

Emily's Voice

Introduction

This is an overview of a PowerPoint presentation made to the Grimsley Senior High School (Greensboro, NC) faculty and administration in August of 2012 as part of a Girl Scout Gold Award project. The presentation is currently being evaluated by the Guilford County School System and is being presented to the N C Department of Public Instruction for review.

The program was designed to assist teachers and other school personnel in understanding and helping students with disabilities that receive accommodations in a 504 plan and are mainstreamed in the classroom. These disabilities can include acute (cancer) and chronic (autoimmune, juvenile diabetes) diseases as well as psychological issues (depression, OCD) and learning disabilities (dyslexia).

Because these students often don't "look sick" (with the exception of children undergoing a serious form of treatment such as chemotherapy), their 504 plans are often either not read or overlooked. The activities in this booklet are designed to help teachers become more empathetic to students living and learning with acute and chronic conditions. Teachers should better understand what these students deal with and what it is like for them to be at school.

There were a series of activities designed to introduce the teachers to the symptoms of various diseases that students must function within school. These activities introduce common disabilities in a general way. Students with the same condition will not necessarily manifest it in the same way. Fact sheets on some common diseases and conditions have been included. Many of the activities used are common with several diseases. For example, the ability to focus and concentrate is central in ADD and ADHD but is also an issue for children with POTS and autoimmune diseases.

Teachers are a very important component of a student's success in school. Thank you for ensuring an equal educational experience for all students.

Emily Reichard
2012

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Emily's Voice Presentation Outline

- I. Welcome Teachers
- II. A Day in the Life
 - A.) Explain that under some of the chairs is a bag. Those seated in chairs with a bag should open the bag and read the instructions and do as directed. They should not share with their neighbor.
- III. Setting the stage
 - A. Student moderator sharing of experience
 - B. Background on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973)
 - C. Common Physical Reasons for a 504 Plan
 - i) as each physical challenge is discussed, the teacher with the corresponding Day in the Life prop should be asked to come forward to demonstrate and relate how it felt to deal with the physical challenge
 - D. Common Psychological Reasons for a 504 Plan
 - ii) as each psychological challenge is discussed, the teacher with the corresponding Day in the Life prop should be asked to come forward to demonstrate and relate how it felt to deal with the psychological challenge
- IV. 504 Process Flow Chart
- V. Typical 504 Accommodations
- VI. Student 504 Experiences Roundtable
- VII. Parent 504 Experiences Roundtable
- VIII. Final Statement
- IX. Questions/Answers

Physical Symptoms that may be present in a 504 student

Day in the Life Exercises (for teachers who had bags under chairs)

Activity

Wear two 5 lb weights on ankles.
When directed to do so,
do leg lifts until told to stop.

Wear two oven mitts.
When directed to do so,
hand out papers one at a time.

Hold baseball bat and towel.
When told to do so, put your
forehead on the top of the bat.
Spin around the bat 5 times as
quickly as you can. Stand up quickly.
Immediately lie down on the towel.

When told to do so, put on a pair of
greased eyeglasses. Read the selection
provided.

At the moderator's direction, place
the straw in your mouth. Breathing
only through the straw, run in place
for 5 minutes.

Put on a child's swim cap that should be
too tight for the teachers head.

Disease

Represents muscle weakness
dealt with in autoimmune diseases
such as lupus, JDM, MS, MD.

Demonstrates nerve loss, fine
motor skills loss in Rheumatoid
arthritis.

Exhibits dizziness from sudden
drop in blood pressure that
accompanies POTS

Mimics loss of vision acuity often
present in juvenile diabetes.

Replicates the difficulty in breathing
present in asthma.

Evinces the headache very present
in POTS and other diseases often as
a result of medication.

Psychological or Mental Symptoms that may be present in a 504 student

Day in the Life Exercises (for teachers who had bags under chairs)

Psychological or mental symptoms are often less obvious than physical ones.

Activity

When directed to do so, read the selection provided.

When the moderator requests, come to the front of the room. Place one ear bud in one ear and the other in the other ear. You will hear two different stories but you will be tested on only one.

Every time anyone in this seminar mentions the word “disability” or “disabled”, you must run up and touch the light switch.

Disease

Mimics how those with dyslexia have difficulty in reading and math.

Shows how persons with ADD or ADHD experience almost constant overstimulation.

Highlights the compulsions that persons with OCD deal with.



It is a lonely existence to be a child with a disability which no one can see or understand. You exasperate your teachers. You disappoint your parents, and worst of all you know that you are just not stupid.

-Susan Hampshire



Final Thoughts

Let's stop "tolerating" or "accepting" difference as if we're so much better for not being different in the first place. Instead, let's celebrate difference because in this world it takes a lot of guts to be different.

-Kate Bornstein

I have not been handicapped by my condition. I am physically challenged and differently abled.

-Janet Barnes

Disability is a matter of perception. If you can do just one thing well, you're needed.

-Martina Navratilova

Know me for my abilities, not by disabilities.

-Robert M. Hensel

It is a lonely existence to be a child with a disability which no one can see or understand. You exasperate your teachers. You disappoint your parents, and worst of all you know that you are just not stupid.

-Susan Hampshire

I don't have a dis-ability. I have a different-ability.

-Robert M. Hensel

Things for Teachers to Consider Regarding 504 Accommodations

- ❖ Students and parents go through a lengthy and involved process to obtain 504 accommodations. Doctors must certify that the student needs 504 accommodations. 504 plans are not frivolous nor are they offered at the drop of a hat.
- ❖ A Section 504 plan is a legal document. Not following the plan or not providing the accommodations listed is a violation of a student's civil rights.
- ❖ Read each 504 plan. Be aware of the accommodations you are responsible for providing. The disability may not be apparent by looking at the student, who may look healthy from outward appearance. However, symptoms such as nausea, headaches, fatigue, elevated blood sugar, dizziness, issues related to kidney, liver, or lung disease, or pain are often challenges that the student deals with daily. Just getting through the school day often takes a lot of effort and fortitude.
- ❖ Be sensitive and confidential. Students with 504 plans do not like to have attention drawn to them in class because of their 504.
- ❖ At the same time, please treat students with 504 plans as normally as you would students without them. However, there may be circumstances where the student is experiencing symptoms and may need extra consideration and compassion.
- ❖ If you have questions or concerns, have a conversation with parents and the student before they become an issue. The school guidance counselor who oversees student 504 plans may also be helpful.
- ❖ You will probably get a great deal of email and other contacts from a 504 student's parents. Please understand they are not being "helicopter parents" and are not trying to make it easy for their student. They are used to advocating for their child in different school settings. Keep in mind that how 504 accommodations are treated varies from year to year and from teacher to teacher and parents are ever vigilant.
- ❖ The goal of 504 plans is to ensure that students have what they need in the face of medical challenges to have an opportunity to succeed academically alongside peers in a classroom setting. Good communication and understanding among educators, students, and parents can help this happen.

What Parents Should Know

- ❖ If your child is diagnosed with an acute or chronic medical or mental health issue (i.e. “a substantial limitation of one or more major life activities”), he/she may qualify for a Section 504 plan.
- ❖ Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act is a national law. It states that persons cannot be discriminated against because of their disability.
- ❖ Qualified students may receive accommodations during the school day. These accommodations are spelled out in a 504 plan.
- ❖ Your child’s doctor is an important advocate for your child in the 504 process, as is the school counselor and school nurse.
- ❖ Don’t be afraid to ask for the accommodations you and your child’s doctor believes your child needs in the school setting. No 504 plan is alike as each child experiences are not alike. Even children with the same challenges (e.g. juvenile diabetes) may have different physical issues in school.
- ❖ Common accommodations can include: modified physical education; extended testing time; extra time for class work and/or homework; an extra set of books for home use
- ❖ “The law requires that students with disabilities be educated along with nondisabled students to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the students with disabilities. This means that students with disabilities must be assigned to regular courses or classes if the students’ needs can be met there. Also, decisions on academic placement must be based on an individual student’s needs.” (US Department of Education)
- ❖ “Students may not be excluded on the basis of disability from participating in extracurricular activities and nonacademic services. These may include counseling services, physical education and recreational athletics, transportation, health services, recreational activities, special interest groups or clubs sponsored by the school, referrals to agencies that provide assistance to students with disabilities, and student employment.” (US Department of Education)

Resources

The United States department of Education

Website: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq5269.html>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights

Hotline: 1-800-368-1019 (voice)

1-800-537-7697 (TDD)

E-mail: ocrmail@hhs.gov

Website: <http://hhs.gov/ocr>

Your State Department of Public Instruction

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US Department of Education