

IDEA: PARENT CHEAT SHEET

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

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YOU'RE A
DECISION-MAKER

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KNOW THE LAW. USE YOUR VOICE.

I was lucky, blessed, really, to land in a school district that actually knew the law and delivered outstanding resources for Chris. They showed up, they followed IDEA, and they provided support that many families never get. But even in a great district, everyone is busy, overloaded, and juggling a hundred kids at once. That meant my role was huge: keeping goals on track, watching deadlines, asking questions, pushing when something slipped, and making sure nothing fell through the cracks. This is not the time to be a shrinking violet. Ask for every service, every accommodation, every support your child deserves. God knows we're doing everything we can at home—the daily help your child is legally entitled to is not a favor. It's their right, and you are the one who makes sure they get it!

IDEA: PARENT CHEAT SHEET

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IDEA is the federal law that makes schools legally responsible for supporting your neurodivergent child. Here's what you actually need to know—no jargon, no legal lecture. You just say you are aware of IDEA.

1. FAPE – FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION

Your child has the right to an education that meets their needs. Not “good enough.” Not “what the school prefers.” Appropriate. Individualized. Required.

2. IEP – INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

This is your child's legally binding plan. It must include:

- Goals
- Services (speech, OT, specialized instruction, etc.)
- Accommodations
- How progress will be measured

If it's written in the IEP, the school must provide it.

3. SERVICES ARE FREE

Anything in the IEP—therapy, supports, specialized instruction—cannot cost you a dime.

4. LRE – LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Your child must be included with peers as much as appropriate. Schools can't isolate them because it's easier for staff.

5. PARENT RIGHTS

You are an equal member of the team. You can:

- Request evaluations
- Ask for changes
- Disagree
- Get an independent evaluation
- Challenge decisions
- Hold the school accountable

You're not a guest—you're a decision-maker.

6. CHILD FIND

Schools MUST identify and evaluate kids who may need support. They cannot delay, ignore concerns, or “wait and see.”

BOTTOM LINE

IDEA is the law that forces schools to show up for your child. It's why your kid gets an IEP. It's why you get a seat at the table. It's why schools can't shrug and say, “We don't do that.”