

# Disability Categories

In order to qualify for special education under the regulations that implement the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a child needs to be a child with a disability, meaning that the child has been evaluated as having a qualifying disability, and by reason thereof needs special education. [See 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(a)]

- The child must have a qualifying disability as defined by the IDEA regulations;
- The disability must have an adverse effect on the child's educational performance; and
- The child must need specially designed instruction in order to access and make progress in the general education curriculum.

The disability categories under the IDEA are listed below:

## 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, as defined in paragraph (c)(4) of this section. A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after age three could be identified as having autism if the criteria in paragraph (c)(1)(i) of this section are satisfied. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(1)]

## Deaf-blindness

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. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(2)]

## 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. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(3)]

## Developmental Delay

The regulations that implement the IDEA allow states to determine eligibility for special education to children aged three through nine who are experiencing developmental delays in one or more of the following areas: physical development; cognitive development; communication development; social or emotional development; or adaptive development. [34 C.F.R. 300.8(b)] Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) state that "Developmental delay" means performance by a child who is at least three years of age but under ten years of age on a norm-referenced test that measures at least one and one-half, but not more than three, standard deviations below the mean for children of the same chronological age in two or more of the following areas: cognitive development; physical development; communication development; social or emotional development; [or] adaptive development." [A.R.S. 15-761(3)]

## Emotional Disturbance

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. (ii) 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 under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(4)] A determination of Emotional Disturbance requires verification of a disorder by a psychiatrist, licensed psychologist, licensed professional counselor, licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), or a certified school psychologist.

## Hearing Impairment

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. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(5)] A determination of Hearing Impairment requires an audiological evaluation by an individual holding a master's or doctoral degree in audiology, and an evaluation of communication/language proficiency.

## Intellectual Disability

Intellectual Disability 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. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(6)] The term *Intellectual Disability* replaces the term *mental retardation*.

## Multiple Disabilities

Multiple disabilities means concomitant impairments (such as [intellectual disability]-blindness or [intellectual disability]-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. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(7)]

## 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). [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(8)] A determination of Orthopedic Impairment requires verification of the physical disability by a doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, doctor of podiatric medicine, licensed nurse practitioner, or licensed physician assistant.

## Other Health Impairment (OHI)

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, that— (i) 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; and (ii) Adversely affects a child's educational performance. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(9)] A determination of Other Health Impairment requires verification of a health impairment by a doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, licensed nurse practitioner, licensed physician assistant, or in cases of ADHD a certified school psychologist or licensed psychologist.

## Preschool Severe Delay

Arizona defines preschool severe delay as “performance by a preschool child on a norm-referenced test that measures more than three standard deviations below the mean for child of the same chronological age in one

or more of the following areas: cognitive development; physical development; communication development; social or emotional development; [or] adaptive development.” The results of the norm-referenced measure must be corroborated by information from a comprehensive development assessment and from parental input, if available, as measure by a judgment based assessment or survey. If there is a discrepancy between the measures, the evaluation team shall determine eligibility based on a preponderance of the information presented. [A.R.S. 15-761(24)]

## Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

Specific learning disability—(i) General. 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. (ii) Disorders not included. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of [intellectual disability], of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(10)]

## Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)

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. [34 C.F.R. 300.8(c)(11)] A determination of Speech-Language Impairment requires an evaluation by a certified speech-language pathologist or speech-language technician. For students whose speech impairments appear to be limited to articulation, voice, or fluency problems, the written evaluation may be limited to: an audiometric screening within the past calendar year; a review of academic history and classroom functioning; an

assessment of the speech problem by a licensed and certified speech-language pathologist or speech-language technician; or an assessment of the student's functional communication skills.

## Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

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. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(12)] A determination of Traumatic Brain Injury requires verification of the injury by a doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, licensed nurse practitioner, licensed physician assistant, or a licensed clinical neuropsychologist.

## Visual Impairment (VI)

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. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(13)] A determination of Visual Impairment requires verification of a visual impairment by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.