

# EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

## ■ Definition of Emotional Disturbance under IDEA

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: (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. 34 CFR 300.8(c)(4)

## TYPES

- Anxiety disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Conduct disorders
- Eating disorders
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Psychotic disorders
- Depressive disorders

## POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Heredity
- Brain disorder
- Diet
- Stress
- Family functioning

However, researchers have not found that any of these factors are the direct cause of behavioral or emotional problems.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character, or poor upbringing. Mental illnesses are treatable. Most people diagnosed with a serious mental illness can experience relief from their symptoms by actively participating in an individual treatment plan.

## INCIDENCE

- According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), approximately 8.3 million children (14.5%) aged 4–17 years have parents who've talked with a health care provider or school staff about the child's emotional or behavioral difficulties.
- Nearly 2.9 million children have been prescribed medication for these difficulties.
- Among children aged 6–17 years, 7.5% used prescribed medication for emotional or behavioral difficulties in 2011–2012.

## POSSIBLE SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Some of the characteristics and behaviors seen in children who have an emotional disturbance include:

- Hyperactivity (short attention span, impulsiveness);
- Aggression or self-injurious behavior (acting out, fighting);
- Withdrawal (not interacting socially with others, excessive fear or anxiety);
- Immaturity (inappropriate crying, temper tantrums, poor coping skills); and
- Learning difficulties (academically performing below grade level).

Children with the most serious emotional disturbances may exhibit:

- Distorted thinking
- Excessive anxiety
- Bizarre motor acts
- Abnormal mood swings

## TEACHING TIPS/INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Educational programs for children with an emotional disturbance need to include attention to both emotional and behavioral support, as well as helping them to master:

- Academics
- Develop social skills
- Increase self-awareness
- Increase self-control
- Increase self-esteem

Students with emotional disturbance require a structured environment that includes:

- Rules and routines that are predictable;
- Consistent rewards for appropriate behavior;
- Behavior management techniques such as: positive reinforcement, token economy, contracts, and a cool-down area;

- Systematic teaching of social skills through modeling, discussion, and rehearsal are provided to help students increase control over their behavior and improve their relations with others;
- Supportive therapies involving music, art, exercise, and relaxation techniques; and
- Individual and group counseling to improve self-understanding, self-esteem, and self-control.

#### **THIS INFORMATION DEVELOPED FROM THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:**

- **Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS)**  
[www.ok.gov/odmhsas/](http://www.ok.gov/odmhsas/)
- **Mental Health Association of Central Oklahoma**  
[www.mentalhealthok.org/](http://www.mentalhealthok.org/)
- **Mental Health Services of Southern Oklahoma**  
[www.mhssso.org/](http://www.mhssso.org/)
- **INTEGRIS - Mental Health Oklahoma**  
[www.integrisok.com/mental-health-oklahoma-ok](http://www.integrisok.com/mental-health-oklahoma-ok)
- **The Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD)**  
[www.ccbd.net/](http://www.ccbd.net/)
- **NAMI | National Alliance on Mental Illness**  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- **NIMH | National Institute of Mental Health**  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/index.shtml)
- **Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI)**  
[www.challengingbehavior.org/](http://www.challengingbehavior.org/)
- **SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center**  
[www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/)
- **Centers For Disease Center (CDC)**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/mentalhealth.html>
- **List of Spanish-language hotlines**  
[www.nmhcstore.samhsa.gov/espanol/lineas.aspx](http://www.nmhcstore.samhsa.gov/espanol/lineas.aspx)