



Getting to the Heart of the Matter: Mental Illness and Learning in Children with CHD

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Catherine Ullman Shade, PhD

Cardiac Neurodevelopmental Program, Boston Children's Hospital



Agenda

1. Mental health in students with CHD
2. Mental health and learning
3. Accommodations
4. Services
5. Placement
6. Advocacy



Mental Health: an Invisible Burden of CHD



Young people with CHD are more likely than peers to show symptoms of:

1. Anxiety
2. Depression
3. Post-traumatic stress
4. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Certain sub-populations are associated with other mental health problems, such as the risk of early-onset psychosis in 22q11 Deletion Syndrome.

(e.g., Gonzalez et al., 2021; Moons et al., 2021)



Mental Health and Learning

Mental health problems and learning disabilities often occur together.
Even when a learning disability isn't present, mental health interacts with learning and school experiences.



Poor attention
Missed instruction
Lack of motivation
Interfering behaviors
Reduced social skills



Fear of performance and failure
Complex social environment
Grades and feedback
Disciplinary actions
Expectations of uniformity and obedience
Sensory stimulation



So how can we help?

Children with disabilities have the right to **fully access the curriculum**, and to make **meaningful progress appropriate to their ability**.

504 Plan (from Section 504 of 1973 Rehabilitation Act)	IEP (from IDEA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guarantees equal access• Accommodations• Sometimes services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guarantees meaningful progress appropriate to ability• Placement• Services• Accommodations



School Accommodations to Compensate for Mental Health

Inattention:

- Frequent check-ins
- Opportunity to re-take tests and assignments
- Priority seating
- Outlines

Hyperactivity:

- Movement breaks
- Alternative seating
- Fidget toys

Anxiety:

- Predictable schedule, previewing
- Avoiding high stimulation
- Calming corner breaks

Depression:

- Focus on quality not quantity
- Opportunities for breaks
- Pre-teaching/reteaching, retaking assignments



School Services to Support Mental Health



Students with mental health disabilities have the right to services that allow them equal access, and the opportunity to make meaningful progress. Such as:

- Scheduled counseling sessions
- “On demand” access to a counselor
- A shared or 1:1 aide
- Behavioral services from a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)
- Access to a separate room when overwhelmed



Educational Placements for Mental Health

Sometimes, a student will require a special placement through their IEP, for some or all of the school day, in order to make meaningful progress and/or to remain safe.

- Therapeutic classroom within public school
- Learning disability classroom within public school
- Collaborative public therapeutic school
- Private therapeutic school (district-pay or parent-pay, day school or residential)



Good therapeutic educational environments are safe, trauma-informed, and academically rigorous. They have low teacher-student ratios, trained Special Education teachers, psychologists, and behavior specialists.



How can you advocate for your child?

If you have no 504 or IEP:

- Write a letter to school requesting eligibility evaluation. Note physical and mental health concerns, plus any evidence of learning disability.
- Gather evidence from doctors, outside evaluators of your child's disability.
- Consider bringing an advocate to your meeting.
- Approve/reject in parts, after the meeting.

If you want intensification of services:

- Write a letter asking for reconvene (or IEP eligibility evaluation)
- Bring any new data, evidence of inadequate progress, new diagnoses
- Ask for objective evidence that child is meeting goals, and goals are consistent with ability
- Ask for further evaluation in areas of concern
- If dissatisfied, ask for school payment of private reevaluation
- Consider bringing an advocate.
- Approve/reject in parts, after the meeting.



Embrace the Inchstones



Not every young person is going to hit typical “milestones.”

Everyone can find “inchstones:”

- times of incremental progress
- times when something gets easier
- times when you or your child can find joy, satisfaction, or relief, where you did not before

Find those inchstones, and celebrate the heck out of them. They matter.



Curious to Learn More?



- Visit our program website:
www.bostonchildrenshospital.org/cardiac-neurodevelopmental-program
- Follow the Boston Children's Hospital Benderson Heart Center on social media
- Sign up for our CNP newsletter:
jill.mudarri@cardio.chboston.org
- Email Catherine.ullmanshade@childrens.harvard.edu to join our 2023 CNP Eversource Walk Team on June 11





Thank You

Catherine.UllmanShade@Childrens.Harvard.edu

