504 Plan Elements

One of the things that happens commonly in my practice is I get requests from parents and schools to provide some suggestions or recommendations for the 504 plan. This is hands down one of my least favorite things to do. Providing a unilateral list from all the possible accommodations, modifications, and services that could be offered is impossible to do. I can make a list, and parents and teachers can pick from the list, but a 504 plan is best developed through a collaborative conversation between the clinician, the school, and the family. If you want a list of possible 504 plan accommodations, we've provided references where you can submit a very long list that the school team will then pick and choose from, because it's not going to work to have a list if twenty-five 504 elements. It will be overwhelming for the teacher who is expected to be aware of them and follow them, and frankly many of them will be less than helpful. When I think about developing a 504 plan, I think about the domains or elements of a 504 plan that might be important for the child, and then I develop the 504 plan aspects from that. Let me give you some examples.

I think it's important for the 504 plan to include some process for parent/teacher communication. This is particularly important when medication therapy is involved. We need some capacity for providing the family, providing you regular information. Not at the end of the month, not once a year, of what is being accomplished, where the child is struggling. Again, how you can support the school's efforts.

Often 504 plans involve task modifications. They can be a different spelling list, it could be different expectations regarding how you get your thoughts down on paper, it can be shortening math tests. There are many ways to modify assignments that fit within the skillsets, the abilities, or a child with attention or self-control problems.

I think an often-neglected area are goal setting elements. It's really important when a child is presented with task expectations that they understand how to set goals. We talked a lot about that. I think some process within the 504 plan for having a teacher and student identify the goal before they begin their work is very, very important.

Most 504 plans now involve elements for rebooting attention, most commonly with movement breaks. As you know from one of our other modules, there are many, many ways to establish or reboot attention.

There are also strategies for helping children to shift attention. This is one of the most common challenges for children with ADHD. Again, we've presented a module to help you and the teacher help the child to shift attention when it's important to do so.

We also want to create systems for self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Ultimately this type of self-awareness; were you in proper position to pay attention, were you productive on that task, were you present for that task, did you participate. These are all things that we want to teach children to be aware of by tracking and self-evaluating and in some way reporting back to parent and family how they've done.

There are many work environment considerations. These are the kind of 504 plan accommodations that have say, quieter work space or access to adult support, sitting near a particularly conscientious peer, avoiding a child who might be particularly distracting. These kinds of work environment considerations are very important. They are often included in 504 plans when it comes to doing testing, because as we

all know these test scores matter, at least from many people's point of view. They put those environmental modifications into the testing elements but not in the day-to-day work elements.

We also include in 504 plans the use of technology. Voice to text, power point presentations, other forms of media presentations. There are lots of ways to change task expectations and level the playing field by introducing technology. By the way, this 504 plan development is not a matter of fairness, I hear so often that someone will say, "Well that's not fair to the other children that don't get to use these technology aids, or don't get to have their assignments modified." In my view, meeting the needs of every child, whether they have a condition or not, is part of our educational system. It's what we're striving for.

504 plans, I think, should include, when appropriate, some way of establishing routines and habits that are part of the classroom experience. These can be practiced at home so that the child is better prepared for the expectations in school.

We've also talked about organizational supports. This becomes more important as the children get older. Working with someone to organize their binder, review their assignments, practice the turn-in process for turning in work. Organizational supports are generally a very important part of a 504 plan.

As I've mentioned, 504 plans can provide supportive services. It can provide someone teaching a child how to build these skills. How to take notes or how to organize their materials, or how to create a topic sentence. T04 plans are not only about accommodations and modifications.

We're hoping to support teachers with a 504 plan, not just burden them with increased expectations. 504 plans can provide elements for teacher training. A colleague of mine did a really nice beginning study looking at teacher's attitudes towards 504 plans. To my surprise, they felt the 504 plans were helpful, but the resounding feedback that we got is that they needed more training, not only how to write 504 plans, but training on how to help children with attention and self-control weaknesses. Don't be shy about incorporating training goals into a 504 plan.