



Back to School & College During COVID-19

Hosts: Rebecca Gillett, MS OTR/L, and Julie Eller
Guest: Heidi Goldsmith, Esq.

As COVID-19 cases continue to spike across the country, the question on every parent's mind is, "When can schools safely reopen?" For parents of children with juvenile arthritis or parents and college students with autoimmune diseases, this question carries even more weight. While no safety measure or plan will completely eliminate infection risk, there are things you can advocate for to make learning environments safer.

In this episode, our hosts and guest expert, educational rights attorney, Heidi Goldsmith, Esq., discuss educational rights plans and how they can be applied in the context of the pandemic. Listeners will leave with a better understanding of how to advocate for themselves or their child, including reasonable accommodations they can ask for in this unprecedented situation.

Heidi Goldsmith has been serving the needs of children and families in the area of special education for 20 years. Prior to founding Bradley Goldsmith Law, Ms. Goldsmith practiced law at McAndrews Law Offices. During her 19 years at McAndrews Law, Ms. Goldsmith became a shareholder of the firm and was supervising shareholder of the special education department for over 10 years. Ms. Goldsmith is the parent attorney representative to the Stakeholders Council for the Office for Dispute Resolution, which oversees all due process and mediations in the state of Pennsylvania. She also serves on the professional advisory board of the Learning Disabilities of America, as well as the chair of the by-laws and policy committee.

Additional resources:

Expert Q&A: When Is It Safe to Send My Child Back to School?

<https://arthritis.org/health-wellness/about-arthritis/related-conditions/other-diseases/coronavirus-and-schools-reopening>

Expert Q&A: When Can My Child Safely Participate in Sports and Other Activities?

<https://arthritis.org/health-wellness/about-arthritis/related-conditions/other-diseases/childhood-sports-and-coronavirus>

Back to School Safety Checklist During COVID-19: <https://arthritis.org/juvenile-arthritis/school-and-college/communication/school-safety-checklist>

Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



CDC Guidance for Schools and Childcare Programs: A Checklist for Parents and Teachers:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/checklist.html>

Back to School Episode #18 – July 21, 2020

PODCAST OPEN:

Welcome to the Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast, from the Arthritis Foundation. You may have arthritis, but it doesn't have you. Here, you'll learn things that can help you improve your life and turn No into Yes. This podcast is part of the Live Yes! Arthritis Network — a growing community of people like you who really care about conquering arthritis once and for all. Our hosts are arthritis patients Rebecca and Julie, and they are asking the questions you want answers to. Listen in.

Rebecca Gillett:

Welcome to the Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast. I'm Rebecca, an occupational therapist living with rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis.

Julie Eller:

And I'm Julie, a JA patient who's passionate about making sure all patients have a voice.

MUSIC BRIDGE

Rebecca:

Thanks for joining us today on the podcast. We are talking a subject that everyone is talking about right now, and that's going back to school during COVID. Whether you have children in elementary, middle, high school or college, or you are an educator, or you are someone with arthritis, who is in school right now at whatever level you're at, there's concerns about going back to school, Julie.

I know I am a little bit nervous about sending my son to school. He does have asthma, and then with all of my high-risk issues, it's a little concerning. But at the same time, starting middle school, and not having that social interaction, is a really hard thing for me to think about, him starting at home. So, so excited to have our guest today.

Julie:

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Yeah, me too, you know. It's different for every family, every community, that I think, whether you have children, or you're a patient with arthritis, as an adult without kids, school issues are important. And we see so much of this in the news. While there is no one-size-fits-all answer, we will talk with Heidi Goldsmith today about finding the solutions that are right for you and your family.

Heidi Goldsmith has been serving the needs of children and families in the area of special education for 20 years. Ms. Goldsmith founded Bradley Goldsmith Law and offers substantial expertise in the areas of special education law. She handles a wide variety of special education matters, including civil litigation cases and even criminal justice issues. She's gonna help us inform our approach today, and we're really glad to have her.

Rebecca:

We're so fortunate to have Heidi Goldsmith with us, to answer some of our questions about your child's rights, as far as reasonable accommodations are, as we look at returning to school. Thanks for joining us today, Heidi.

Heidi Goldsmith:

Oh, thank you for having me.

Julie:

What is the landscape of returning to school right now for children of all ages across the nation? Could you give us, like, a high-level overview of what that looks like right now, and why it's so variable?

Heidi:

So right now, you know, candidly, it's very diverse in terms of what the landscape looks like. (laughter)

Rebecca:

That's the nice way to put it.

Julie:

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Oh yes, it's a good framing. (laughter)

Heidi:

There are certain states, and I will say this is more the minority, that are taking a very hard line. Kids-are-gonna-be back-in school-five-days-a-week approach. Most states are taking more of the optional, either cyber and/or school-based. And a lot of states are looking for that hybrid model, where they're trying to create the social distancing for the kids by breaking the kids and having part cyber and part in school.

What will ultimately be the deciding factor? You know, the difficulty again, and I am not a COVID expert, but, I mean, you can look at the numbers, and they are, in certain areas, increasing substantially. In other areas, not increasing.

So, you know, most school boards actually take the month of July off. A lot of them are not. If you're looking for that, kind of what's it gonna look like next year, I think, and to your school board's situation. Also, another resource parents should be looking at is their State Department of Education resources, because, you know, a lot of governors are putting out guidance of what should be happening.

If you are involved with the Arthritis Foundation or any local chapters, keeping in contact with those organizations, because listen, I am watching that type of stuff like a hawk. Reaching out to those people who really are on top of it and connecting to them is the best resource right now.

Julie:

There's a lot to dig into here, Heidi. Let's start with reasonable accommodations. How do we consider going back to school and asking for what we, as families, need if we're living with arthritis and entering this challenging time?

Heidi:

We are kinda in unprecedented times. Unfortunately, the IDEA, Section 504, ADA, most of those laws didn't have a pandemic clause... (laughter) What to do in case of a national crisis. One of the things that is always important to do is to look to history and find similar circumstances where we have had to figure out what reasonable accommodations are for kids with arthritis. It is very similar in history to

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



kids with peanut allergies, or more that allergy situation. So, we can look to that situation to kinda find what reasonable accommodations are.

Rebecca:

Can you explain the peanut allergy situation, and how that changed the school environment?

Heidi:

When peanut allergies really became much more prevalent within the school-based system, it became much less about the individual child, the accommodations that that child would have to receive, but instead, environmental changes that, unfortunately, or fortunately, would impact everyone.

It involved situations which was... kids having to come back in the classroom and wash their hands. Situations where snacks would be limited to non-peanut items. And in fact, in certain circumstances, involving situations that I was involved with, it was even involving breakfast items, or snacks on the bus. Because, again, those were situations that it could actually, with peanuts... if the child ate that morning a peanut butter toast for breakfast, it would actually catch in the air.

So, when we're looking at juvenile arthritis, we're looking at more the environmental impact, the virus being around us. And how we're going to have to accommodate that environment, but also involving other children who are gonna have to be involved in that process, to ensure the safety.

One of the hot topics, obviously, is the masks. Masks has always been a medical situation. It has become much less so now. The situation with masks though is that it's similar to a peanut allergy. If a child is required to have it, having other people have to have it in school, is not something that would be unreasonable theoretically to ask for. But given the political nature of it, it's not as certain.

Now, there is some new guidance coming out from states that I think is important. For example, in Pennsylvania, they have actually now required all students, teachers and staff in public schools, and private schools, and parochial schools, to wear masks. They actually state that it can't just be, like, a loose-fitting situation. It has to go over the ears. There's more legal basis now to say masks are not an unreasonable accommodation. States are now requiring them.

In Texas now, they're actually criminalizing it, in terms of fines for people not wearing masks. It has not been answered in a school-based setting at this juncture. But, again, I think as we're moving more

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



toward acceptance of the reality of the mask, that is something that is going to become more seen as a reasonable accommodation, than had been in the past.

Julie:

That's really helpful, Heidi. And I think it's really a good example if we're thinking about framing our response today, in the terms of history with the peanut allergy, kind of, community-level response. Originally, it was something very individual. That child with the allergy would have to be extra cautious. But then it became kind of a public response to it. I wonder, to enforce that behavior change, can you comment on how school districts, states in the nation, kind of prepared for that shift?

Was it legal? Were laws passed? Was it just guidance from the school districts?

Heidi:

So, it was more of the legal requirements. It really came in mainly through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the ADA. Where there was kids who would present with these needs, they would have documentation that these were the steps needed to ensure the child's safety in school, because the whole point of those laws is to allow access to kids with disabilities, so that they can access those systems, as long as there are reasonable accommodations, and doesn't fundamentally alter either delivery or the environment.

It became a situation where, was it truly unreasonable to ask kids to wash their hands? No, of course not. I mean, everyone can wash their hands. There are many other snacks available that have no peanuts, are not made in peanut factories.

So, although it wasn't necessarily a situation that was, in terms of the difficulty of getting other people to buy into it maybe as easy, but in terms of the law, it was an easier shift. Now, how that was enforced was through Section 504 plans and communication home to family.

Rebecca:

Can you explain to our audience what a 504 plan is, versus what an IEP or Individualized Education Plan is?

Heidi:

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



The two main laws that impact kids with disabilities in a school-based setting are an IEP and a Section 504. And the way I like to describe those two laws is, think of a big circle, okay? The really big circle is Section 504, because any person with a disability, who has substantial life impairment, and one of the substantial life impairments can be the learning environment, is entitled to what's known as a Section 504 plan.

And that really is allowing an individual to access the accommodations needed to be able to be in a school setting. For example, if you have a child with juvenile arthritis, who, during flareups, might need access to the elevator, that would be all part of the Section 504 plan.

So, if you have that big circle that you're thinking of, and you go into the center of the circle, and there's a little circle inside of that, it's the IDEA. So, any child with an IEP falls under the IDEA, but they're also in the 504 bubble. The big, huge difference between an IEP and Section 504 is this term called, in need of specially designed instruction. And that is where, for a child, what they would need to have instruction delivered differently to them, versus the regular education curriculum.

One of the things that has come up recently, especially with kids with autoimmune disorders, is most of these kids have not needed even a 504 plan in a school district before. It really has been a situation that, you know, for intents and purposes, it's been able to be managed. You know, teachers worked cooperatively. And there's been no need for it. For those parents, there may be a real concern, especially for the fact of, for example, you have truancy laws that involve kids with having to attend school.

Having friends with kids with juvenile arthritis, the big thing I'm hearing from them is this need for flexibility. They need it to be a situation that, if they're not comfortable with the numbers that week, sending their child to school, even with masks and even with all of the accommodations, that flexibility to not just send your child to school. But alternately, not a, how is that child gonna have that curriculum? That's decided in advance, so you're not in a situation, you can't send your child to school for two weeks, and now you're trying to figure out, "Well, how are we gonna make up what Johnny missed over those past two weeks?"

So for kids who may have never needed a Section 504 plan before, it may be very critical, especially if you're looking for that type of flexibility with attendance rules, how the child's gonna be receiving instruction, to actually be asking your district now for a Section 504 evaluation. Because now, that juvenile arthritis may be impacting how that child can access that learning environment that has never been seen before.

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Julie:

You wanna get in there early, you wanna intervene, and you wanna build a structure, so that you can be responsible and respond in that emergency way when the time does come. So, I really appreciate you sharing how flexible teachers have been in the past, but how this is an extra layer of protection, so that you could have the accommodations that your family needs.

Rebecca:

Explain to everyone, like, if you don't have one, and you are in that situation, how do they go about getting one started?

Heidi:

So, you should go to the website of the school district, and find... it's either called special education, specialized services, where there's a contact for the director of special education, or director of pupil services, and send an email. And also send an email to the principal of the school where your child will be attending. And if you know their last classroom teacher, that teacher, but also an upcoming teacher, because you want to make sure that there's no question that this email wasn't received by somebody.

You know, "Dear Mrs. Johnson, Tommy has juvenile arthritis. You know, we're uncertain about what his needs are gonna be, in terms of what the school day's gonna look like. We are asking for an evaluation under Section 504, accommodation plan."

Now, two things that I think is critically important that, if parents hear in response to that, that are legally inaccurate. One is, "You must go get a medical doctor's note before we will do the testing." That actually is not a requirement in the regulations, in any capacity. You may still have one, and wanna supply it, and that's fine. But it's actually their duty to do an evaluation.

Secondly, if they say to you, "Uh oh, you don't, you know, we don't have to do an evaluation. We can just do a Section 504 plan." You could agree to that, but legally, they're still supposed to do an evaluation. There's no exception to that evaluation. And the reality is so that everyone's working from an informed state about what the child's needs are, because otherwise, candidly, you may be sitting at a table with people who don't understand truly how juvenile arthritis impacts children.

Julie:

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



That's really helpful. The Arthritis Foundation has some really good draft letters and FAQs and different things like that to set up an effective medical 504 plan. So, if you're just getting started, it's a great place to look. If you go to arthritis.org, and just search medical 504, you'll find lots of really good resources there.

MUSIC BRIDGE

PROMO:

We want to hear from you about topics you'd like us to cover in future Live Yes! With Arthritis podcasts. And tell us how we're doing! Go to arthritis.org/liveyespodcast. Just scroll down to the big green block at the bottom of the page and click "get started" to start the survey. That's arthritis.org/liveyespodcast.

Julie:

Heidi, one question I have: A lot of our listeners maybe are arthritis patients themselves, and are not parents of children with juvenile arthritis, but maybe have children that would be entering back into the school district, and bringing home germs that they might need to be concerned about. Can you comment on what protections exist, or don't exist, for parents in that situation?

Heidi:

So, for adults who have an autoimmune disorder, they are actually covered, you know, under the ADA, especially in their workplace environment. 504s are not imputed to children. There are vulnerable adults who are either caring for children, or having contact with the children, and parents may not be comfortable sending their children back to schools.

A lot of school districts, you know, across the nation, are starting to at least offer, if parents are not comfortable, cyber programming. Now, what's important to note though is, they can't force that upon you. They can't say, "Well, if you need that, you have to go there." It's something that they're offering now as an option, but unfortunately there is no way to impute vulnerability of an adult in the household, or a family member, onto a child to make the school district accommodate that.

Rebecca:

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Does asthma apply to that? I think about that because I am that situation Julie just described. But my son actually has asthma. Our school district has already decided they are starting in person. But I do worry about him because he has asthma. Does that apply anywhere in a 504?

Heidi:

Yeah. He may need flexibility and accommodations due to that. That falls under the same exact theory of juvenile arthritis, that, that's something you'd be asking for a 504 plan, because of the situation where they are at much higher risk for COVID-related pneumonia. Asthma patients as well should be looking towards those 504s. Now again, that would allow then, if numbers are high, for both the child and the adult to make that decision. And again, have the flexibility that they're not gonna be... you know, truancy proceeds will not be started, that there won't be situations where the work missed is gonna now pile up, or the child's not gonna receive the instruction.

Julie:

It's not just your students with juvenile arthritis, but your students with juvenile diabetes, and asthma, and different allergies, and so on and so forth. This is about basic safety. This is for all the kids, not just your own. Heidi, can you share a little bit about how people go about putting into their 504 plan, or something similar, that kind of community-level, classroom-wide or school-wide accommodation request?

Heidi:

Your best way to accomplish that is through your medical doctor, to write a letter outlining that, for your child's needs, these are the things that, for that child to attend school, is gonna need to happen. You know, everyone's gonna need to be masked. There's gonna need to be partitions in between the desks. That there's gonna need to be social distancing. Teachers are gonna probably need to wear shields, so that at least kids can see the mouths of the teacher, but again, still provide protection.

Julie:

Can you share a little bit about how that process applies to students who are returning to college campuses in the fall? Do 504 and IDEA plans kind of apply to these kids as well?

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Heidi:

So, 504 does. IDEA doesn't. Once you graduate from high school, IDEA goes away.

Julie:

Yeah, that was something. So, I have juvenile arthritis, so wherever I pursued university, I really was keen on not letting people know that I had arthritis. I didn't want that to be part of my college identity. I was too cool for that. But then I flared really bad my freshman year. And it was awful (laughter), and I was missing classes. And I wasn't able to get outta bed. I wasn't completing assignments. And I had to communicate with all of my professors, all of a sudden, why I wasn't there and what was going on.

And I was really lucky that I still had my medical 504 paperwork. And from that point on, I really transitioned into a more vocal advocate for myself.

I wasn't able to hold a pencil for a prolonged length of time, if my hand is flaring. So, I would have an accommodation where I could write essays in school on a keyboard instead. If you have those pieces of your medical 504, and you're transitioning into college, and you want some of those coronavirus-level responses or accommodations, how can you modify your 504 in that situation?

Heidi:

Colleges have gotten tremendously better at working with 504 plans and kids with disabilities. Most colleges and universities now have an Office for Student Disabilities that I strongly encourage kids to walk into, you know, right during the first part of school. They're really good at communicating with the professors, giving you the guidance that you need to get that in place before the bad thing happens. But it's a situation where there has been a real shift in that self-advocacy that kids have. And that, you know, ownership, without it being a negative situation. It becomes more a badge of honor and courage.

Julie:

Talk to your Office of Disabilities on campus. The earlier you can build that relationship, the better.

Rebecca:

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 
REGENERON



It's worth having that extra support. Heidi, if you can answer, and provide some strategies to our listeners that... of how to ensure their child receives the best possible accommodations under these educational rights plans, whichever route they are.

Heidi:

So, the first that I'm encouraging all parents to do: Attend school board meetings, because you will learn so much at a school board meeting of what the plans are in place, what the discussions are by that. If you cannot attend a school board meeting, the great news is that they're always required legally to post that information, so you can go and read the minutes if you need to. You can contact board members. You can send emails to them about your concerns. You can contact superintendents.

Start planning now. I cannot emphasize that enough. We are dealing with a situation that we're ever evolving, in terms of what the school year is going to look like. And the longer you wait, the worse it's going to be. So, start now. Ask for the meetings now. If you get pushback, it's because they get all the team members there. I would suggest that, this juncture, waive team member participation. You can always have those members participate at a later date, but get to a meeting now, to get that process started.

Julie:

I love that advice, Heidi, especially engaging with your school board. I think that there's so much opportunity to have representation on your school board's having an election. This is a great time to start thinking about what people are standing for, what their platforms are, and really exercising that.

One of the communities I'm most concerned about, as we return to school: our educators, our teachers, who will be exposed to large numbers of kids. What protections do they have in place, to keep them healthy and well? And what can we do to support them as we transition back to school?

Heidi:

One of the things that I will say, that a lot of the resources that offer a lot protections, are teacher unions. I mean, there is a lot of collective bargaining that goes on that are working through their teacher unions. If you have educators that you really support, reach out to them, because there may be activities, for example, even in my public school system, where there is group of people who are

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



educators, but as well as people who support them, that are trying to get together community grassroots, to try to help support those teachers in returning to school.

If they need reasonable accommodations due to arthritis or other autoimmune disorders, that make it that it's unsafe for them to return, the district has to accommodate the teachers as well, in terms of that. The good news is that, again, most districts, and this has forced our whole society to, to move towards being okay with virtual settings. There's actually a need for teachers who would be more comfortable still teaching virtually.

Rebecca:

If anyone has not seen our coronavirus and arthritis webinars, in the second webinar, we did have somebody speaking on employee rights. So, you can find that on our website. We also have some information on what your rights are, and links to more information for that. Go to our website at arthritis.org for that information.

So, we know that the school must provide accommodations to the least restrictive environment possible, and it can't be based on budgetary restrictions, right? What are some other things that parents should know about their rights for their child, in receiving an education in this kind of environment?

Heidi:

They know they have a right to the least restrictive environment, but what does that really mean? And what that means is, you have a right to attend a school-based setting with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. Generally, that's seen as a public-school setting. When we're dealing with kids with certain disabilities, and especially when we're dealing with the autoimmune disorders, where they may not be able to be in a large public-school setting, because that's unsafe for them.

Heidi:

But it's not that they couldn't attend a small school-based setting with a smaller student-to-teacher ratio, where there may be more protections in place, such as a private school. Well, let's say that there is a local private school in the area that has non-disabled peers, that is offering all the social distancing and medical accommodations needed for that child to access the education system.

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



You know, under Section 504 and the IDEA, there's known as a continuum of support. And they have to move down this chain of command, so that it's least restrictive. Public schools are number one, but if they say to your child, "Well, if you can't attend public school, you have to go home, and you have to do a cyber program," that's actually the most restrictive (laughs) because you're not even around any children. Private schools that have non-disabled peers that can medically accommodate your child may actually be appropriate placement for your child.

Rebecca:

So, the district would pay for the tuition for you to be able to go to a private school, so that your child could be in the least restrictive environment?

Heidi:

If that is the appropriate placement for that child, due to that child's disability, can only be met in that environment, yes. That is actually permissible both under Section 504 and the IDEA.

Rebecca:

I had no idea that 504 was included in that. I thought that might just be IAP.

Heidi:

No, it's actually 504 too. If you are looking for that, for this fall, you have a private school that you know can accommodate, and you know you have medical documentation that the placement that the district is offering is inappropriate, that's a conversation I would be starting with the district now.

It's this idea of a continuum that you're supposed to move from the least restrictive to the most restrictive. An in-home placement is the most restrictive placement of all the placements, even including hospitalizations. Because there's no opportunity to interact with non-disabled peers.

So that's kind of the legal standard by which whether or not a district has to place them to a private school. There are certain legal requirements if you're placing a child, giving proper notice, attending the IAP meetings that have to happen, because that can reduce your right to tuition reimbursement.

Rebecca:

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Wow. That is great information.

Julie:

If that's your circumstance, and you identify a private school in your neighborhood that you think would be appropriate for your child, is that private school obligated to accept your child into their class?

Heidi:

No, they're private school, so they can accept or deny the child, but it's a situation where, you know, you can apply, and as long as the child is accepted, again, as long as it meets the medical requirements as outlined by what you've documented, the doctor has said, and it's a situation that the district cannot meet those needs, yes, that is.

It's actually in the IDA, there's a section called continual placements. Private schools are on there. It is far better for a child to be in the appropriate placement than in a cyber setting, where the child's not receiving appropriate education, or the other things that are really important to childhood.

Julie:

That's really helpful, Heidi. Can you comment on how schools are ramping up their medical attention at schools and what that looks like? If it's any more consistent than just one nurse? Is it multiple nurses? What does that look like?

Heidi:

Unfortunately, I think school nurses are being overlooked. They aren't really ramping them up like they should be. They're kinda taking the same protocol of, one nurse to one building. There's times they don't have a nurse at all, and they have one nurse that travels the district. They are not looking to hire additional school nurses. Although, again, how this is eventually gonna evolve in the next two months, you know, I don't know.

Rebecca:

is it a reasonable accommodation to ask for there to be a school nurse onsite?

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Heidi:

Well, absolutely.

MUSIC BRIDGE

PROMO:

Visit our special resources webpage at [arthritis dot org slash cares](https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/special-resources) — for more information about avoiding COVID-19, as well as tips for returning safely to school and college. Also learn about our webinars on coronavirus topics like employee rights, emotional well-being and navigating juvenile arthritis and family care. Plus, much more. Go to [arthritis dot org slash cares](https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/special-resources).

Julie:

How we can support our school systems, and our children, and our community, as we move toward reentering school?

Heidi:

I always encourage parents to be involved in Facebook groups. Create a Facebook group for parents. There's always strength in numbers, and there's strength in knowledge. If you can create a parents' group in your area, that is so important, because, first of all, we don't get manuals. A Zoom meeting group, whatever you can do to get that information in a parent-group situation. There's also parent groups of specific disabilities. That's really good, because again, if you're dealing with juvenile arthritis, you know, you sometimes don't even know you can ask for that.

I hear that all the time from parents. "I didn't even know I could ask for that." You can always ask for it.

Rebecca:

Yeah, it's so true. I mean, I see this really as an important opportunity for our juvenile arthritis community, and arthritis community as a whole, to really raise awareness. If anything, since the beginning of COVID, we've really been able to shine a light on how our community is high risk. And educate others that, you know, these are very scary times. But a lot of us go through this every day of

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



the year, when it comes to any kind of, you know, flu, or something that's highly contagious out there, it's really a community effort to look out for each other.

If somebody is going through this process to get accommodations for their child, and they are not granted the requested accommodations to ensure a safe learning environment, what other actions can they take?

Heidi:

There's actually a lot of avenues. Every state is required to have a parent information center, that actually will provide some parent advisors for you, for free. There's also education law centers in every state. So, reach out. If you run into that impasse, the first thing to do is, I would suggest, again, get more information. Reach out to one of these groups.

You can talk to a live person who knows what the rights are, and say, "Listen, here's what I'm having," and they will give the guidance, probably, that's specific as to what's best for you, to how to pursue it forward.

Now, a lot of times that's mediation, which is a situation where you can be before a mediator. Sometimes they're actually judges. Sometimes they're appointed by the state. But there are situations where it would be you, the district and the mediator, to sit down and have that discussion. Getting the mediation or pursuing it up the food chain actually creates a situation where you can get other people involved that may have more knowledge, who may say, "Here's what we can do to try to get those accommodations for your child."

There's also the due process proceeding, and that's under the IDEA. In some states, that also covers 504. In other states, they have a different policy. If you have a 504 plan, the law requires each district to create a procedural safeguards and procedural situation. Ask for that. Ask for a copy of it, because it can be illuminating to you.

Rebecca:

Well, thank you for clarifying that.

Julie:

Right.

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Rebecca:

We do have great information for getting rights in the school environments on our website. You'll be able to access it through our show notes, that helps parents provide that language you should be using when you are asking for these accommodations. So just look for that in our show notes.

Julie:

Know that you've got support, like the Arthritis Foundation, behind you, helping to guide you through that. I really just wanna encourage everybody, call your board officials. Call your elected officials. Call your members of Congress. Everybody has a role that they play in making sure that we return to a safe community environment, in this kind of post, during COVID era. And you have a role that you can play, even if it feels like you really feel quite powerless right now.

Rebecca:

Yeah. Thank you so much, Heidi, for all this information. What are your big three takeaways that you want our listeners to know about knowing their rights, when it comes to navigating going back to school or college in the fall?

Heidi:

So, the first takeaway is, start now. There's no question in my mind. You need to start now. The second one is, even if things had been working great in the past, we're in a whole new landscape. So, you need to be revisiting the Section 504 plan, the IAPs, as well as if your child doesn't have one. If you can foresee situations where there may need to be accommodations that you had never needed before, get that process started now.

And the last is, connect with your community and the other parents in your community. And also reach out to your school board members. because they're the ones who are ultimately making the decisions. So we all need to get more involved now. We are in unprecedented times. Get involved now with those processes.

Rebecca:

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 

REGENERON



Thank you. Those are great tips for everybody. We really appreciate your knowledge and your expertise, and I learned a lot.

Julie:

Yeah.

Heidi:

Well, thanks for having me. I really appreciate it. I've really enjoyed working with families and working with the Arthritis Foundation. I've always been impressed with the caliber of people and the information that you guys have.

Julie:

Thank you so much, Heidi. We appreciate you.

PODCAST CLOSE:

This Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast was brought to you by the trusted experts of the Arthritis Foundation. We're bringing together leaders in the arthritis community to help you make a difference in your own life in ways that make sense. You may have arthritis, but it doesn't have you. The Arthritis Foundation would like to thank Sanofi-Genzyme-Regeneron ... for sponsoring today's episode. Go to arthritis.org/liveyespodcast for episodes and show notes. And stay in touch!

**Thank you for supporting the
Live Yes! With Arthritis Podcast**

SANOFI GENZYME 
REGENERON