

School is a major part of a child's life and a child with mental health needs can experience challenges that make it difficult to be successful in school. Your child's school can provide a range of services that can help your child succeed.

School Psychologist

Most schools have a school psychologist who is trained in both psychology and education, and possesses at least a master's degree. They are licensed by the State of Maryland. School psychologists help children and youth academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. They may be part of an IEP team and perform academic and psychological evaluations.

School Mental Health Programs

Many schools have a therapist that comes to the school and meets with children to provide emotional support and address behavior issues in school. The therapist may also meet with you to discuss your child's progress and help you cope with your child's behavior(s) or moods. There can be a charge for these services or, if your child has Medicaid, you will be asked to sign a form giving the school permission to bill Medicaid for the therapy.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Children with more intensive mental health needs may qualify for special education services under the federal law called Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA requires that children with a disability receive additional services to help them in school. A child with mental health needs must show certain characteristics to qualify for special education as a child with an "emotional disability."

"(i) Emotional Disability is a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's education performance:

1. an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors

2. an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers
 3. inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances
 4. a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
 5. a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems
- (ii) Emotional Disability includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance."

In addition, in order to be eligible for services under IDEA, the student, by reason of their disability, must require special education and related services.

Note that the definition of Emotional Disability is not a diagnosis or medical term, but rather a term used in the federal education law to designate eligibility for special education. Under IDEA, if a child is found eligible, the student is entitled to an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) that is designed to meet their unique needs.

504 Plans

Children with mental health needs who do not qualify for special education may qualify for services under another federal law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 504's definition of disability is broader than the IDEA's definition. To be protected under Section 504, a student must be determined to: Have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or have a record of such an impairment; or be regarded as having such an impairment.

Under a 504 Plan, the school can make special accommodations for your child such as: a quiet space if your child becomes upset at school, home instruction, or a tape recorder or keyboard for taking notes.

Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (SEFEL)

In Maryland, SEFEL is focused on promoting the social and emotional development and school readiness of young children between birth and five years of age. SEFEL's Pyramid Model, which is being integrated into early education settings throughout the state, promotes effective practices to enhance young children's social and emotional competence and to prevent challenging behaviors. Visit <https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/sefel> for more information.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

PBIS Maryland has been implemented in more than 900 schools across all 24 local school systems. The goals of PBIS are to promote a positive school climate, reduce disruptive behaviors, and create safer, more effective

schools for all students. The emphasis on PBIS is on rewarding positive behaviors rather than focusing on reactive, punitive practices.

Taking Medication at School

Sometimes it is necessary for children to take medication during school hours. Schools have very strict regulations governing medications at school. A form completed by your child's doctor is required and can be downloaded from the Maryland State Department of Education website: <https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/3/occ1216-medicationadministrationauthorization.pdf>

All medication must be in containers labeled by the pharmacist or doctor and an adult must bring the medication to school. Non-prescription medication must be in the original container with the label intact.

Resource Links

Resources on Special Education

Maryland State Department of Education

<http://MarylandLearningLinks.org>

<http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/Special-Ed/FSS/BuildingIEPswithMDFamiliesMar2018.pdf>

Maryland SEFEL Pyramid Model

<https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/sefel>

Maryland Association of Nonpublic Special Education Facilities (MANSEF)

<http://www.mansef.org>

Disability Rights Maryland

<https://disabilityrightsmd.org/wp-content/uploads/89563-4-DRM-SE-Handbook-english.pdf>

The Parents Place of Maryland

<http://www.ppm.org>

800-394-5694 or 410-768-9100

Resources on 504 Plans

Office of Civil Rights, Protecting Students with Disabilities

Frequently Asked Questions About Section 504 and the Education of Children with Disabilities

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>



Coordinated by



The Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign is a collaboration of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) and the Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) with support from the Maryland Department of Health - Behavioral Health Administration. The Campaign goal, with School and Community Champions across the state, is to raise public awareness of the importance of children's mental health. For more information, please visit www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org