

Emotional Disturbance

What is Emotional Disturbance?

■ Many terms are used to describe emotional and/or behavioral disorders. Currently, students with such disorders are categorized as having an emotional disturbance, which is defined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as "...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:

- An inability to learn that 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 behavior 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."

The term emotional disturbance is often used interchangeably with the terms emotional disorder/problem, behavior disorder/disturbance, psychiatric illness, and mental illness/disorder.



What Causes Emotional Disturbance?

■ The causes of emotional disturbance have not been adequately determined. Although various factors such as heredity, brain disorder, diet, stress, and family functioning have been suggested as possible causes, research has not shown any of these factors to be the direct cause of behavior or emotional problems.

Children with the most serious emotional disturbances may exhibit distorted thinking, excessive anxiety, bizarre motor acts, and abnormal mood swings. Some are identified as children who have a severe psychosis or schizophrenia.

Many children who do not have emotional disturbances may display some of these same behaviors at various times during their development. However, when children have an emotional disturbance, these behaviors continue over long periods of time. Their behavior thus signals that they are not coping with their environment or peers.

How is Emotional Disturbance Diagnosed?

■ Emotional disturbance is diagnosed by a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health professional.

Some common childhood emotional disturbances might include:

- anxiety and mood disorders (depression)
- attention deficit and disruptive disorders
- elimination disorders
- eating disorders.

Statistics About Emotional Disturbance

- One in five children have a diagnosable mental, emotional or behavioral disorder.
- Up to one in ten children may suffer from a serious emotional disturbance.
- Seventy percent of children who have an emotional disturbance do not receive mental health services.
- In the 2000-2001 school year, 473,663 children and youth with an emotional disturbance were provided special education and related services in public schools.

Teachers and parents should be aware that children with emotional disturbance may:

- display hyperactivity, a short attention span, and impulsiveness.
- show aggression or self-injurious behavior by acting out or fighting.
- withdraw or retreat from exchanges of social interaction, showing excessive fear or anxiety.
- display immaturity, inappropriate crying, temper tantrums, and/or poor coping skills.
- have learning difficulties.



Emotional Disturbance



What is The LEAD Center, Ltd.?

- The LEAD Center, Ltd. is a private day school that serves 5 to 21-year-old students with mental and emotional disabilities who live in central Virginia. The mission of The LEAD Center, Ltd. is to provide students in our care with the tools necessary to develop to his or her greatest capacity, to become able to independently take care of him/herself, and to become a reliable member of society. Successful and timely transition to the public school is the ultimate goal of The LEAD Center, Ltd.

What are the Educational Implications for Children with Emotional Disturbance?

- The educational programs for children with an emotional disturbance need to include emotional and behavioral support, as well as help to master academics, develop social skills, and increase self-awareness, self-control, and self-esteem. A large body of research exists regarding methods of providing students with positive behavioral support in the school environment so that problem behaviors are minimized and positive, appropriate behaviors are fostered.

It is also important to know that, within the school setting:

- For a child whose behavior impedes learning (including the learning of others), the team developing the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) needs to consider strategies to address that behavior, including positive behavioral interventions.
- Students eligible for special education services under the category of emotional disturbance may have IEPs that include psychological or counseling services. These are important services, which are available under law, and are to be provided by a qualified social worker, psychologist, guidance counselor, or other qualified personnel.
- Career education (both vocational and academic) is also a major part of secondary education and should be a part of the transition plan included in every adolescent's IEP.

There is growing recognition that families, as well as their children, need support, respite care, intensive case management, and a collaborative, multi-agency approach to services. There are a growing number of agencies and organizations actively involved in establishing support services in the community.

How Can The LEAD Center, Ltd. Help Children with Emotional Disturbance?

- Facility and staff at The LEAD Center, Ltd. recognize the potential of each student by providing an environment that nurtures the development of positive self-esteem and independence. The LEAD Center, Ltd. focuses on each student's personal strengths and develops individualized academic and behavioral programs to successfully meet long and short-term goals.

In order to achieve success, The LEAD Center, Ltd. uses a team approach based on consistency, predictability, family involvement, therapeutic counseling, alternatives to regular education, and community. Also included in the process are public service providers for continuity during the critical stage of transition back to the community.

For more information about The LEAD Center, Ltd., please visit www.leadctr.com or call (804) 452-3730

