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# **Mental Health Awareness:** Identifying Needs in Students

# **Kentucky Special Parent Involvement Network (KY-SPIN)**

Since 1988, when Kentucky first received a Parent Training Information Center (PTI), the U.S. Department of Education has funded KY-SPIN Parent Center under IDEA. The center provides training, information, and support for children and youth with all types of disabilities (birth through 26 years old), their parents, families, and professionals.

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We do NOT

Act as attorneys

We DO

Empower families to advocate for their children effectively.

Provide “peer-to-peer” support to help families access needed information and resources

# Defining Mental Health in Education



Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

- Affects learning capabilities, social interactions, and behavioral responses.

## Common Challenges:

- Anxiety, depression, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), trauma-related issues, disabilities, body dysmorphia, and more.
- These are not just personal issues—they affect learning.
- Observe for changes in mood, behavior, or academic performance.

# Recognizing Signs of Mental Health Needs

## Emotional signs

- Persistent sadness (long-lasting)
- Anxiety
- Personality changes or altered moods
- Excessive worrying, etc.

## Academic signs

- Drop in grades
- Not turning in assignments
- Trouble focusing
- Behavioral concerns, etc.



# Educational Impact – Academic & Functional Performance

Academic performance includes test scores and schoolwork.

Functional performance includes emotional regulation, attention, behavior, and communication.

Example: A student with ADHD may complete work at home but struggle to focus in class.

- Observe behavior in multiple settings (classroom, lunch, special classes).
- Gather data (grades, observations).
- Identify concern.
- Talk with your child.
- Talk with the teacher
- Refer to the school support team.

# Child Find – School’s Duty to Identify Students

- Recognize a concern
- Make a written request for an evaluation
- School sends notice to parents.
- With consent, the school evaluates the student.
- Team determines eligibility for special education
- Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan created if eligible

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), schools must identify and support students with potential disabilities, including mental health concerns.

Early intervention improves outcomes.

Schools assess needs based on educational and functional impact, not just medical diagnosis.

If you suspect your student has a disability, submit a written request to the school for an evaluation.



# Supporting Student Mental Health with KyMTSS

Kentucky's Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a way schools help all students, especially those who need extra support with learning, behavior, or mental health.

- **Tier 1:** Help for **all students** (school rules, kindness lessons).
- **Tier 2:** Extra help in **small groups or short-term** (meeting with a counselor).
- **Tier 3:** **Individualized** help for students who need more support.



1. **Talk to the Teacher or Counselor:**  
Tell them you're concerns about your child's mental health or schoolwork.
2. **Ask for Support in Writing:**  
Write a short note or email asking if your child can get extra help through an evaluation
3. **Join Meetings:**  
The school will invite you to talk about a plan to help your child.
4. **Check In Often:**  
Stay in touch with the school to see how things are going and if more help is needed.

You don't need a diagnosis to ask for help! ➡ Learn more at [KyMTSS.org](https://www.kyMTSS.org)

# 504 Plans

504 Plans provide accommodations for students with physical or mental impairments that substantially limit one major life activity.

Based on  
Section 504  
of the  
Rehabilitation  
Act.

Parents can request a 504  
evaluation in writing if they believe  
their child needs reasonable  
accommodations to have equal  
access to meet their learning needs.

Parent/Teacher referral

The school holds a meeting.

Team reviews health records,  
teacher input.

If eligible, create a written 504  
Plan.

Teachers implement  
accommodations.

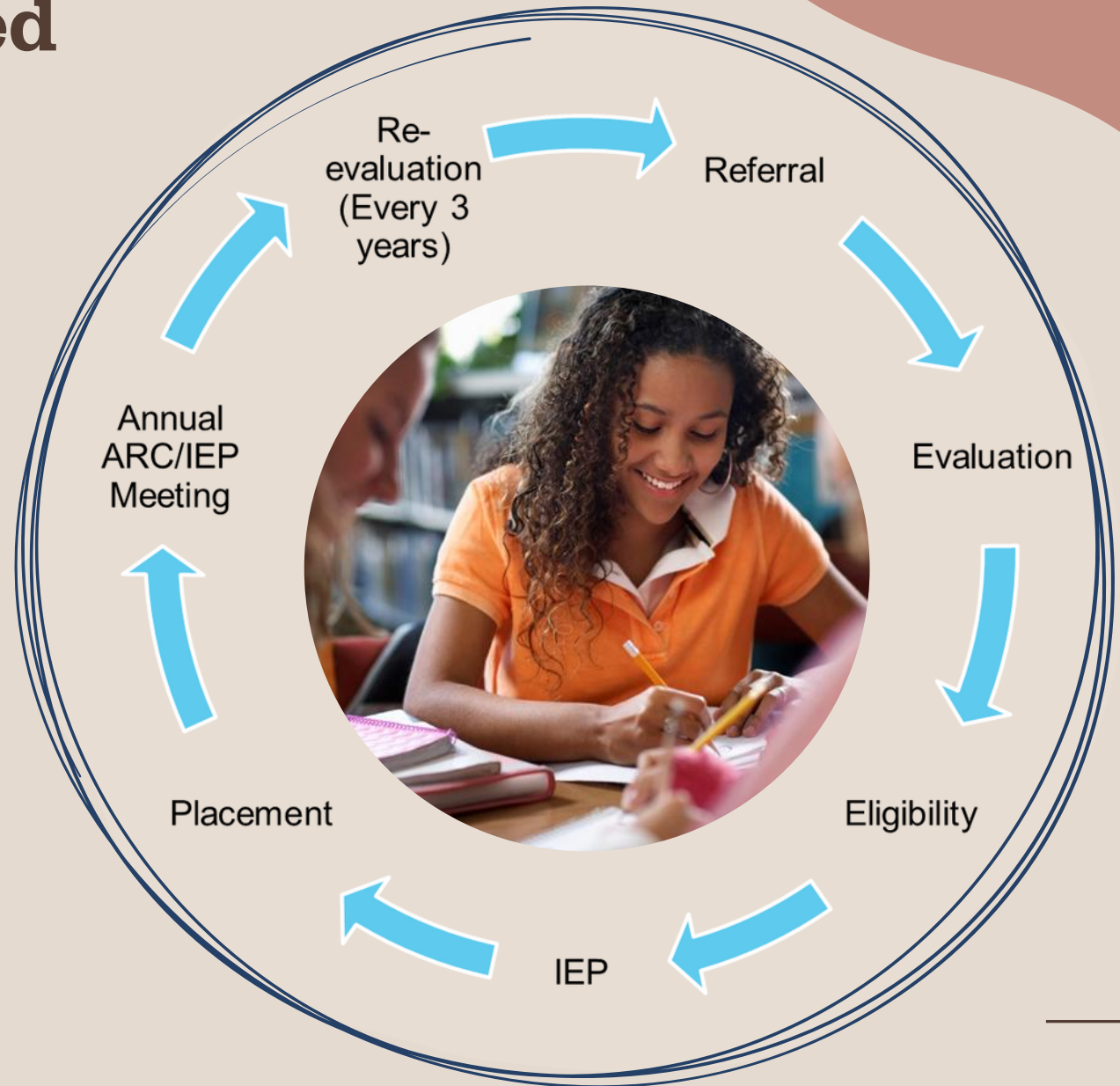
Accommodations: extended time  
on tests, flexible deadlines, breaks  
during the day.

# IEPs – When Specially Designed Instruction is Required

For students needing Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) and Related Services due to a qualifying disability.

Mental health-related disability eligibility categories (Emotional-Behavioral, Other Health Impairment, Autism).

Example: A student with severe anxiety impacting classroom participation.



# Key Differences

Feature	504 Plan	Individualized Education Program (IEP)
Legal Basis	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
Support Type	Accommodations & Supports	Special Education
Eligibility	Impacts one or more major life activities	<p>The child's disability must show an "adverse effect" that impedes progress where educational performance is significantly and consistently below the level of children of similar age.</p> <p>Must meet criteria of one or more disability categories</p> <p>Must need specially designed instruction &amp; related services</p>
Example	Extended test time	Speech therapy, counseling, extended test time

# Accommodations & Supports

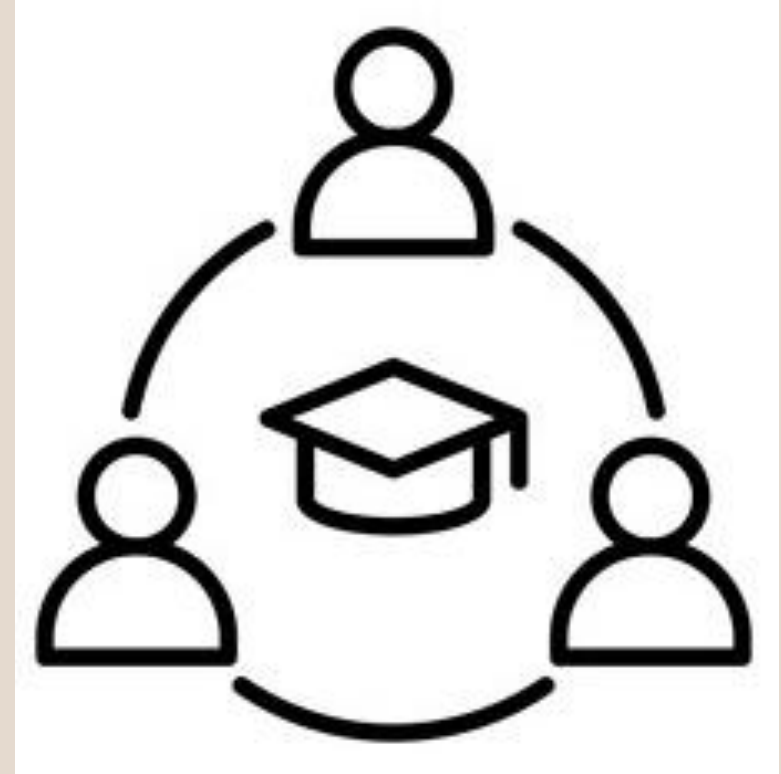
Parents, teachers, and school staff should work together to find the right support plan and personalize it to your child.

Testing	Classroom	Emotional	Mental Health
Breaks Extended time Separate location	Movement breaks Use of fidgets Visual schedules Preferential seating Schedule changes addressed ahead of time	Access to a counselor Check in with a trusted adult Positive behavioral supports Access to calming techniques	School counseling Functional Behavioral Assessment Behavioral Intervention plan Music therapy Group or individual therapy

# Collaborating for Student Success

## Team approach

- Students
  - Encourage self-advocacy
- Parents
- Educators
- School psychologists
- Therapists



# Reducing Stigma & Building a Supportive School Culture



- Creating an environment where students feel safe discussing mental health.
- Training staff in mental health awareness.
- Promoting resources and coping strategies.
- Schools should provide clear guidance on accessing mental health services.

# Resources

- 988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE
- NAMI (NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS)
- POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS & SUPPORTS (PBIS)
- KY-SPIN MENTAL HEALTH
- KY-SPIN FBA/BIP
- KY-SPIN MANAGING EMOTIONS
- KY-SPIN SELF-CARE GOALS FOR THE IEP
- KY-SPIN SELF-ADVOCACY GOALS FOR THE IEP
- [HTTPS://WWW.SCHOOLSAFETY.GOV/MENTAL-HEALTH](https://www.schoolsafety.gov/mental-health)
- SCHOOLSAFETY.GOV MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES
- [HTTPS://DBHDID.KY.GOV/](https://dbhdid.ky.gov/)





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KY-SPIN Resources

(Infographics, short videos &  
more)



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