# Between Families March 2023

# How to Advocate for Your Foster Child in the Public School System

Helping your child get the help he or she needs.

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[How to Advocate for Your Foster Child in the Public School System | Adoption.com](https://adoption.com/advocate-foster-child-public-school-system)

Advocating for your foster child in the educational setting can be confusing and difficult. About half of foster children under the age of five have developmental delays. Various state studies show that anywhere from 30%-60% of children in foster care have disabilities.

Developmental delays, trauma, frequent moves, emotional distress, instability, and other common issues foster youth face affect a child’s ability to learn. Foster parents need to be prepared to advocate for the education needs of their children.

**IDEA – What You Need to Know**

The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](http://idea.ed.gov/) is the US special education law that requires public schools to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Under this act, public schools are required to provide a free and appropriate education to students in the least restrictive environment. Students with disabilities can receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which details any special services the student may need that the school is required to provide, along with the frequency of the services, and any goals related to the child’s progress.

**Getting an IEP**

Most children in foster care will already have an IEP in place. However, if your foster child does not have one, and you believe special services are needed, you can request an evaluation from the school.  To request evaluation, you will need to [write a referral letter](http://learningdisabilities.about.com/od/publicschoolprograms/ht/spedreferrals.htm) which should include the reasons you believe your child needs an IEP.

Once the referral is received, the school has 14 days to respond to the request. If the school consents to the evaluation of the child, they have 60 days to evaluate the child, hold an eligibility conference, and develop an IEP if one is needed. The foster parent should be involved in all steps. The IEP is reviewed on an annual basis by the education team and parents.

**Special Accommodations**

Accommodations are included in an IEP for students with learning disabilities or other special needs and offer kids alternative options for learning new things or displaying knowledge. My older two children have ADHD, among a few other issues, which makes it harder for them to focus. Because of this, some of their accommodations include being allowed to take frequent breaks during the day, taking unit tests in a separate room, being allowed more time for testing, allowing verbal responses instead of written, etc.

Accommodations can be written for any issue your child has that negatively impacts their ability to learn, such as anxiety, ADHD, sensory deficits, dyslexia, etc. These will not change the information that the children need to learn or standards for testing, but they do allow for the kids to have support in areas of deficit while they learn.

**Other Services**

Additional aids and services such as a one-on-one aid, behavioral plan, occupational therapy, social work support, and more can be included in your child’s IEP if needed. Evaluations and planning meetings are important in the determination of accommodations and services your children receive, so it is important to be involved in those steps to ensure the appropriate services are being put in place to support their needs.

It’s easy to feel intimidated and frustrated when dealing with public school systems, especially if you are made to feel like your child is the issue. However, understanding IDEA as well as the services available to your child can help you better advocate for your child in school and get them the support they need to succeed.

**Between Families Training Insert  
How to Advocate for Your Foster Child in the Public School System**

**March 2023**

**PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONNAIRE AND RETURN TO YOUR ASSIGNED FOSTER CARE WORKER FOR ½ HOUR CREDIT**

**Printed Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

1. What percent of children in foster care have disabilities? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. What are some common issues foster youth face that affect their ability to learn?
   1. Developmental Delay
   2. Trauma
   3. Frequent moves
   4. Emotional distress
   5. Instability
   6. All of the above
3. What does IDEA stand for?
   1. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
   2. Individuals with Delays Education Act
   3. Individuals with Difficult Emotions Act
   4. Ideal Ways to Discuss Education Act
4. What does IDEA require of public schools?
   1. A fun and appropriate education to students in the most restrictive environment
   2. A free and appropriate education to students in the least restrictive environment
   3. A fulfilling and appropriate education to students in the least restrictive environment
5. What does IEP stand for?
   1. Individual Education plan
   2. Individual Expectations plan
   3. Independent Education Program
   4. Individualized Education Program
6. What is the first step in requesting an IEP for a foster child?
   1. Fill out necessary paperwork
   2. Write a referral letter
   3. Demand a meeting with the principal
   4. Schedule a meeting with the IEP team
7. Once a referral is received by the school, how many days does the school have to respond?
   1. 14 days
   2. 30 days
   3. 7 days
   4. 60 days
8. How many days from the time of referral does the school have to evaluate the child if consent is given?
   1. 14 days
   2. 30 days
   3. 7 days
   4. 60 days
9. Accommodations on the IEP should be tailored to that child’s specific needs
   1. True
   2. False
10. What other accommodations can be included in the IEP
    1. One-on-one aid
    2. Behavior plan
    3. Occupational therapy
    4. Social work support
    5. All of the above