Emotionally Disturbed Questions from Parents
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

Some important definitions:

Condition:
a consistent pattern of symptoms or behaviors which make it very difficult to meet with academic success

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

*ED is an educational disability and not a clinical diagnosis. Educational disabilities are determined by a multidisciplinary school committee where 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. In all cases, however, these problems are severe enough to significantly impair a child’s ability to succeed educationally.
What is an emotional disturbance?

Emotionally Disturbed (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 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, or feelings of sadness
  * ♦ poor appetite or overeating; dramatic changes in eating habits
  * ♦ significant changes in sleeping habits
  * ♦ low energy or fatigue
  * ♦ low self-esteem
  * ♦ poor concentration; difficulty making decisions
  * ♦ feeling of hopelessness or helplessness
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 who has a psychiatric diagnosis such as schizophrenia or multiple personality 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 and does not require medication. ED is an educational eligibility category. Being eligible for special education services simply means that your daughter’s “emotional problems” prevent her from doing as well as her potential indicates.

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 or become “potentially harmful” to himself or others, 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.

If you would just discipline my son, he would be fine.

The school system provides guidelines for appropriate disciplinary measures when students do not abide by rules and regulations. The school system cannot, however, physically punish students, as this is illegal.
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.

How come my daughter does so well with some teachers and not others?

Teachers, like students, come with many different personalities and characteristics. One benefit of special education teachers is that they have been specifically trained to work with children who have disabilities. Their primary role is to help design and provide instruction, case consultation, and support for children with disabilities within an educational setting that can best meet children’s needs. It is part of human nature for us to get along with some people better than we do with others. Therefore, your daughter may do better in some classes than in others.
Special education is provided to students with a wide range of abilities. 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 are Intellectually Impaired. 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 can’t the school meet his needs here? I don’t see how home teaching could possibly make things any better?

A period of home teaching is sometimes recommended to allow the school time to develop a more appropriate program. During this period of time, academic instruction continues at home, where the child may feel less pressured by peers, teachers, and the general demands of the classroom.
Why does he have to go to a special program?
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. The only thing that students identified as ED have in common is the fact that their social and emotional functioning adversely affects their educational performance.

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

With your participation and input, your child’s school has designed an educational program (called an Individualized Education Program – IEP) specifically to meet your son’s needs and make use of his strengths. At times, those goals can be met best in specialized programs where particular resources and structures are in place. Participating in programs with other students who have similar educational needs can benefit your son by allowing him an opportunity to develop and practice the skills he needs. An example of this would be group therapy where each child is working on social interaction skills.
Now that my daughter is enrolled in a special education program for students with emotional difficulties, what is my role as her parent?

Parents can be the best advocates for their children. You are considered a member of the School Team, and, as such, you continue to have input into obtaining the most appropriate education for your child. Communication with her teachers, her school psychologist, and other school staff is very important to ensure that everyone is working toward the same goal. Parents are often a tremendous resource for the school in providing information about techniques that work best with their child. In addition, if she is taking medication and/or is in outside therapy, it is important that all professionals communicate with the school.

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 the 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

**BOOKS FOR ADULTS**

A Guidebook for Parents of Children with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

The Emotional Problems of Normal Children: How Parents can Understand and Help
by Stanley Turecki, Bantam Books, New York, 1994

Coping with Teen-Age Depression: A Parent’s Guide

Between Parent and Teenager
by Haim Ginott, Avon Books, New York, 1982

The Difficult Child

**Books for kids:**

The Boys and Girls Book about Good and Bad Behavior
by Richard Gardner, Creative Therapeutics, 1990

I Have Feelings
by Terry Berger, Human Sciences Press, New York, 1971

**SUPPORT GROUPS**

Parents Supporting Parents
Parents’ Place

**Additional information may be obtained by:**

♦ calling your physician
♦ contacting your school psychologist or guidance counselor
♦ visiting your local library
Questions regarding the contents of this brochure should be directed to:
the Office of Psychological Services (410) 222-5321

For information on ordering copies of this series of brochures, please call (410) 222-5101. Other subjects covered include
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Emotionally Disturbed, Mental Retardation, and Learning Disabilities.
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