

Know Your Rights: Laws and Autism

If you or your child has autism, some of the most basic things you can study and learn are your rights. Every American citizen is protected under the constitution, and there are special laws that have been passed to help protect people with autism and other disabilities. By knowing the laws that protect you or your autistic loved ones, you can live in a world that provides better opportunities to everyone, regardless of not only disability, but also race, gender, and ethnicity. This is simply the first step to creating a more tolerant world in general.

The first law with which you should become acquainted is I.D.E.A., or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The I.D.E.A. covers children ages 3 to 21 and provides autistic children with the special educational programs they need. The I.D.E.A. gives parents the right to be involved with education decisions concerning their child made by the school. Your child first needs to be assessed to qualify under the I.D.E.A., and this is best done by a private professional. In the end, your child has the right by law to receive a free public education that is appropriate for his or her skill level. If your public school has no such program, they are required to find one or create one at no cost to you.

Also become familiar with and knowledgeable about the American Disabilities Act. Under this act, discrimination due to disability is prohibited in the workforce, as well as with state and local government, public accommodations, the United States Congress, public transportation, and telecommunications. For example, if you are autistic, but have the skills to do a certain job, you cannot be refused the job because of your autism.

Other laws provide rights for people with autism so that they are constitutionally equal to others. One such law says that people with autism have the right to vote, and accommodations must be made so that this is possible. Another says that autistic individuals cannot be refused housing based on disability. Others provide equal rights in all other aspects of life, and these should especially be studied if your loved one with autism is in a health care institution. By knowing the law and how it applies to yourself or others with autism, you can be sure that justice is upheld. If you have questions, local law officials should be ready and willing to answer you or provide you with material to answer your own questions. Remember that ignorance of the law is not a valid excuse for anyone, so be an advocate for yourself or others with autism to prevent mistreatment.