

**Parent:**  
But does my child qualify for these kinds of supports this many months, or even years, after the traumatic event?

5

**Navigator:**  
Yes, your child is entitled to these supports as long as her symptoms make it difficult for her to succeed.

### Tips for Parents

1. Federal law classifies many trauma-related conditions as “emotional” disabilities or impairments. These can be particularly difficult to accommodate at school. Try to provide as much documentation as possible.
2. If possible, try to minimize conflict, particularly personal conflict, with the school. Keep in mind that your family probably will be working with this school system for many more years of your child’s life — which means you will be interacting with the same staff over and over again.

**Parent:**  
I think my child might need an IEP. How does she get one?

6

**Navigator:**  
Your child needs to be evaluated by an expert. First, request an evaluation from the school in writing. The district must send an evaluation consent form within 5 days. Then the school has to complete the evaluation and convene a team meeting within 45 school days.

**Parent:**  
What if I disagree with the evaluation or the services the school offers?

7

**Navigator:**  
You have the right to get another evaluation from a professional outside the school system—at your own expense, though it sometimes is possible to get the school district to cover the costs (it is best to consult with an expert about this because it’s complicated). You also have the right to reject the IEP the school proposes. You can reject the whole IEP or just parts of it.

### SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

**Center for Law and Education**  
cleweb.org • (617) 451-0855

**Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts**  
clcm.org • (781) 581-1977

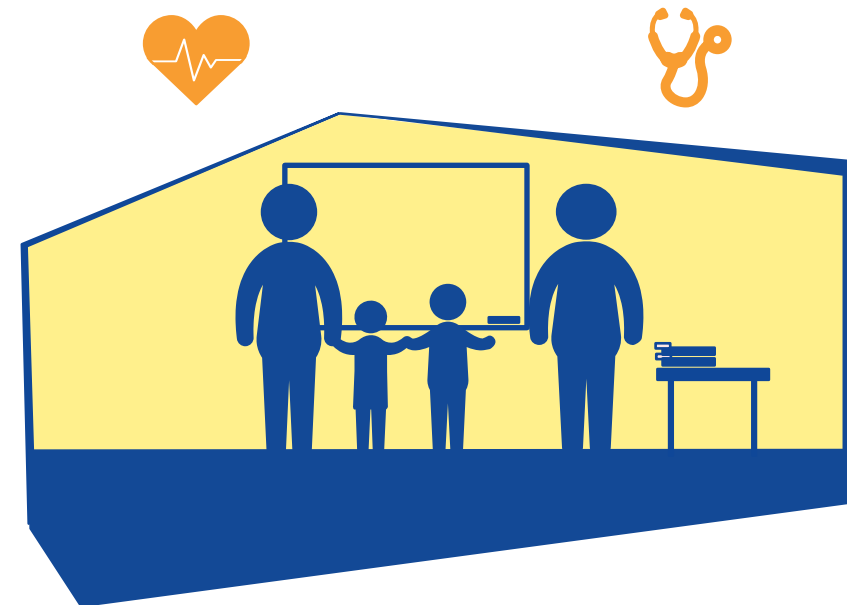
**The EdLaw Project:**  
edlawproject.org • (617) 910-5829

**Federation for Children with Special Needs**  
fcsn.org • (617) 236-7210

**Massachusetts Advocates for Children**  
massadvocates.org • (617) 357-8431

# Supporting Trauma Survivors to Succeed in School

An *It Takes Two* Guide for Patients and Providers



Medical  Legal Partnership | Boston  
RAISING THE BAR FOR HEALTH

### Acknowledgments:

We are grateful to the **EdLaw Project** for its contribution to the content.

Designed by **Artists for Humanity**

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**Parent\*:**

I'm worried that my child is struggling in school because she experienced a traumatic event.

**Navigator:**

Have you talked to the teacher or the principal? You also can immediately, in writing, request an initial evaluation for special education services.

**Parent:**

I'll do that, but the school doesn't seem to understand that my child is acting out because of the trauma. How can I educate the school about my child's needs?

**Navigator:**

It is important to tell the school about the traumatic event your child experienced, even though it might feel uncomfortable. I also suggest providing the school with medical documentation – for example, a letter from your child's therapist confirming her diagnosis. Finally, you could share with the school any ideas you have about how to accommodate your child's needs – for example, a "buddy" to walk with your child between classes to help her cope with a crowded hallway, if the noise and commotion trigger her trauma symptoms.

**Parent:**

This is very helpful, but I'm worried about my child's privacy. Does the school have to keep her experience and symptoms confidential?

**Navigator:**

Yes, the school is required to keep your child's experience and symptoms confidential. (One big exception: schools are required to report to authorities if they suspect your child has been abused or neglected.) One way to limit the amount of private information shared is to ask your child's clinician to write a "summary" letter specifically for the school district, instead of showing the school the medical records.

**Parent:**

What kinds of services and supports are available to my child in this situation?

**Navigator:**

All kids are entitled to a "free and appropriate public education." If your child has a disability that prevents her from succeeding in school, she has the right to special services and supports to help her succeed. The most common supports are:

- **"IEP" (Individualized Education Program)**  
A plan developed by a team of school educators, other professionals, and the child's parents that details special services that are to be provided to the student.
- **"504" (named after Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973)**  
A team-developed plan that ensures students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum through "reasonable accommodation" of the disability. Accommodations are not services, so if your child needs a specific service (like counseling in school), you should seek an IEP instead.