

A Sample Physician's Letter

To whom it may concern:

John XXXX is under my care for Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) and Postural Orthopedic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS). After completing a lengthy period of diagnosis (during which diseases with overlapping symptoms have been excluded), John is taking the following prescribed medications— list medications - meant to alleviate his symptoms and hopefully improve his energy level. These medications may cause significant side effects during the initial adjustment period, causing him to miss additional school days.

The usual course of illness for ME/CFS involves long-term, highly variable symptoms. Patients like John may experience weeks or months of function on an expected level, followed by an equal or longer period during which they may be homebound or bedridden with only intermittent school attendance possible.

With regard to John's capabilities in an educational setting, ME/CFS and POTS involve a complex set of symptoms that manifest differently in each patient. In John's case, ME/CFS symptoms relevant to school participation will include (1) extreme fatigue (possibly with joint pain and sleep disorders) that causes him to miss a significant number of days during the school year, or to arrive at school late; (2) diminished executive function that will result in increased distractibility, poor organizational skills, and intermittent episodes of "brain fog" during which he will find concentration extremely difficult; (3) difficulties with processing speed, dyscalculia, and working memory and (4) severe post-exertional malaise, an exacerbation of symptoms or "crash" following even mild to moderate physical or mental exertion, and which can last for several days, weeks or months. There is no predictability as to when these symptoms will occur. It is also important to note that while executive functions and processing speed are seriously affected, intelligence is generally not compromised by this disease, and with appropriate support John should be able to achieve academic success in a school setting.

The accommodations and modifications recommended below are those that have proven successful with students suffering from ME/CFS in a school setting:

Specifically, with regard to accommodations and/or modifications in a public school setting, I would recommend (1) a reduced schedule (half days, late arrival, and/or reduced course load); (2) a hybrid schedule that includes both home instruction and school attendance as physical ability at that time dictates; (3) exemption from attendance requirements and physical education based on the severity of his condition; and (4) classroom accommodations to include (but not necessarily limited to) 100% extended time for tests; modified/reduced homework assignments; grading based on the work he manages to complete only; copies of class notes; material presented in sequential fashion rather than multiple topics being covered simultaneously in the same class; an additional set of textbooks for home use; and an Extended School Year (or home instruction that continues through the summer months to supplement/support in-class instruction).

It is socially and psychologically important for John that the school allows him to attend school as much as possible when his disease permits, even if his completed work lags behind that of his peers.

While the course of this illness is variable with every child, schools across different states have implemented accommodations such as those suggested above to ensure that students with ME/CFS have the best chance of educational success.

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, MD