

Emotional Disability (ED)

WIDE RANGE OF DISORDERS

Of the 74.5 million children in the United States, an estimated 17.1 million have or have had a psychiatric disorder. Half of all psychiatric illnesses occur before the age of 14, and 75% by the age of 24. The most common psychiatric disorders in childhood are anxiety disorders, AD/HD and disruptive behavior, depression and bipolar disorders, and eating disorders. Since children and adolescents exhibit a wide range of behaviors, it can be challenging to separate normal acting up, or normal anxiety, from a more serious problems. Fear of social stigma for having a mental disorder, can be one thing that keeps many people undiagnosed and untreated for many years.

We refer to mental disorders using different umbrella terms such as emotional disturbance, behavioral disorders, or mental illness. Under this umbrella is a wide variety of specific conditions that differ from one another in their characteristics and treatment. These include:

- 1-anxiety disorder
- 2-bipolar disorder, sometimes called manic-depression
- 3-conduct disorders
- 4-eating disorders
- 5-obsessive-compulsive disorder, sometimes called OCD
- 6-psychotic disorders

Emotional disability is one of the categories of disability specified in IDEA, which means that a

child with an emotional disability may be eligible for special education and related services in public school. These services can be of tremendous help to students who have an emotional disability. The Alabama Administrative Code uses the term “emotional disability” and gives the following definition:

Emotional Disability

AAC definition:

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

1-an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;

2-an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;

3-Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;

4-a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or

5-a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. Emotional disability includes schizophrenia. The term does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disability as defined herein.

AAC 290-8-9.03(4)(a)(1-5)



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CHARACTERISTICS

An emotional disability can affect a student in many ways, not just emotional. Depending on the disorder, a person's physical, social, or cognitive skills may also be affected. Some of the characteristics seen in children with emotional disability include:

- 1-hyperactivity (attention span, impulsiveness);
- 2-aggression or self-injurious behavior (acting out, fighting);
- 3-withdrawal (not interacting socially with others, excessive fear or anxiety);
- 4-immaturity (inappropriate crying, temper tantrums, poor coping skills); and
- 5-learning difficulties (academically performing below grade level)

Children with the most serious emotional disabilities may exhibit distorted thinking, excessive anxiety, bizarre arm and leg movements, and abnormal mood swings. Many children who do not have emotional disorders may display some of these same behaviors at different times during their development, but the difference is when the behaviors continue over long periods of time. Their behavior indicates that they are not coping well with their environment or peers.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

Special Education and Related Services are available through the public school system for school-aged children, including preschoolers (ages

3-21). The federal special education law called IDEA, and corresponding state law called Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), require that special education and related services be made available free of charge to every eligible child with a disability, including preschoolers. These services are designed to address the child's individual needs in the classroom resulting from the disability – in this case, emotional disability. In the 2013-2014 school year, more than 354,000 children and youth with emotional disabilities received services to address their individual needs related to emotional disability.

REFERRAL AND EVALUATION

If you feel your child is in need of special education and related services, the first step is to make a referral to your child's school indicating the behavioral challenges you've noticed, and request an evaluation for a disability. The team will review all data and, if the referral is accepted, a formal referral form is completed, and you must give written consent for the evaluation to be done. The school has 60 calendar days from written consent to complete the evaluation process. If the referral is not accepted, written notice is given to the parent, and the child is referred to the problem-solving team.

Keep in mind that a child does not have to fail in school to be eligible for special education services. A referral for special education should never be denied based solely on the student having passing grades.



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An evaluation is the process of gathering information about your child, their potential disability, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of need. If your child is struggling in school and you are concerned about their learning, educational progress, social skills, or behavior, comprehensive special education evaluation may be the information that can help you and your child's school to meet your child's educational needs. The initial evaluation will serve to answer these questions:

- 1-does my child have a disability?
- 2-does his disability affect his educational performance?
- 3-does my child need special education and related services?



Just the mere presence of a disability does not automatically qualify your child as **“a child with a disability”** under special education laws. Your child must meet the criteria listed for Emotional Disability using certain minimum evaluative components. The criteria includes: a vision/hearing screen with satisfactory results; evidence that the problem is not due to intellectual, sensory, or health factors; results from behavior rating scales indicating deficits; evidence that the emotional disability adversely affects the child's academic

performance and/or social functioning in the classroom; evidence that the emotional disability has exhibited over six months and to such a marked degree that educational performance has been affected; teacher/parent/child interviews, clinical documentation or medical reports; and observation in the classroom.

DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

When the evaluation process has been completed, the team has 30 days to review all the assessment data and scores, meet with all the other team members, including parents, and make an eligibility decision.

The team will collaborate and create a written report of the testing results. The report will describe your child's strengths and needs, how your child's skills compare to others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what individualized instruction and related services are recommended to help your child. If you disagree with the report, you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation or IEE, paid for by the school. The school is also allowed to deny your request for IEE, but it must take additional steps to prove its evaluation is appropriate.

If your child is identified as **“a child with a disability”** and determined to be eligible, a meeting to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be held within 30 calendar days of the initial eligibility determination. The data obtained during the evaluation is used to determine what



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services are required for the child to make educational progress. An IEP must be developed and in effect before special education and related services are provided. The school must obtain written informed consent from the parent before the initial provision of services to the child.

The types of services provided to each child are designed to meet their unique needs, and educational programs for children with emotional disabilities need to include attention to providing emotional and behavioral support as well as helping them to master academic, develop social skills, and increase self-awareness, self-control, and self-esteem. Using programs that emphasize positive behavioral support (PBS) in the school environment are recommended, so that problem behaviors are minimized and appropriate behaviors are reinforced.

For a child whose behavior keeps them, or someone else from learning, the IEP team needs to consider strategies to address that behavior, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports. Students eligible for special education and related services under the emotional disability category may have IEPs that include psychological or counseling services. These are important related services available under IDEA, and are provided by a psychologist, qualified social workers, guidance counselor, or other qualified personnel.

Sometimes the test scores and data do not meet the qualifying criteria for disability, and your child is denied eligibility for services. If you disagree with the ineligibility decision, you have the right to

appeal this decision and should inform the school. You will receive a written copy of your Special Education Rights from the school, which contains information on due process procedures to follow. Ask about services through a 504 Plan. You can also contact our staff for assistance.

RESOURCES

Families often need help in understanding their child's disability and how to help them. Help is available from psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health professionals that work in either the private or public sector. There is a network of mental health support operating in every state.

National Alliance on Mental Illness <https://www.nami.org/Local-NAMI?state=AL>

Mental Health America <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/back-school>

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Family_Resources/Home


Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services <https://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>

American Psychological Association
<https://www.apa.org/pi/families/>

Child Mind Institute
<https://childmind.org/audience/for-families/>

Alabama Department of Education, Special Education Services www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/



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YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Stakeholder opinion is very important to our center. We invite you tell us what you think and make suggestions for trainings and publications. Complete a brief survey, call our center, or join our advisory committee. Your input is always welcome. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALPT>

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APEC IS HERE TO HELP

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