



## Need Resources for Parents & Caregivers?

The following handouts are guides from our collection, **Help Guides for Children with Behavior and Learning Challenges**. They're meant to be easy-to-understand information sheets for caregivers and advocates.

### Topics include:

- Section 504 Plans
- Special Education and IEPs
- Behavioral Health Supports in Schools
- School Discipline
- School Climate
- Georgia Apex and Behavioral Health
- Signing Up for Medicaid and PeachCare
- Mental Health Challenges
- Student Support Teams
- Behavior Intervention Plans and Functional Behavior Assessments
- School-Court Partnerships
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
- More!

Find the complete set of guides on our website:

<http://bit.ly/GAHelpGuides>





## MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Struggling to learn or acting out may be a sign of a mental health challenge. All children can have mental health challenges.

If you think that your child has a mental health challenge, your school and community can help you.

### What mental health challenges could affect my child?

There are many different types of mental health challenges that affect school children. Some of these challenges are listed below.

- Anxiety may cause a child to be nervous or irritable.
- Depression may cause a child to be sad and lack interest in being active or spending time with friends and family.
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder may make it difficult for a child to pay attention or sit still. This challenge is also known as ADHD or ADD.
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder may make a child sad, anxious, irritable, or frightened. If your child has experienced stress from things like death or violence, your child may develop this challenge. This challenge is also known as PTSD.

### What should I do if I think my child is struggling with mental health?

Ask the school for help. You can ask the school to do an evaluation. You may also ask the school for a special education assessment.

Ask your friends, family, and community to suggest mental health professionals who can help.

Call the Georgia Crisis and Access Line at (800) 715-4225 or a local mental health provider for help.



## TRAUMA

Sad, violent, or scary events can have long-term effects on a child's behavior. These effects are called **Trauma**. Accidents, abuse, neglect, bullying, and other disturbing events can cause trauma. Children suffering from trauma can have trouble learning and following school rules. These children can also develop serious mental health challenges if they do not receive help.

### What can the school do?

If you think that your child suffers from trauma, you should tell a school teacher or counselor you trust.

The school can provide special care for students with trauma. This special care is called **Trauma-Informed Care**. School teachers need to have special training to give trauma-informed care. Trained teachers help children feel safe physically, mentally, and emotionally in school.

Ask the school to train your child's teachers in trauma-informed care. Schools can get free training from the Georgia Department of Education. You can ask the school to schedule a training through its local **Regional Education Service Agency**.

### Where can I find support for trauma outside of the school?

Ask your friends, family, and community to suggest mental health professionals who can help.

Call the Georgia Crisis and Access Line at **(800) 715-4225** or call a local mental health provider for assistance.



## EXPULSION, OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION, OR OSS

A school may want to remove a child from school for breaking certain rules, disrupting class, or causing danger. A school will call this punishment expulsion, out-of-school suspension, or OSS.

These punishments should be explained in the school's code of conduct or student handbook.

### What should I do if the school wants to remove my child from school?

The school must hold a special meeting when it wants to remove a child for more than ten days. This meeting is called a **Tribunal**. The tribunal will decide whether your child broke the rule and what the punishment will be.

You can advocate and defend your child at a tribunal. You can call witnesses or question the school's witnesses.

You should talk to a lawyer if your school tells you that the school will hold a tribunal for your child. For free legal help, call Atlanta Legal Aid Society at (404) 524-5811 or the Georgia Legal Services Program at (800) 498-9469.

### What if my child is in special education?

If a child has an IEP or is in special education, a school cannot remove that child from school for more than **ten days total** each year without a meeting called a **Manifestation Meeting**. At this meeting, the school will decide if your child's disability caused the behavior. If the disability did cause the behavior, the school usually cannot suspend or expel for more than ten days.

You can advocate and defend your child at a manifestation meeting. You should talk to a lawyer if your school tells you they are holding a manifestation meeting.

### What if my child is in preschool through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade?

A school must give these children extra help and support before the school can expel or suspend them for more than **five days total** each year. This extra help and support is called a multi-tiered system of supports, or MTSS. Learn more about MTSS in our guide on [Multi-Tiered System of Supports and Responses to Intervention](#).

A school must provide extra protections for children who are in preschool through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade **and** have an IEP or Section 504 plan. The school must give these children MTSS and a new IEP or Section 504 meeting. Learn more in our guides on [Section 504 Plans for Children with Disabilities](#) and [Special Education and IEPs for Children with Learning Disabilities](#).



## **STUDENT SUPPORT TEAMS**

Schools can create a team to help a student who struggles to learn or behave in school. This team is called a **Student Support Team**.

### **What can the student support team do for my child?**

The student support team will

- Learn why your child is struggling to learn or behave. The team may give your child an **educational evaluation** to learn about your child's challenges.
- Create a plan to help your child succeed. The plan may involve tutoring, counseling, or other activities.
- Check whether your child and the team are doing what the plan says. They will also check to make sure that the plan is working. The team can change the plan.

### **How can I get my child a student support team?**

Ask your school for a student support team. State the reason why you are making the request. Ask in person and write the school a letter or email. Put the date on the letter or email. Keep a copy of your letter or email.

You may ask the principal, classroom teacher, special education teacher, counselor, school psychologist, or social worker. These school employees may be on your child's student support team. Make sure you keep copies of all student support team documents.



## **BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLANS AND FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENTS**

Schools create plans to help students with serious behavior challenges. These plans are called **Behavior Intervention Plans**.

### **How do I get my child a Behavior Intervention Plan?**

Ask the school for a **Functional Behavior Assessment**. This assessment looks at why a child acts out and breaks school rules. Tell the school that you want the assessment done by a **Board Certified Behavior Analyst**. State the reason why you are making the request. Ask in person and write the school a letter or email. Put the date on the letter or email. Keep a copy of your letter or email.

The school should create a behavior intervention plan after the assessment. The plan will list the ways that the school can support changes to your child's behavior. It is important that all of a child's teachers understand and follow the behavior intervention plan.

### **Do I have to wait until my child is suspended to ask for a Behavior Intervention Plan?**

No. If your child is getting in trouble often, tell the school you want a functional behavioral assessment and a behavior intervention plan.

### **Does my child have to be in special education to get a behavior intervention plan?**

No. Your child does not have to be in special education to get a behavior intervention plan.



## SECTION 504 PLANS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Health issues, disabilities, and other issues can make it hard for children to learn or follow rules at school. A school can create a plan for children who need extra help due to a disability. They call these plans **Section 504 Plans**. The plan might say that your child can get extra time to take tests, receive special equipment to help see or hear, or receive other types of help.

### How do I get my child a Section 504 Plan?

Ask the school for a Section 504 Plan if you think that your child has a disability. State the reason why you are making the request. Ask in person and write the school a letter or email. Put the date on the letter or email. Keep a copy of your letter or email.

The school must do a free **Educational Evaluation** of your child if your child has a disability. The school will talk with you and your child to learn why your child is having trouble learning or behaving.

After the educational evaluation, the school must create and follow a Section 504 plan if your child has a disability. Schools provide a different plan called an **IEP** for students with certain **Learning Disabilities**. Your child does not need to have a learning disability to get a Section 504 plan.

Our guide on [Special Education and IEPs for Children with Learning Disabilities](#) provides more information on IEPs.

### What if the school says that my child does not need a Section 504 plan or an IEP?

Talk to an education lawyer for advice. Parents and caregivers living on low incomes might find free legal help at Atlanta Legal Aid Society (404-524-5811) or Georgia Legal Services Program (800-498-9469).



## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS

All children can have strong emotions that they have difficulty coping with. These feelings might be caused by the school environment, learning or mental health challenges, or something going on at home.

These feelings may cause children to act out and have trouble following school rules.

Some schools offer **Behavioral Health Services** to help these children and their families. All public schools provide services to children in Special Education with IEPs.

### What kind of services are available in school?

- Students may speak with a counselor alone or in a group.
- Counselors can talk to parents and caregivers and give them additional tools and skills to support themselves and the child.
- Counselors may use art or playrooms to help the student.

### Do these services cost money?

Some services may be free and others may cost money.

You can ask the school for a free evaluation, when necessary, to help understand what is going on with your child.

Talking with counselors may cost a fee. Government help like Medicaid or PeachCare may pay the counselor. See our section on [Paying for Your Child's Care](#) for more information.



## **SPECIAL EDUCATION AND IEPS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

Children can have health issues, disabilities, and other issues that make it hard to learn or follow rules at school. We call these challenges **Learning Disabilities**. Some children with learning disabilities may need extra help or time with specially trained teachers.

A school must create a plan to help a child with a learning disability. This plan is called an **IEP** or an **Individualized Education Plan**. The IEP is a plan for **Special Education Services** that will help the child learn better at school.

### **What does an IEP do?**

The IEP gives school employees instructions on how they must help your child. An IEP might include extra time to take tests, special equipment to help see or hear, or other types of help.

The school must teach your child in the **Least Restrictive Environment**. This means that the school must teach your child with other children as much as possible. The school should place your child in a classroom with children who are receiving special education services and children who are not receiving special education services.

### **How do I get my child special education services?**

Ask the school to provide special education services. State the reason why you are making the request. Ask in person and write the school a letter or email. Put the date on the letter or email. Keep a copy of your letter or email.

The school must do a free **educational evaluation**. The school does this evaluation to learn whether your child has a learning disability. The school will talk with you and your child to learn why your child is having trouble learning.

The school must create an **IEP Team** for children with learning disabilities. The IEP team has teachers, parents, a school administrator, and others. The team must create a special plan for your child. The plan is called an IEP. Your child should be on the IEP team when you feel the child is mature enough.

The school must follow the IEP until the IEP team changes it.



## **SPECIAL EDUCATION AND IEPs FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

### **What if the school says that my child does not need Special Education Services or an IEP?**

- Ask the school for a Section 504 plan and a student support team. Learn more in our guides for [Section 504 Plans for Children with Disabilities](#) and [Student Support Teams](#).
- Talk to an education lawyer for advice. Parents and caregivers living on low-incomes can find free legal help at Atlanta Legal Aid Society (404-524-5811) or Georgia Legal Services Program (800-498-9469).



## MEDICAID AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Medicaid pays for services for children with autism spectrum disorder. These services include tests to find out if a child has autism. It also pays for treatment.

Our guide on Signing Up for Medicaid and PeachCare tells you how to sign up for Medicaid.

### What does Medicaid pay for?

Medicaid will pay for a test to find out if a child has autism. These tests are called diagnostic tests or assessments. Your child's doctor can order the tests. Sometimes the doctor will want you to see a special doctor to order the tests.

Medicaid will also pay for a treatment called **Applied Behavior Analysis**.

Applied behavior analysis treatment helps a child learn social skills, language, and other life skills. Sometimes the treatment is with a group of children, and sometimes the treatment is one-on-one with a counselor.

### How do I find someone who will provide treatment?

Your child needs to get help as soon as possible. Ask your doctor or a social worker for a list of therapists. You may need to get on a waiting list. You may need to challenge Medicaid if you cannot find a therapist or if it is taking too long to get services. Your challenge is called an **Appeal**.

You can ask a lawyer to help file an appeal. Look at the bottom of this page for information about free legal help from a lawyer.

### What if Medicaid will not pay for treatment?

Medicaid will sometimes refuse to pay for tests and treatment. It may also refuse to pay for as many treatments as your child needs. You can challenge Medicaid if Medicaid refuses to pay. Your challenge is called an appeal. You can ask a lawyer to help file an appeal.

For free legal help, call Atlanta Legal Aid Society at (404) 524-5811 or the Georgia Legal Services Program at (800) 498-9469.



## ORGANIZATIONS THAT CAN HELP: CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN GEORGIA

**Georgia Crisis and Access Line** – for immediate access to routine or crisis services, 24 hours a day.  
**(800) 715-4225**

**Georgia Legal Services** – provides free legal services to Georgians living on low incomes.  
**(888) 408-1004**  
[www.glsp.org](http://www.glsp.org)

**Atlanta Legal Aid Society** – provides free legal services to people across Metro Atlanta living on low incomes.  
**(404) 524-5811**

**Disability Integration Project** – an Atlanta Legal Aid Society project that works with people with disabilities.  
**(404) 377-0707**

**Parent to Parent of Georgia** – network of “parent mentors.” They help other caregivers and children with disabilities.  
**(800) 229-2038**  
[www.p2pga.org](http://www.p2pga.org)

**Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO)** – provides services to children with disabilities in Georgia.  
**(800) 537-2329**  
[www.thegao.org](http://www.thegao.org)

**United Way** – connects you with mental health services, disaster services, housing, and legal services.

**Call 211**  
[www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org)

**Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) Division for Special Education** – gives information about children’s rights in schools and parents’ rights.  
**(404) 656-3963**  
[www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org)

**Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)** – oversees public mental health services for Georgia.  
**(404) 657-2252**  
[www.dbhdd.georgia.gov](http://www.dbhdd.georgia.gov)

Visit  
<https://namiga.org/community-resources/> for National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Georgia’s more complete list of behavioral health help.



## IMPROVING STUDENT BEHAVIOR WITH PBIS

Many schools use the **PBIS** program to help students learn to follow school rules and have a better school experience. PBIS stands for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

### How does PBIS Work?

PBIS schools teach children how they should act and reward them when they act correctly. Schools that use PBIS often feel safer and the children do better with their classwork. PBIS schools have fewer problems with bullying, discipline, and substance abuse.

PBIS schools follow a plan with three levels.

- Level 1: Teachers explain expectations for behavior to every child and then reward the students they see acting correctly.
- Level 2: Schools organize special group activities for students who need more help acting correctly. These activities could include group conversations with other students or workshops.
- Level 3: Schools organize special activities for students who need individual attention. These activities could include conversations with the school counselor or tests for special education.

### How do I get PBIS in my child's school?

- Check to see if your child's school is using PBIS. Enter your school name on the Georgia Department of Education's School Climate Dashboard at [www.georgiainsights.com/school-climate-overview.html](http://www.georgiainsights.com/school-climate-overview.html).
- If you are not at a PBIS school, talk with the principal and ask them to learn about PBIS.
- Learn more in our [School Climate](#) guide.