



**THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF STUDENTS WITH  
HIDDEN DISABILITIES UNDER SECTION 504  
OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973:  
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

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## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A LEARNING DISABILITY?

- Basically, a learning disability is a disorder in the way someone processes language – written or spoken
  - As a result, the person may experience an imperfect ability to:
    - Listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations
  - So, the person has to modify the way he or she learns new information

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE ADHD?

- One of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood
- Usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood
- Symptoms may cause difficulty at school, at home, or with friends

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE ADHD?

- A person with ADHD may:
  - Daydream a lot
  - Forget or lose things a lot
  - Squirm or fidget
  - Talk too much
  - Make careless mistakes or take unnecessary risks
  - Have a hard time resisting temptation
  - Have trouble taking turns
  - Have difficulty getting along with others

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE MILD AUTISM?

- Mild autism spectrum disorder (ASD Level I) is one of a distinct group of complex neurodevelopment disorders characterized by social impairment, communication difficulties, and restrictive, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE MILD AUTISM?

- Difficulty knowing what to say or how to behave in social situations. They may appear awkward or rude, and unintentionally upset others.
- Trouble with “theory of mind,” that is, trouble perceiving the intentions or emotions of other people, due to a tendency to ignore or misinterpret such cues as facial expression, body language, and vocal intonation.
- Challenges with “executive functioning,” that is, organizing, initiating, analyzing, prioritizing, and completing tasks.
- A tendency to focus on the details of a given situation and miss the big picture.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE MILD AUTISM?

- Intense, narrow, time-consuming personal interest(s) — sometimes eccentric in nature — that may result in social isolation, or interfere with the completion of everyday tasks.
- Inflexibility and resistance to change. Change may trigger anxiety, while familiar objects, settings, and routines offer reassurance.
- Feeling somehow different and disconnected from the rest of the world and not “fitting in”—sometimes called “wrong planet” syndrome.
- Extreme sensitivity—or relative insensitivity—to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or textures.

## HOW WILL MY RIGHTS CHANGE IN COLLEGE?

- Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004)
- In high school, you got your accommodations either through your IEP (i.e., IDEA) or through a Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act) or through the American with Disabilities Act [ADA], 1973).
- In high school, your counselor made sure you had your accommodations, in college, you are responsible for accessing your accommodations.



## HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

- In college, the school's only requirement is to give you academic accommodations like extra time on tests, a separate setting, or a note-taker.
  - Your professors may not recognize when you are having difficulty and they may not seek you out in order to encourage you to get help or to advocate.

## **YOUR CIVIL RIGHTS IN COLLEGE**

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states the following:  
**"No otherwise qualified individual with handicaps in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of her or his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance...."**
- That means that any institution receiving federal funds must provide individuals the accommodations they need to access their course content, a building, etc.

# YOUR CIVIL RIGHTS IN COLLEGE

- First, it is your responsibility to disclose your disability to the University.
  - You have made an excellent decision to disclose to the University!
- You may be required to show documentation to support the need for the accommodations you request.
  - This is especially true for students with hidden disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, ADHD, emotional/behavioral disorders, respiratory conditions, visual impairment, hearing impairment, etc.)

# ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS IN COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES

- Academic accommodations are based on your disability and your specific needs
- For example these may include:
  - Extended time on tests
  - Separate setting for tests
  - Note-takers
  - “Live readers” (i.e., having the test read to you)
  - Ability to record lectures
  - Professor-provided notes
  - Preferential course selection

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A SELF-ADVOCATE?

- Self-advocacy means understanding yourself
  - Strengths, interests, needs, goals
- Knowledge of rights
  - Understanding personal, community, consumer rights, resources
- Good communication
  - Using effective body language, listening skills, understanding how to deal with differences of opinion, understanding/reading non-verbal language
- Leadership
  - Advocating for others, knowledge of groups' rights and resources

# LET'S HEAR FROM COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH A LD AND/OR ADHD



## **TEACHING SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS**

- I'm here to teach you a very specific set of skills to help you request academic accommodations from your professors and to learn how to handle the situation if the professor is not willing to grant your accommodations.
- My goal is to help you become an excellent self-advocate!

## **BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE SELF-ADVOCATE**

- Self-advocacy skills are important for every person because we all have to self-advocate throughout our lives, not just in school.
- As an adult, you are the one who needs to advocate for yourself – not your parents or your friends!



# ACCOMMODATION SELECTION

- Previous accommodations
- Course/professor
- Accommodation needed for the course

## REFERENCES

- Bethune, L., (2015). Unpublished dissertation. Department of Special Education and Child Development. University of North Carolina at Charlotte, North Carolina.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *The civil rights of students with hidden disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, Washington, D.C., 1995.