

# Navigating Mental Health as Students Return to School

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Margo Pierce

Parent Support Partner Statewide Coordinator  
Association for Children's Mental Health





# **Navigating Mental Health *as Students Return to School***

*A Guide for Parents and Caregivers*



Presented by: Margo Pierce, ACMH  
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# The Association for Children's Mental Health (ACMH)

## **Purpose:**

- ACMH exists to bring help and hope to families of Michigan children and youth with emotional, behavioral and mental health disorders.

## **Mission:**

- All Michigan children & youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges and their families live in a safe, welcoming community with access to needed services and supports.

## **What We Do:**

- ACMH provides information, support, resources, training, referral and advocacy for families of children and youth with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders and the communities who support them.

# Think & Share

**What's one word  
you'd use to  
describe a  
supportive school  
environment?**



# Goals

- **Increase awareness and understanding of mental health challenges among youth and young adults, particularly during transitions like returning to school.**
- **Equip participants with practical knowledge and resources to support the educational and emotional needs of their youth or young adult.**
- **Provide strategies for implementing accommodations and supports at school and home to foster resilience and academic success.**
- **Guide participants through the 504/IEP process and the integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) as part of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).**

# The Scope of Mental Health Struggles in Children and Youth



- **Overall Prevalence:**

- 11.5% of youth (~2.8 million) have a diagnosed mental health disorder.

- **Anxiety and Depression:**

- 9.4% (5.8 million) have anxiety.
- 4.4% (2.7 million) have depression.

- **Behavioral Disorders:**

- 9.8% have behavioral disorders (e.g., ADHD, conduct disorders).

# Signs and Symptoms of Mental Health Struggles in School



- **Academic Performance:**

- Decline in grades
- Incomplete assignments

- **Behavioral Changes:**

- Increased absenteeism
- Disruptive behavior

- **Social Interactions:**

- Withdrawal from peers
- Conflicts with classmates

- **Physical Complaints:**

- Frequent headaches or stomachaches

- **Emotional Signs:**

- Sadness or anxiety at school
- Emotional outbursts

# Determining Your Child's Needs



- **Observation:**

- Keep track of your child's behaviors and identify potential triggers.

- **Communication:**

- Discuss your child's feelings and experiences, ensuring you listen and validate their perspective.
- Collaborate with teachers and school counselors to understand and address concerns.

- **Professional Help:**

- Obtain evaluations from mental health professionals.
- Consider a multi-disciplinary approach to address complex needs.



# IEP vs. 504

**There are two types of educational support plans:**

- Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)
- 504 Plan Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

They are similar yet very different...

# IEP vs. 504, cont.

## Team Meetings:

- The development and review of an IEP involve a formal team meeting with specific members, including special education teachers, school administrators, and parents. *A 504 Plan is developed through a less formal process and does not require the same level of team involvement.*

## Progress Reports:

- An IEP includes a detailed plan for how progress towards the goals will be measured and reported to parents. *A 504 Plan does not have this requirement.*

## Legal Requirements:

- An IEP is required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandates specific procedures and documentation. *A 504 Plan is covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which has different requirements and less detailed documentation compared to IDEA.*

## IEP vs. 504, cont.

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In summary, while both plans aim to support students with disabilities, the IEP provides a more structured and comprehensive approach with specific educational goals and services.

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Section 504 requires recipients to provide to students with disabilities appropriate educational services designed to meet the individual needs of such students to the same extent as the needs of students without disabilities are met.

# Examples of Accommodations

- Student breaks
- Testing in alternate environments
- Having tests/assessments read to student (not always possible depending on what's being assessed)
- Reduced work expectations
- Fill in the blank notes, peer notes, copy of teacher notes
- Extended time on homework/tests/quizzes
- Retesting or reassessing if grades are below passing or below mastery

**“ \_\_\_\_\_, will be permitted to take breaks as needed following their prescribed procedure.”**

## **Pre-planning is a MUST.**

- Where does the student go?
- How do they get there?
- Who do they check in with?
- What do they do when they are there?

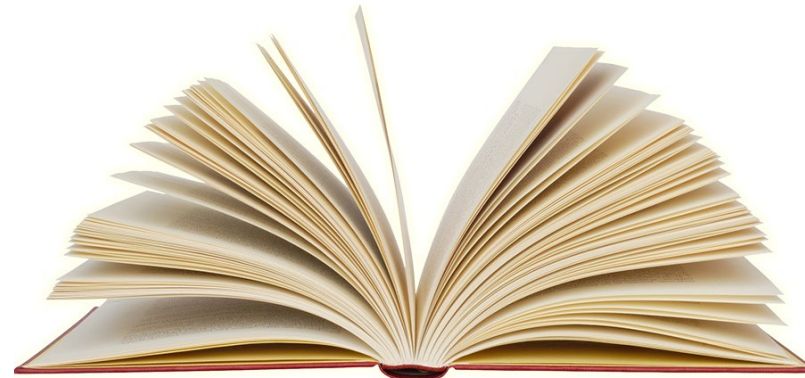
*Best practice is that this should always apply in all settings within the school building, except in situations where student movement throughout the building is entirely prohibited.*

# Follow Up Considerations

- **Breaks need to be at the discretion of the student, *not the adult*.** If the student does not recognize they need a break, we need to help them learn the signs.
- **Student dignity** needs to be of paramount concern for students to feel safe and accepted at school.
- **Be creative!** There are ways to make things like this work that take little or no money and little or no effort.
- If there is concern about a student abusing the privilege, the school can collect data and that can be reviewed *if that becomes a problem.*

# Difference between medical diagnosis and educational eligibility

- In Michigan, a specific medical diagnosis does NOT automatically result in educational eligibility for special education supports and services under that diagnosis.
- A parent may still make a written request for a comprehensive special education evaluation in all suspected areas of disability.



[Special Education - Disability Rights Michigan \(drmich.org\)](http://drmich.org)

[- Center for Parent Information and Resources \(parentcenterhub.org\)](http://parentcenterhub.org)

# Is anxiety eligible for special education supports and services?

Yes, they can be.

*A special education evaluation would need to be requested and conducted to determine if the student's anxiety rises to the level that it would require that type of intervention.*





# How Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) relates to Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)



## Holistic Development:

- SEL supports students' social-emotional needs, integral to FAPE, by fostering skills like self-awareness and relationship-building.

## Positive Learning Environment:

- SEL helps create a supportive school climate, enhancing students' engagement and ability to benefit from their education.

## Behavioral Support:

- SEL addresses behavioral challenges, ensuring students can access and benefit from their educational programs.

## Integration in IEPs:

- SEL goals and supports can be included in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to address students' unique needs.

# Helpful phrases to use

**I'd love to review the data you collected about this issue.**

**Can you help me understand why they aren't receiving supports in that area if you've identified it as a concern?**

**What interventions have you tried and how have they worked?**

**Help me understand how you determined this is choice behavior?**

**I need you to explain that to me until I understand.**

**What makes you think they want to be unsuccessful or fail?**

**Does my student feel welcome and accepted here? How did you come to that answer?**

# Helpful tips to remember

Schools have a **Child Find** obligation. They are required to identify and pursue evaluation of any child that is suspected of having a disability.

If you ask yes or no questions, you are inviting a “no” response.

Instead of, “Isn’t there something you can do to help?” ask, “What supports are available for them?”

PASSING GRADES CANNOT BE  
USED AS A REASON TO DENY AN  
EVALUATION FOR SPECIAL  
EDUCATION

Ask questions and give people time to respond. Don't be afraid of the uncomfortable silence that may follow—this often encourages others to provide the answers themselves.

# Summary

- Addressing mental health in children is crucial for their overall well-being and academic success.
- A significant percentage of youth experience mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders.
- Be aware of academic, behavioral, social, physical, and emotional signs that may indicate mental health struggles in school.
- Use observation, communication, and professional evaluations to understand and address your child's mental health needs.
- **504 Plans vs. IEPs**
- Integrate SEL into your child's education to support their holistic development and ensure they receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).
- Practice helpful phrases and remember key tips to advocate for your child's needs and collaborate with educators.

# Let's Talk About It!



# Resources

- Association for Children's Mental Health: [www.acmh-mi.org](http://www.acmh-mi.org)
- Michigan Alliance for Families: [www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)
- Disability Rights Michigan: [www.drnich.org](http://www.drnich.org)
  - Special Education Advocates Manual
- ADDitude Magazine: [www.additudemag.org](http://www.additudemag.org)
- Strategies for ADD, ADHD, Executive Function issues: [How to Improve Executive Function Skills in ADHD Adults, Children \(additudemag.com\)](http://www.additudemag.com)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- Strategies for Learning Disabilities and differences:
  - [Understood.org](http://www.understood.org) and the [Learning Disabilities Association of America](http://www.ldaa.org) ([Understood](http://www.understood.org), [Education Week](http://www.educationweek.org), [Connected and Engaged](http://www.connectedandengaged.org))

# Contact Information:

Margo Pierce, PSP Statewide Coordinator

Association for Children's Mental Health

[Mpierce@acmh-mi.org](mailto:Mpierce@acmh-mi.org)

(517) 420-2193



# We are here to support you!

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**For more information visit**

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

Call 800-552-4821

En Español 313-217-1060

للغة العربية 248-963-0607

[info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)





# Michigan Alliance for Families

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1-800-552-4821

[info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

