

Definitions of the IDEA Disability Categories

Mental Retardation:

A general intellectual functioning, adversely affecting a child's educational performance, which:

- A. Is significantly sub average.
- B. Exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior.
- C. Is manifested during the developmental period

Hearing Impairment:

An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance, but is not included in the definition of deafness.

Deafness:

A hearing impairment which:

- A. Is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification.
- B. Adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Speech or Language Impairment:

A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, voice impairment or a language impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Visual Impairment:

An impairment in vision, even with correction, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes partial sight and blindness.

Emotional Disturbance:

- A. 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:
 - 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 a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
- B. The term includes schizophrenia, and does not apply to a child who is socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that the child has an emotional disturbance.

Orthopedic Impairment:

A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease such as poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, and impairments from other causes such as cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures.

Other Health Impairment:

Having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that adversely affects a child's educational performance, 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, and sickle cell anemia.

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD):

SLD 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 an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. SLD includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. SLD does not include children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Multiple Disabilities:

Concomitant impairments, such as mental retardation-blindness, mental retardation-orthopedic impairment, the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that the child cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include children with deaf-blindness.

Deaf-Blindness:

Concomitant hearing and vision impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational problems that the child cannot be accommodated solely as a child with deafness or a child with blindness.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):

TBI means an acquired injury to the brain, caused by an external force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. TBI includes 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. TBI does not include brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative or brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Autism:

A developmental disability which:

- A. Does not include emotional disturbance as defined above.
- B. Significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction.
- C. Is generally evident before the age of three.
- D. Adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Autism may be characterized by:

- A. Engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements.
- B. Resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines.
- C. Unusual response to sensory experiences.

A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after the age of three could be identified as having autism if the criteria of this section are satisfied.

Developmental Delay:

Child, age three through five, exhibits one or more of the following:

- A. 25% delay, measured and verified by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following developmental areas:
 - 1. Cognitive development
 - 2. Physical development, including vision and hearing
 - 3. Communication development
 - 4. Social or emotional development
 - 5. Adaptive development
- B. Manifests atypical development or behavior which is demonstrated by abnormal quality or performance and function in one or more of the above specified developmental areas, interferes with current development, and is likely to result in subsequent delay (even when diagnostic instruments or procedures do not document a 25% delay)
- C. Has a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay. Examples of these conditions include chromosomal abnormalities, genetic or congenital disorders, severe sensory impairments, inborn errors of metabolism, disorders reflecting disturbance of the development of the nervous system, congenital infections, disorders secondary to exposure to toxic substances, including fetal alcohol syndrome, and severe attachment disorders
- D. The child is eligible for Part B services under an existing categorical option, however, the family prefers to have the child identified under the Developmental Delay category.

* Note: Definitions taken from the Howard County Public School System Special Education Procedures and Guidelines handbook.