

ADHD

Information for Educators

ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) makes it difficult for children to control their behavior. ADHD is one of the most common childhood disorders, affecting 4-12 percent of school-aged children. While it is more common in boys, girls can also be diagnosed with ADHD.

Treatment and support can help students with ADHD manage their symptoms and succeed in school. Students with ADHD are most successful when teachers and parents work together.

Common ADHD Symptoms

Children with ADHD may exhibit some or all of the following symptoms.

Inattention

- ▶ Has a hard time paying attention or daydreams
- ▶ Often does not listen
- ▶ Pays little to no attention to details
- ▶ Becomes bored quickly
- ▶ Has difficulty beginning and completing tasks

Hyperactivity

- ▶ Cannot stay seated or is constantly moving
- ▶ Frequently squirms and fidgets
- ▶ Talks too much

Impulsivity

- ▶ Acts without thinking
- ▶ Interrupts others
- ▶ Exhibits unsafe behavior, such as running into the street without looking

The term ADD (attention-deficit disorder) is sometimes used when a student has Inattentive Type ADHD. A student with ADD does not have symptoms of hyperactivity or impulsivity.

Autism

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Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a developmental disability that can vary greatly in severity. Because ASD can impact the way a child learns, communicates, and interacts with others, it's important that teachers stay informed and adaptable when working with students on the autism spectrum.

Signs and Symptoms

The following are some of the signs and symptoms of ASD. These signs usually appear in early childhood.

- ▶ Isn't interested in or has difficulty relating to others
- ▶ Avoids eye contact
- ▶ Has a hard time talking about his/her own feelings
- ▶ Does not recognize the feelings of others
- ▶ Resists or doesn't express physical affection
- ▶ Repeats certain words or actions frequently
- ▶ Has trouble adapting to new routines
- ▶ Has obsessive interests
- ▶ Has delayed speech or language skills
- ▶ Has flat or inappropriate facial expressions

Screening and Diagnosis

If a child is diagnosed with autism, his/her diagnosis includes the following more specific conditions.

- ▶ Autistic disorder
- ▶ Asperger's syndrome
- ▶ Pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS)

Be informed about the particular diagnosis your student has received. Because students on the autism spectrum exhibit a wide range of characteristics, needs, and abilities, it's important for teachers to understand where they fall on the spectrum, and what that means for their educational needs.

Asperger's Syndrome

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Asperger's syndrome is a developmental disorder that can cause significant social impairments. While Asperger's is part of the autism spectrum, children with Asperger's have a number of unique characteristics.

Autism and Asperger's

Asperger's syndrome is often characterized as a less severe form of autism. There are, however, a number of differences.

- ▶ Children with Asperger's usually do not experience the speech delays characteristic of autism. Because speech delays are often less pronounced in children with Asperger's, they're often diagnosed later than other children on the autism spectrum.
- ▶ Asperger's syndrome typically does not include cognitive or intellectual impairment. While they can suffer from learning disabilities like any other child, children with Asperger's typically have average or above average intelligence.

Signs and Symptoms

Because children with Asperger's are typically diagnosed later than other children on the autism spectrum, teachers need to be especially observant, and watch for the following.

- ▶ Awkward or poor social skills
- ▶ Obsessive routines and/or patterns
- ▶ Poor eye contact or staring at others
- ▶ Inappropriate behaviors / odd mannerisms
- ▶ Intense interest in specific topics
- ▶ Frustration in group/social situations – not understanding why they're not accepted
- ▶ Hypersensitivity to light and/or sounds

Dyslexia

Information for Educators

Dyslexia is a learning disability that affects the part of the brain that processes language. Words and letters appear “mixed up” to people with dyslexia, though their vision and intelligence are unaffected by dyslexia.

Because the effects of dyslexia are so closely tied to academic performance, it’s important for teachers to be aware of dyslexia symptoms, and know how to support students with dyslexia.

Symptoms

Dyslexia is often not diagnosed until a child is school aged. However, before starting school, children with dyslexia often learn to talk late, have problems learning new words, and have a hard time remembering words and names.

Once a child with dyslexia is in school, the following symptoms often emerge:

- ▶ Reading below grade level
- ▶ Difficulty spelling
- ▶ Difficulty finding the right words when answering questions
- ▶ Avoiding reading or activities involving reading
- ▶ Taking a long time completing reading and writing assignments
- ▶ Difficulty reading aloud
- ▶ Mispronouncing words, even familiar ones
- ▶ Trouble remembering the sequence of events
- ▶ Difficulty memorizing things
- ▶ Difficulty telling or remembering a story

Children with dyslexia are also at a greater risk for ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder). If you suspect a student has dyslexia, or if he/she has been diagnosed, watch for ADHD symptoms as well.

Learning Disabilities

Information for Educators

Learning disabilities impact specific academic skills, such as reading, writing, or math. They also often impact a child’s organization and time management skills, attention, and/or memory.

Individuals with learning disabilities don’t see, hear, or understand things the same as other students. And because their brains are wired differently, they often have difficulty learning in a traditional classroom.

Learning disabilities are not caused by intellectual or physical disabilities. In fact, individuals with learning disabilities typically have average or above average intelligence.

Specific Learning Disabilities

While learning disabilities are unique to each individual, the following are some of the most common learning disabilities.

- ▶ **Auditory Processing Disorder** is a condition that affects how someone receives verbal information and processes meaning.
- ▶ **Dyscalculia** impacts a person’s ability to use and understand math. In addition to having difficulty in math class, individuals with this condition may have a hard time counting, using money, and/or telling time.
- ▶ **Dysgraphia** affects fine motor skills. Someone with this condition usually has illegible handwriting, and may also have issues with spacing, spelling, and putting thoughts into written words.
- ▶ **Dyslexia** affects the part of the brain that processes language. Words and letters appear “mixed up.”

Intellectual Disability

Information for Educators

An intellectual disability limits an individual’s thought processes (their ability to learn and understand). An intellectual disability also negatively impacts a person’s social and life skills—skills used in everyday situations.

While individuals with an intellectual disability need support, they can learn, grow, and thrive, both in and out of the classroom.

Limitations and Characteristics

Individuals with an intellectual disability experience limitations in the following two areas:

Intellectual functioning – the ability to learn, reason, and problem solve. Intellectual functioning is typically measured with an IQ test. An IQ test score of 70-75 or below indicates impaired intellectual functioning.

Adaptive behavior – conceptual, social, and practical skills

- ▶ **Conceptual skills:** language, reading and writing, money, time, and number concepts
- ▶ **Social skills:** interpersonal skills, self-esteem, the ability to follow rules, and gullibility (the ability to identify and avoid being taken advantage of)
- ▶ **Practical skills:** daily living tasks (e.g., hygiene, housekeeping), job skills, transportation, use of money, health care, routines, and personal safety

It’s important to remember that all people with intellectual disabilities are different, and that they are likely to be more skilled in some areas than they are in others. It’s also important to remember that with ongoing support, these individuals can grow in the above areas throughout their lives, especially in adaptive behaviors.

Speech or Language Impairment

Information for Educators

Speech and language impairments impact a person's communication, articulation, and voice. Because a speech or language impairment can adversely affect a child's academic performance and social development, it's important to support these students as much as possible.

Speech Impairment

Speech impairment refers to a range of disorders that impact the way a person speaks. Speech impairment can have a variety of causes and symptoms, as well as a wide range of severity.

- ▶ **Speech sound disorders** impact an individual's ability to articulate certain letters or sounds (e.g., pronouncing an "r" like a "w").
- ▶ **Stuttering** occurs when the flow of speech is disrupted by involuntary repetitions or abnormal hesitations (pausing).
- ▶ **Apraxia, verbal dyspraxia, and dysarthria** are impairments caused by injury or a neurological condition. They impact the motor functions involved in speech, such as the brain's ability to control the mouth and throat.

Language Impairment

Language impairment impacts a person's ability to understand or use language.

- ▶ **Language-based learning disabilities** impact listening, comprehension, and speech.
- ▶ **Specific language impairment** refers to instances when a child's language abilities do not develop normally, and the impairment cannot be attributed to physical or mental impairment.
- ▶ **Selective mutism** is a disorder that is marked by a child's refusal to speak despite being physically and intellectually able to do so.

Giftedness

Information for Educators

Children are characterized as gifted when their ability in a certain area is significantly above the norm for others their age. They may have superior cognitive ability, be very creative, or be gifted in an academic subject, such as math or science.

Characteristics

All gifted children are different, but the following are some common features and characteristics of gifted children.

- ▶ Is a fast learner
- ▶ Has an excellent memory
- ▶ Has a large vocabulary at a young age
- ▶ Enjoys puzzles and solving problems with numbers
- ▶ Has a keen sense of humor and a vivid imagination
- ▶ Understands abstract ideas at a young age
- ▶ Is intensely curious and asks lots of questions
- ▶ May have a heightened emotional sensitivity to social/humanitarian issues

Twice-Exceptional

A child is considered twice-exceptional if he/she is identified as gifted, but also has one or more disabilities (e.g., physical disability, learning disability, speech or language impairment, autism).

Twice-exceptional children often get frustrated in school, and sometimes have behavioral issues. As a result, twice-exceptional children can be especially challenging for teachers.

If you have a twice-exceptional child in your class, work with his/her IEP or 504 team to develop personalized strategies that effectively address the student's needs, and enable him/her to thrive and grow.

IEP

Information for Educators

An IEP, or Individualized Education Program, is a document created to address the unique needs of a child eligible for special education services. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlines what IEPs should generally include, IEPs vary greatly from state to state, school to school, and child to child.

IEP Eligibility

The following are the 13 categories of disabilities that make students eligible for special education services and an IEP.

- ▶ Specific learning disability
- ▶ Other health impairment (includes ADHD)
- ▶ Autism spectrum disorder
- ▶ Emotional disturbance
- ▶ Speech or language impairment
- ▶ Visual impairment, including blindness
- ▶ Deafness
- ▶ Hearing impairment
- ▶ Deaf-blindness
- ▶ Orthopedic impairment
- ▶ Intellectual disability
- ▶ Traumatic brain injury
- ▶ Multiple disabilities

The Initial Evaluation

Once a student has been identified as possibly needing special education services, whether by parent request or school identification, the child is evaluated by the school.

The teacher's role in this process is to provide information on the student's current performance in the classroom. This feedback will help ensure that students get the support and services they need.

Each IEP is unique, and the services outlined in an IEP will vary from student to student.

504 Plan

Information for Educators

A 504 plan is developed to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same education as their non-disabled peers.

A 504 plan doesn't provide individualized instruction; however, it does provide students with various accommodations so they are able to succeed in the regular classroom.

504 Eligibility

Students with any disability may be eligible for a 504 plan, as long as the disability substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., learning).

A 504 plan has a wider range of eligibility than an IEP, which makes a 504 plan an option for students who don't qualify for special education services under IEP requirements.

The 504 Plan Process

Anyone (e.g., doctor, parent, teacher) can refer a student for a 504 plan. However, it's up to the school to determine if a student is eligible—and if a 504 plan is needed to help that student succeed in school.

Once a student is identified as needing a 504 plan, a team will determine what accommodations are to be included in the plan.

Different schools deal with 504 plans differently. Most 504 plans are written, but this isn't a requirement. It is a good idea, but also not a requirement, to review a student's 504 plan annually. During the annual meeting, which should include the parent(s), the team can determine if the 504 plan should continue, and if so, if any changes should be made.

A 504 plan is a legally binding document and public schools are required to provide the accommodations included in a student's 504 plan.

IEP vs. 504 Plan

Information for Educators

Both an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and a 504 plan help students with disabilities get the support they need to succeed in school. IEPs and 504 plans have a number of similarities, but there are also some significant differences.

For students with conditions that adversely impact their education, a well written, well implemented IEP or 504 plan will help ensure that they get the support and services they need.

	IEP	504 Plan
Legal Basis	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
Purpose	To provide individualized special education services for eligible students	To provide students support (accommodations) in the regular classroom setting
Eligibility	Students must have one or more of the 13 disabilities listed by IDEA as eligible to receive services. The disability must also adversely impact a child's academic performance.	Students must have a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., learning). Section 504 has a broader definition of disability than IDEA.
Contents	An IEP is a written document developed by an IEP team. It details a student's current educational performance, services, goals, accommodations, modifications, placement, and more.	There is no standard form for a 504 plan. Most 504 plans are written, but it is not a requirement. 504 plans generally include accommodations, and information on who provides them.

Special Education Terms

Teachers play a crucial role in helping their students get the support they need to succeed. Familiarity with these special education terms and acronyms will help you to better understand and support your special education students.

- ▶ **504 Plan:** A plan developed to ensure that students with disabilities receive the services and accommodations they need to succeed in the regular classroom
- ▶ **Accommodations:** Alterations that enable a student to work around a disability, without a change in the curriculum (e.g., giving answers orally, having extra time on assignments)
- ▶ **Annual Review (AR):** Yearly meeting of an IEP team to assess a student's needs and progress
- ▶ **Assessment:** An evaluation used to identify a student's strengths, weaknesses, and progress
- ▶ **Assistive Technology (AT):** Technology devices used to help students perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for them
- ▶ **Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP):** A plan specifically targeting one to three of a student's undesirable or disruptive classroom behaviors
- ▶ **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** The right to equal educational opportunities
- ▶ **Individualized Education Program (IEP):** A document that defines the special education services to be delivered to students who qualify as defined by IDEA (There are 13 categories of disabilities that make students eligible for an IEP.)
- ▶ **IEP Team:** The group of individuals (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, special education staff) who meet to make decisions on a student's IEP.