WHAT DISABILITIES ENTITLE A CHILD TO SPECIAL EDUCATION?

As considered in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), handicapped children must meet two criteria. The child must have one or more of the disabilities listed in the next section, and he or she must require special education and related services. In other words, not all children who have a disability require special education; many are able to and should attend school without any program modification. Following are the disabilities included in the definition.

--Deaf: A hearing impairment so severe that the child cannot understand what is being said with or without a hearing aid. --Deaf-Blind: A combination of hearing and visual
im pairments causing such severe communication, developmental, and educational
problems that the child cannot be accommodated in either a program just for the deaf or
one that is specifically for the blind. --Hard of Hearing: A hearing impairment that
adversely affects a child's educational performance but is not as severe as deafness.
--Mentally Retarded: Both significant subaverage general intellectual functioning and
deficits in adaptive behavior. These deficits should have been observable throughout
the child's development. --Multiply Handicapped: A combination of impairments, other
than deaf-blindness, that causes such severe problems that the child cannot be
accommodated in a special education program for any one of the impairments.
--Orthopedically Impaired: A severe physical disability that adversely affects educational
performance. The term includes impairments such as club foot, absence of a limb,
cerebral palsy, poliomyelitis, and bone tuberculosis. --Other Health Impaired: Limited
strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as rheumatic
fever, asthma, hemophilia, and leukemia, which adversely affect the child's educational
development. --Seriously Emotionally Disturbed: Schizophrenic children and others who
have a marked degree of one or more of the following characteristics, displayed over a
long period of time: An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual,
sensory, or health factors. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal
relationships. 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. This term does not
include students who are socially maladjusted, unless they are also seriously
emotionally disturbed. --Specific Learning Disability: A disorder affecting the child's
understanding or use of spoken or written language. The student's ability to listen, think,
speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations may be affected. Conditions
such as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and
developmental aphasia are included in this category. This term does NOT include
children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or
motor handicaps; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural or economic
disadvantage. --Speech Impaired: A communication disorder such as stuttering or
impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely
affects a child's educational performance. --Visually Handicapped: A visual impairment
that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term
includes both partially seeing and blind children.

HOW MANY CHILDREN IN THE U.S. REQUIRE SPECIAL EDUCATION?

Estimates of the proportion of school-aged children requiring special education range
from 10% to 15%. The actual number of children under age 19 served in school year
1984-1985 was 4,363,031.

WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF DISABILITIES?

Children suspected of having a handicap are evaluated by a multidisciplinary team that
includes at least one teacher or other specialist with knowledge in the area of the suspected disability. Following a full and individual evaluation of the child's educational needs, the team determines whether or not the child requires special education and related services.

If the evaluation confirms that a child has one or more disabilities and because of the disabilities special education and related services are required, then states and localities must provide a free, appropriate public education for that child.

Public Law 94-142 has fueled a trend toward teaching more exceptional students in the regular classroom. A variety of approaches have been developed to implement this mainstreaming effort, including resource rooms and consultation services by special education teachers. Regular classrooms are being changed to provide for a wider diversity of students and educational services. For those students with problems too severe to be served in a regular class, provision must be made for the most normal, or least restrictive, setting possible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION


THE EXCEPTIONAL PARENT. A journal published 8 times a year. Available from Psy-Ed Corporation, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

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