

# Overview of Disability Categories

## OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY CATEGORIES

The core of special education is the ability to address a student's disability in a manner that is most effective, efficient, and beneficial for the child. Until 1963 most kids with learning problems (from mild to severe) were turned away from public schools and considered uneducable. IDEA groups disabilities into 13 categories:

### I. Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Refers to individuals who have "average" intellectual ability, but whose academic performance falls below that potential.

- Learning disability describes a "neurological disorder in which a person's brain works or is structured differently, interfering with an ability to think and remember. It can affect ability to speak, listen, read, write, spell, reason, recall, organize info and do math."
- Two key concepts at the core of diagnosis: ability achievement discrepancy (possess average intelligence but academic performance falls below potential) and definition of exclusion (the child isn't functioning despite all other exclusionary causes, like retardation, emotional disturbance, blindness, deafness, excessive absences, frequent family moves or non-native language, etc).

### II. Speech or Language Impairments

Refers to a disability where individuals have difficulty communicating effectively either from speech impairment (in voice, articulation, or fluency) or from a language impairment (in form, content, or use).

- Speech impairments -abnormal speech that is unintelligible, unpleasant or interferes with communication. 3 types of impairment: voice, articulation and fluency (e.g. stuttering).
- Language impairment -difficulty or inability to master the rules of language, interfering with communication. 3 types of impairment: form, content and use.

### III. Mental Retardation

### IV. Emotional Disturbance (ED)

Refers to students with often average or above average intelligence whose performance lags due to interference from social or emotional conflict.

- Sometimes referred to as "behavior disorders".
- Teachers must often make adjustments that involve behavioral management rather than instructional methods.

### V. Multiple Disabilities

### VI. Autism

A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction, and includes engagement in repetitive activities, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

- Only considered a separate SPED category since 1990; is now 2% of all kids in SPED.
- Great variation: mildly autistic (experience social problems), moderate cases (limited social responding, severe patterns of behavior, limited language, mental retardation requiring considerable supports), severe autism (function at significant levels of mental retardation).

## VII. Orthopedic Impairments

## VIII. Hearing Impairments

## IX. Developmental Delay

Affects children ages 2 thru 8 and is defined by delays in one or more of the following areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, adaptive development.

## X. Visual Impairments

## XI. Deaf-blindness

## XII. Traumatic Brain Injury

## XIII. Other Healthy Impaired (OHI)

With a focus on ADD/ADHD -defined as having limited strength and vitality, including a heightened sensitivity to environmental stimuli that results in limited alertness in an educational setting. ADD and ADHD fall into this category.

- ADD/ADHD is a disorder characterized by inattention and distractibility, over arousal and excessive activity of the mind, impulsiveness, and difficulty with long term goals.

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