on how hearing loss affects language or be able to provide families with the necessary strategies.

### Things to note

1. All children with a diagnosed hearing loss qualify for early intervention services.
2. Regular support from a specialty provider with a background in hearing loss will greatly impact a child's overall success.
3. Families can add multiple specialty providers to the IFSP, even if services are provided out of their home district.
  - a. For example, a family might attend a center-based program for children with hearing loss in Boston while also receiving services from a specialty provider who works on sign language support in the home.



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4. As a child approaches their third birthday, the family should prepare for their child's transition out of EI services.
  - a. Your EI team will help contact the school district before a child turns three years old. With parent permission, the school can do evaluations to see if a child qualifies for special services in school.
  - b. Not all children will qualify for an IEP (see below) when they turn three years old, however, all public institutions, including schools, do have to provide access. Therefore, all children with hearing loss automatically qualify for a 504 plan (see below).

## Individualized Education Program/Plan (IEP)

Individualized Education Programs/ Plans (IEPs) are school plans for children three years old and older that write up parent concerns, evaluations, progress information, accommodations and goal areas. The IEP is designed to help children access education and succeed in an academic environment. IEP accommodations might include sound modifications to the classroom, use of a hearing assistive technology (HAT) system, sign language interpreters, teacher of the deaf support, speech therapy, physical therapy, visual aids and other things.

The IEP describes what types of services are received, how often, and by what providers. Students with hearing loss need to be evaluated to see if they qualify for and IEP based on the educational impact of their disability

### Things to note

1. Children must be evaluated to determine if they qualify to receive an IEP and services. Not all children will qualify for an IEP.
2. IEPs are reviewed every year, and students have a full reevaluation every three years.
3. Accommodations on an IEP should be designed to meet a student's specific needs.
  - b. Accommodations might include sign language interpreters, a microphone system, therapy in or out of the classroom, educational aids, extended time to complete work or tests or other supports.
4. Parents are part of the IEP team and do not have to accept an IEP as it is written. The whole team works together to decide what is best for a student. Parents must sign that they accept an IEP for it to be approved.

## 504 Plan

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is related to students with hearing loss. A 504 plan includes changes made to ensure a student has equal access to education and all school activities. This plan may contain accommodations like a hearing assistive technology (HAT) system, among other things, but does not write any student goals or progress updates. A 504 plan, unlike an IEP, does not have to be written down but must ensure students have full access to all school programs and activities. Like an IEP, students must be

evaluated to see if their disability qualifies them for a 504 plan. One qualifying factor, however, is having “a physical impairment” and “record of impairment,” meaning that all students with a diagnosed hearing loss should qualify for a 504 plan.

### Things to note

1. All students with documented hearing loss will be able to qualify for a 504 plan.
2. Students who need removal of barriers to education but who do not need specialized instruction may be on a 504 plan instead of an IEP.
3. A 504 plan includes the supports or accommodations needed for a student to have equal access but does not have to be a written document signed by the family.
4. On a 504 plan, “auxiliary aids” are often interpreted to include accommodations which allow for equal communication access such as a sign language interpreter, captioning services or a remote microphone system, among other things.
5. A 504 plan does not automatically allow for services or consultation from a teacher of the deaf although an argument can and should be made for services from an educational audiologist to maintain any hearing equipment used at school.

Information has been gathered from the following resources, which are recommended for further reading:

**Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss (2012):** Individual education plans (IEPs) and 504 plans. Retrieved from: [https://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/for-parents/ieps\\_504/](https://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/for-parents/ieps_504/)

**U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Free Appropriate Public Education for Students With Disabilities:** Requirements Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Washington, D.C., 2010. Accessible online: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html>

**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2014):** Individualized education program (IEP); IEP Process Guide PDF. Accessible online: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/iep//>