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### Testing Accomodations

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#### True Potential: Your Child's Rights to Testing Accommodations

By Lillian E. Wong, Esq.

Autism Asperger's Digest | Online Article

Have you pulled a test out of your child's backpack and thought to yourself, "What went wrong? He knew this material!" Have you ever looked at your child's standardized test scores and thought, "There's no way my daughter took this test, she would have scored much higher!"? Did you later learn that that your son, who has difficulty with unfamiliar adults, had never met the test examiner until right before the exam? Or did you find out that your easily distracted daughter was administered that test in a large, noisy room? There is nothing more frustrating than when ASD leads to test scores that undervalue your child's skills and knowledge.

How can you make sure test results reveal your child's true understanding and ability? Testing accommodations. The purpose of testing accommodations is to make sure assessments measure your child's knowledge and skill and not their disability.

Individuals on the autism spectrum benefit from a variety of testing accommodations, including accommodations in presentation (familiar test-taker, visual or written rather than auditory instructions, and prompts to return to task); response (non-bubble answer sheet, indicate answer by pointing, multiple choice instead of short-answer); setting (separate room, small group, individual administration) and timing (frequent breaks, extended time, scheduled over several class periods or days).

What right does your child have to testing accommodations?

The law requires that testing accommodations be "reasonable," meaning that they provide test takers with disabilities, including those with ASD, an equal opportunity to participate without lowering or fundamentally altering the test. The right to particular testing accommodations depends on the test taker's disability-related needs, previous accommodations, and the purpose of the test. Testing accommodation law changes as your child gets older, so it is important to understand your child's rights now and what they will be in the future.

#### TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS: ELEMENTARY THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

From elementary through high school, schools must provide your child reasonable testing accommodations in order to prevent discrimination and allow access to a Free Appropriate Public Education.

**Special Rule – Children with IEPs:** If your child has an IEP, the IEP must describe what testing accommodations are necessary to measure his or her performance. The IEP team must decide whether the student can take state and district-wide assessments, with or without accommodations, or whether the student requires an alternative assessment. All students must participate in state and district-wide assessments. Because parents are vital members of the IEP team, it is important that you advocate for appropriate testing accommodations at IEP meetings.

**Special Rule – Children in Private Schools:** Even if your child attends a private school, the school must provide reasonable testing accommodations, especially if the school accepts federal funding. Even private schools that do not accept federal funding must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires that individuals with a qualified disability are provided equal access to testing.

## **TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS: SAT, AP and ACT**

Just because your child receives testing accommodations on his or her IEP or 504 Plan doesn't mean your child will receive accommodations on pre-college exams. If your child plans to take the ACT, PSAT, SAT, SAT II Subject Test or any Advanced Placement (AP) Exam, you need to apply for testing accommodations. The law requires schools to assist students with disabilities in requesting these testing accommodations, as long as the school usually provides information to its students about applying to college.

The testing accommodations application process takes around seven weeks and can take even longer if the accommodations request is not initially granted, so apply hearing. And be aware, use of unapproved testing accommodations will invalidate test results, and may subject your child to discipline by the testing agencies, so never utilize accommodations without the approval of the testing agency.

**PSAT, SAT, SAT II Subject Tests and AP Exams:** In order for your child to receive accommodations on these tests, you must submit an application with the College Board. The application must establish that your child has a disability and that your child's disability requires the requested accommodations. Documentation is required in certain circumstances, including when the accommodations request is made without the involvement of the child's school.

**ACT Exam:** The ACT also requires an application for testing accommodations. In order to receive accommodations, applicants must have a professionally diagnosed condition, appropriate documentation on file with the school, and use the requested accommodation on tests in school. If the disability was first diagnosed within the last three years, the ACT requires more detailed information about the disability and need for testing accommodations.

## **TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS: COLLEGE**

Unlike in high school, in college it is the students' responsibility to inform the administration about their disability and resulting need for testing accommodations. Colleges can require that students submit a current evaluation to support the diagnosis and document the need for accommodations. Colleges are not required to provide or fund these evaluations.

Not only must college-level accommodations be reasonable, they must be necessary. If a student has been academically successful without these accommodations, the accommodation is not considered necessary. In addition, accommodations cannot fundamentally alter academic standards and program requirements.

## **TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS: EMPLOYMENT**

The law also requires reasonable accommodations in the hiring process, including pre-employment testing. As in college, it is the test taker's responsibility to inform the potential employer of his or her disability and resulting need for accommodations.

Employers are required to provide accommodations, unless the requested accommodation would place an undue burden on the employer or the accommodation would alter the validity of the test. In addition, pre-employment tests cannot screen-out disabled applicants, unless the disability prevents the test-taker from performing an essential feature of the job, even with reasonable accommodations.

## **THE TAKEAWAY**

From elementary school to employment, advocacy and planning are required to access testing accommodations. Parents and students must understand their rights and obligations. Documentation of the disability and need for accommodations must be recent and persuasive. Early diagnosis and implementation of testing accommodations will ensure your child's testing reveals their true knowledge and ability and provide your child equal opportunity to success at school and beyond.

## **BIO**

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