

Considerations When Requesting K-12 Accommodations

The goal of accommodations in K-12 education is *student success*. When a student has a diagnosis of idiopathic hypersomnia (IH), it can take some time for them to learn to live with and understand their symptoms and to accept and commit to the accommodations.

- **Feelings Matter.** Typically, children do not want to be different or stand out from their peers, if they can help it. They want to fit in and "be normal," even when a disability makes that difficult. What the child might need for optimal functioning (which tends to be what parents want) and what the child wants in order to feel normal and "fit in" may be very different.
- **No Place for Battles.** Although parents want their child to be supported and successful, they must understand that their child may often need to weigh the importance of an accommodation with other factors that parents may not fully understand, such as anticipated peer reactions or scheduling conflicts with preferred lunch times.
- **Opinion and Commitment Count.** For accommodations to be as successful as possible, it is necessary to consider the student's opinion about any accommodation. Students are more likely to commit to the accommodation if they believe it is urgently needed. The more engaged the student is with healthcare providers and parents in discussing requests for accommodations, the more likely the student will "buy into" the accommodation(s).
- **Manage for Success.** It's also important that schools view the accommodation requests as manageable, not overwhelming or overreaching. The goal is for the school to be supportive and willing to provide what is being requested, rather than resentful of the number of requests. Determining a few of the most critical accommodations and prioritizing those can be more effective than developing an extensive list. Federal law requires implementation of necessary accommodations, but in practice, implementation is often inconsistent because it requires regular follow-up with teachers to ensure the accommodations are being provided. That can become a point of contention if the number of accommodations is overwhelming for those educators.
- **Laws Rule.** Public schools have laws and policies to follow regarding attendance and extended illnesses, and they can vary by state and school district. These regulations are for the student's protection, as truancy and parental neglect could be factors in absences. Parents whose children may have difficulty attending school regularly should familiarize themselves with the laws applicable in their local area.

Julie Flygare,* Founder of Project Sleep (www.project-sleep.com), points out that students may be reluctant to accept accommodations, fearing that doing so is considered as a sign of weakness or having given up on themselves or having let the diagnosis "beat them." She counsels that such feelings are normal and encourages us to remind students that accepting their accommodations "...means you are being smart and strategic, working with your (diagnosis) to live your most successful life" (p. 400).

*Flygare, J. (2016). Succeeding in school and in the workplace with narcolepsy. In Goswami, Thorpy, & Pandi-Perumal, (Eds.), *Narcolepsy: A Clinical Guide* (2nd ed.) (pp. 395-405). New York: Springer.