Essential Tremor Children Educational Initiative

Empowering Every Classroom: A Guide to Essential Tremor in Children

Children with ET often struggle with everyday school tasks like writing, drawing, using computers, and eating lunch. The Diann Shaddox Foundation's Essential Tremor Children Educational Initiative Program empowers parents to work effectively within the school system.

- **Academic Accommodations**: DSF provides guidance on securing specialized learning modifications, such as **504 Plans** or **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)**.
- **Classroom Aids**: Recommended accommodations include extra time on tests, speech-to-text software, and weighted writing instruments to stabilize hand movements.
- **Teacher Awareness**: The program helps parents educate teachers and school staff about ET, so they do not mistake a child's involuntary tremors for nervousness, poor behavior, or lack of effort.

A **504 plan** is highly effective for a student with Essential Tremor, as the condition physically impacts fine motor skills but does not alter a student's intellectual capacity. The plan ensures that the physical shaking of the hands, arms, head, or voice does not become a barrier to their academic performance or testing accuracy.

A **504 plan** is a formal blueprint that provides accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure equal access to learning in a general education classroom. Governed by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973—a federal civil rights law—it aims to eliminate barriers to education and prevent discrimination based on disability.

A 504 plan changes **how a student learns, not what they learn**.

DIANN SHADDOX FOUNDATION
FOR ESSENTIAL TREMOR

How to Get a 504 Plan

1. **Submit a written request:** A parent, caregiver, or teacher can contact the school's 504 coordinator or principal to ask for an evaluation.
2. **Gather documentation:** The school reviews the student's grades, medical history, diagnoses, and teacher reports. A formal, intensive medical evaluation is not always required.
3. **Hold a 504 meeting:** A team composed of parents, teachers, and school administrators meets to determine eligibility and draft specific accommodations.
4. **Periodic review:** The plan is reviewed regularly—often annually or every three years—to ensure

Qualification and Eligibility

- **IEP:** Requires a child to have a disability that fits into one of 13 specific federal categories and adversely affects school performance to the point of needing special education.
- **504 Plan:** Features a broader definition; applies to any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, such as learning, walking, or concentrating.

Services and Content

- **IEP:** Includes specialized instruction, specific learning goals, progress monitoring, and related support services like speech or occupational therapy.
- **IEP vs 504 Comparison**
- **504 Plan:** Focuses strictly on classroom changes and accommodations, such as extra test time, assistive technology, or preferential seating, without altering the standard curriculum.

Writing & Note-Taking Support

- **Speech-to-text software**: Allowing the student to dictate essays, assignments, and open-ended test answers instead of writing by hand.
- **Provided notes or outlines**: Giving the student copies of teacher lecture notes, peer-shared notes, or presentation slides before class begins.
- **Digital device access**: Permitting a tablet or laptop for all typed assignments, worksheets, classroom activities, and testing.
- **Audio recorders**: Allowing the student to record classroom lectures to review information later without the pressure of taking fast-paced notes.
- **Scribe assistance**: Providing an assigned staff member to write down verbal answers during high-stakes testing or complex assignments.

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Testing & Grading Adjustments

- **Extended time**: Granting 500% or 150% extra time on all timed quizzes, exams, and standardized state testing.
- **Exemption from handwriting grades**: Evaluating the student based on spelling, composition, and comprehension rather than penmanship, cursive accuracy, or neatness.
- **Alternative format response**: Allowing the student to point to answers, state choices verbally, or use a larger-format digital key rather than filling in small bubble sheets (Scantrons).
- **Frequent physical breaks**: Building in regular 5-to-10 minute rest periods during tests to relieve muscle fatigue caused by straining to control tremors.

Classroom & environmental Tools

- **Adaptive learning materials:** Utilizing thick-grip pens, weighted pencils, non-slip desk mats, mechanical pencils (to prevent broken lead), and large-lined paper.
- **Lab & art modifications:** Providing a lab partner for science experiments involving delicate pouring or measuring, and allowing alternative tools in art or home economics.
- **Spill-resistant containers:** Allowing cups with secure lids and straws in the classroom and cafeteria to prevent public spills and social anxiety.
- **Calculators with large keys:** Supplying large-button or touch-screen calculators for mathematics classes to reduce entry errors.

Social & Emotional Accommodations

- **Privacy during testing:** Offering a quiet, separate testing room to minimize the student's anxiety or self-consciousness about their visible shaking.
- **Educating peers and staff:** Setting up formal awareness brief sessions for teachers and class substitutes regarding Essential Tremor symptoms to prevent misinterpretations of nervousness or cheating.
- **Late arrival / flexible deadlines:** Providing leeway on morning assignments if tremors are more intense early in the day or exacerbated by morning physical stress.