

FOOD ALLERGIES *and* 504s

Best Practices *for* Parents

Parents may wish to refer their food allergic child for Section 504 plan determination in hopes of being found eligible to receive accommodations. There are a few best practices to keep in mind if you decide to refer your child for a Section 504 evaluation:

- Research your school district's evaluation and eligibility procedures to determine timelines after referral.
- Put referral in writing (an email is a sufficient form of writing) addressed to the school administrator and copy another school personnel (nurse or vice principal). Include the date and specifically state that you are consenting to a 504 evaluation.
- Be prepared with a letter from a physician, preferably a board-certified allergist. (See the sample letter provided in the Civil Rights Advocacy Resource Center.)

Other points to remember:

- Do not wait until your child has a severe or near-life-threatening reaction at school, or until the school environment becomes extremely unsafe or hostile, to obtain a Section 504 plan. The Section 504 plan helps the food-allergic student safely access education and activities provided by the school. Educators want the best for their students and welcome the ability to better understand how to manage a student's health and well-being.
- Accommodations may fit the individual needs for some, but not all, students with food allergies. The individual needs of each student must be considered.
- Accommodations are only appropriate if they ensure access to education equal to that of non-disabled peers. Accommodations are not intended to give preferential treatment but to level the playing field for the food-allergic student, allowing him or her to safely access the programs and activities provided by the school alongside his or her non-disabled peers.