

# **IDEA Disabilities Defined**

From IDEA 2004,  
including DSM-IV  
diagnostic criteria.



# I. AUTISM

- Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.
- Autism does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance.

# Autism, or ASD

- You may hear psychologists and special educators say “ASD” for Autism Spectrum Disorders.
- The term “ASD” allows for a greater recognition of the variations found within the term “Autism.”

# ASD Behaviors

- Qualitative impairment in social interaction, including:
- Impairment in use of nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body posture, and social gestures.
- Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level.
- Lack of social or emotional reciprocity
- Stereotyped, repetitive behavior
- There may be intellectual impairment, but not always

# ASD Behaviors

- Qualitative impairments in communication, including:
- Delay in spoken language
- Marked inability to sustain conversation with others
- Stereotyped, idiosyncratic, or repetitive use of language

# Asperger's Syndrome and PDD-NOS

- Qualitative impairment in social interaction, but:
- The symptoms are not as severe.
- Attempts to develop and maintain social interactions are marked by significant anxiety.
- Stereotyped or perseverative behaviors
- Restricted range of interests
- Intellectual ability is inconsistent, with literal conceptualization unimpaired, but inferential skills impaired.

## II. DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT

- **IDEA Definition**: Mental retardation means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- **Developmental Delay**: Cannot be diagnosed as such after the age of nine.
- **Intellectual Impairment**: Any disorder resulting in significant cognitive impairment.

# III. SENSORY DISORDERS

- **Hearing**: Hearing impairment means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this section.
- **Deafness**: Deafness means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance.



# SENSORY DISORDERS

- **Vision**: Visual impairment including blindness means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.
- **Deaf-Blind**: Deaf-blindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

# IV. MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

## IDEA Definition:

- Multiple disabilities means concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation-blindness or mental retardation-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Multiple disabilities does not include deaf-blindness.

## V. EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES

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Emotional disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

# Emotional Disabilities Characteristics

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
- Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

# Examples of Emotional Disabilities

- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Anxiety Disorders, e.g. School Phobia, OCD
- Eating Disorders: Anorexia, Bulimia
- PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: e.g. Physical/Sexual Abuse
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Conduct Disorder
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- NOT Drug/Alcohol Abuse

# SUICIDE OR SELF-DESTRUCTIVE SYMPTOMS

- Previous suicide attempts or gestures
- Giving away of personal possessions
- Discussion and/or making of suicide plans
- Scratching, marking body, or other self-destructive acts
- Death themes throughout: spoken, written, art.
- Expression of hopelessness, helplessness, and anger at self and the world
- Use of dark, heavy, slashing lines, unconnected bodies in art work and doodling
- States family and friends would not miss them
- Recent loss through death or suicide
- Sudden positive behavior changes following depression

# OTHER POSSIBLE SUICIDE RISK FACTORS

- Suffered recent loss (moved, divorce, death)
- Family difficulties, (financial, health, abuse)
- Precipitously falling grades/academic failure
- Extreme dissatisfaction with school
- Lack of motivation
- Work incomplete/missing
- Defensive attitude
- Dropping of friends or avoidance of peers
- Depression or mood swings
- Excessive absences/tardiness/truancy
- Wandering in the halls
- Use or abuse of alcohol

## VI. SPEECH AND LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT (COMMUNICATION DISABILITIES)

- Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- Speech Pathologists may often work with ASD or NLD students, particularly on pragmatics.



## VII. ORTHOPEDIC IMPAIRMENT

- Orthopedic impairment means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

## **VIII. SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY**

- Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

# Specific Learning Disability

- Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

# SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES IMPORTANT ASPECTS

- There are no other factors involved, e.g. cultural differences, educational opportunity, poverty, or other disabilities.
- The problems are intrinsic to the individual, involving specific deficits in information processing or the ability to learn.
- Learning problems are specific and confined to one or two cognitive areas.
- You may hear that there should be a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement skills. This is no longer a criterion for SLD.

# SLD Terms You May Hear:

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- Dyslexia
- Dyscalculia
- Disorder of Written Expression
- Non-Verbal Learning Disability (NVLD or NLD)

# IX. OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRMENTS

- Other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment.
- Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome.

# ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

- Six or more symptoms persisting for at least 6 months.
- Some of the symptoms that are causing impairment were present before age 7 years.
- Some impairment from the symptoms is present in two or more settings.
- There must be clear evidence of clinically significant impairment in social, academic, or occupational functioning.

# ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

## Inattention:

- Often fails to give close attention to details; makes careless mistakes
- Has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or at play.
- Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
- Does not follow through on instructions; fails to finish work, chores etc.
- Has difficulty in organizing tasks and activities.
- Avoids and/or dislikes engagement in sustained mental effort
- Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities.
- Easily distracted by extraneous stimuli



# ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

## Hyperactivity:

- Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat.
- Often leaves seat in classroom or in other situations.
- Often runs about or climbs excessively in situations where it is inappropriate. In adolescents and adults, may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness.
- Has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly.
- Often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor".
- Often talks excessively.

## Impulsivity:

- Often blurts out answers before questions have been completed.
- Often has difficulty awaiting turn.
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others' conversations or activities.

# X. TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

- Traumatic brain injury means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- Traumatic brain injury applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech.
- Traumatic brain injury does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.