



ED

Emotional Disability

Questions from Parents

*Anne Arundel County Public Schools
Office of Psychological Services*

Some important definitions:

Condition

A consistent pattern of symptoms or behaviors that are significantly different than responses or behaviors that would be expected of the student's cultural or developmental level.

Over A Long Period of Time

Behaviors or symptoms that are present for at least six months or the onset of extreme or harmful behaviors.

To A Marked Degree

Frequency, intensity, and duration of the behaviors or symptoms.

Adversely Affects Educational Performance

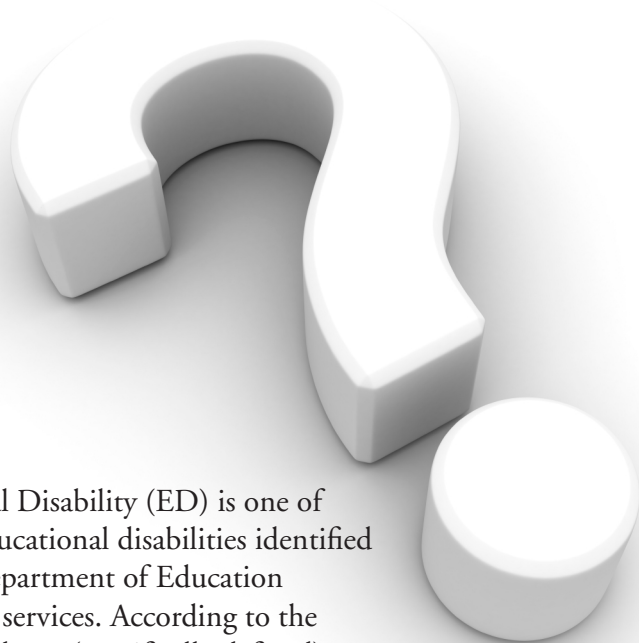
Achievement, test scores, report card grades, class participation, relationships with others and/or interpersonal skills.

*Characteristics that may be reflective of ED:**

- an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
- an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers
- inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances
- a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
- a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems

**ED is an educational disability and not a clinical diagnosis. Educational disabilities are determined by a multidisciplinary school committee while clinical diagnoses are used by mental health professionals outside of the school system. Children who are in need of special education services under the ED disability exhibit a wide range of behaviors. The student's developmental, cultural and social/economic factors are always considered as part of the evaluation process. In all cases, however, these problems are severe enough to significantly impair a child's ability to succeed educationally.*

Questions from parents



What is an Emotional Disability?

Emotional Disability (ED) is one of several educational disabilities identified by the Department of Education for which children can receive special education services. According to the Maryland definition, a student identified as ED has a (specifically defined) condition, over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance.

My son is no different than every other adolescent boy in this school. Why are you saying his problems are serious?

When behavior incidents occur with great frequency, become “potentially harmful” to himself or others, or are resistant to school based interventions, then there is a serious problem. Your son cannot appropriately participate in his classes if he is frequently in the office on a discipline referral or preoccupied with emotional issues. The goal of the school is to meet your son’s needs and improve his ability to be successful academically.



My son is in therapy and is being treated for depression. Does that mean he is ED?

Not necessarily. It is only when his educational performance is significantly affected

by his emotional problems that he would be considered ED and in need of special education services. Educational impact is determined by the school team based upon classroom performance and evaluation information.

These symptoms may indicate depression:

- loss of interest in, or pleasure in, usual activities
- irritable mood
- feelings of sadness
- significant changes in eating habits; poor appetite or overeating
- significant changes in sleeping habits
- low energy or fatigue
- low self-esteem
- poor concentration; difficulty making decisions
- feeling of hopelessness or helplessness
- difficulty making decisions

**Symptoms of depression may be expressed or described differently depending on culture, age, developmental level and gender.*

I know my daughter has problems, but she is not crazy. Explain how the two are related.

Some people use the word “crazy” when they talk about someone with a serious mental disorder or who has a psychiatric diagnosis such as Schizophrenia or Bipolar Disorder. We often think of “crazy” people as those who are heavily medicated, out-of-touch, or need to be institutionalized. Although some students with a psychiatric diagnosis may also be identified as ED, ED is not a psychiatric diagnosis. ED is an eligibility category for special education. Being eligible for special education services simply means that your daughter’s “emotional problems” prevent her from doing as well as her potential indicates.

I do not understand! He seems fine at home. How can there be such a difference between school and home?

Children are often under greater stress at school where there are additional peer and academic pressures that are not usually present at home. Quite often, however, you may be able to recall certain moments where your child behaved in ways that were confusing to you or dramatically different than usual for him. Excessive sleeping, temper tantrums that last for hours, or extreme physical aggression may be reflections of the emotional stress that your child is experiencing. All children may display some of these behaviors to some degree, but not all children display these behaviors in a way that negatively and significantly affects their ability to succeed in school.

Why does my child have problems in some classes and not others?

Classrooms differ in many ways, including pace and structure, behavioral and teacher expectations, and level of student involvement/participation. Students’ academic interests and strengths may play a role in their success as well.



My child is not dumb; he knows what he's doing. Why does he need special education?

Special education is not just for students with limited intelligence. In fact, there are 14 different special

education eligibility categories. Only one of those categories identifies students who have an Intellectual Disability. Special education services are provided to students with a wide range of intellectual abilities and whose individual needs are beyond the resources that are ordinarily provided in the classroom.

My son just needs help controlling his behavior.

What can we do?

Most children can state the rules and the difference between right and wrong. Poor impulse control, poorly developed

social interaction skills, and/or poorly established connections between behavior and consequences often result in major behavior problems. The increased structure of some special education programs and the specialized training of their teachers may provide the assistance that your son requires in order to be more successful in a school setting.

Why does he need to have special education?

He's not like "those" kids!

Students who have been identified as ED display a variety of behaviors. Most often parents associate emotional concerns with aggressive or bizarre behaviors. However, a student who is extremely withdrawn or socially immature may also meet the criteria for the educational disability of ED. Students

who get into a lot of fights as well as those who are too shy to ask the teacher for help are sometimes identified as ED. Services are designed based upon his specific needs. Services may be provided through instructional support, related services, and/or supplemental aids and services. Your son's response to special education is consistently monitored to assess progress.

Sending my daughter to a different program is just your way of getting rid of a problem. Prove to me that this placement is in my child's best interest.

With your participation and input, your child's school has developed an educational plan with goals (called an Individualized Education Program – IEP) specifically to meet your daughter's needs and make use of her strengths. At times, those goals can best be met in specialized programs where particular resources and structures are in place. Participating in a program with a highly structured environment and specialized staff is

sometimes necessary to help your child make adequate progress toward her goals.

Now that my daughter is receiving special education services as a student with an Emotional Disability, what is my role as her parent?

You are considered an important member of the School Team, and you continue to have input into obtaining the most appropriate education for your child. Communication with all school staff ensures that everyone is working toward the same goal. Parents can be the best advocates for their children and provide valuable input.

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How did she get this way?

Did I do something wrong or maybe is it because home has been a little crazy lately?

Many children and adolescents experience emotional difficulties as a normal part of growing up. However, there is usually no simple way to explain why a child has

significant emotional problems. Causes are complex and often the result of many factors. Even experts have long disagreed on whether emotional disorders have a genetic component or whether they are “caused” by external factors. It is more useful for parents and educators to focus on their role in helping the child learn adaptive skills and appropriate behaviors rather than focusing on why the child has problems.

Is medication the only answer?

Treatment involves a variety of interventions. When medication is required, it should be

combined with education about the disability and, at times, counseling. Some children may have mild symptoms and only require changes to their educational program. Others may require all of these interventions. Each child should be evaluated individually.

Resources

Websites

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

www.aacps.org/html/parents/default.asp

Anne Arundel County Mental health Agency, Inc.

www.aamentalhealth.org

Maryland Coalition of Families for Children's Mental Health

www.mdcoalition.org

Mental Health Association of Maryland

www.mhamd.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness

www.nami.org

National Association of School Psychologists

www.nasponline.org/families



Additional information may be obtained by:

- contacting your school psychologist, school social worker, or school counselor
- calling your physician

a child has significant emotional problems.



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Special thanks to the Division of Special Education for their review and contributions.

For information on ordering copies of this series of brochures, please call 410-222-5101.

Other subjects covered include Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Learning Disabilities, and Intellectual Disabilities.

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