EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS

1. What is the definition of emotional impairment?
2. What is the definition of socially maladjusted?
3. What are specific characteristics of emotional impairment?
4. What are specific characteristics of social maladjustment?
5. How is an emotional impairment determined?

WHAT IS AN EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENT?

An Emotional Impairment (EI) entails manifestation of behavioral problems primarily in the affective domain, over an extended period of time, which adversely affect the student's education to the extent that he/she cannot profit from regular learning experiences without special education support.

The term "emotional impairment" may also include persons who, in addition to the above characteristics, exhibit maladaptive behaviors related to schizophrenia or other similar disorders. However, the term does not include persons who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that such persons also have an emotional impairment.

Explanation of Terms

. . . manifestation of behavioral problems primarily in the affective domain . . .

The affective domain includes areas such as emotional stability and control, interaction and response to others, problem solving, ability to work with others, and self-control (anxiety, depression, low self-esteem).

. . . over an extended period of time . . .

This phrase means the student has a history of symptoms or characteristics reflecting an emotional impairment that have been exhibited for at least ninety days.

. . . which adversely affect the student's educational performance . . .

This phrase refers to those EI characteristics which interfere primarily with academic performance and/or social functioning in the school setting to a significant degree. This criteria refers to the frequency, duration or intensity of a student's behavior in comparison to peers--that is, the impairment must be pervasive (continuing over time) and intense (overt, acute, observable). The adverse effect may be indicated by either reduced work production in the classroom or by lowered academic achievement.
Note: Private evaluations/DSM-V diagnoses do not by themselves qualify a student for an educational emotional impairment.

**WHAT DOES SOCIA LLY MALADJUSTED MEAN?**

Social maladjustment is conceptualized as a conduct problem. A federal district court accepted a definition of social maladjustment as "a persistent pattern of violating societal norms . . . a perpetual struggle with authority, easily frustrated, impulsive and manipulative" (Doe v. Sequoia Union High School District, N.D. Cal. 1987). Although these students are capable of behaving appropriately, they intentionally choose to break rules and violate norms of acceptable behavior. Socially maladjusted students view rule breaking as normal and acceptable. They do not take responsibility for their actions and often blame others for their problems.

A key distinguishing feature between emotional impairment and social maladjustment is the degree of conscious self-control. Students with an emotional impairment (EI) are viewed as lacking the ability to control themselves. Their underlying problem is typically viewed as internalizing, such as affective disorders, elective mutism or separation anxiety disorder, which may indicate emotional impairment. By contrast, the behavior of a socially maladjusted student is viewed as intentional and is typically viewed as externalizing, such as conduct disorders or oppositional disorder which may indicate social maladjustment.

**WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENT?**

- Inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships within the school environment  
  Read More...
- Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances  
  Read More...
- General pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression  
  Read More...
- Tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems  
  Read More...
WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENT?

The behavior of a socially maladjusted student is motivated by self-gain and strong survival skills. They often engage in "purposive acts designed to garner attention, to intimidate others for material gain, to control turf, or to avoid responsible behavior" (Clarizio, 1992). Most demonstrate a lack of age-appropriate concern for their behavior and its effects on others, and they typically lack empathy. Anxiety is generally not related to the misbehavior of a socially maladjusted student, unless it is due to the fear of consequences. There is little remorse demonstrated for the actual misbehavior.

In addition, a socially maladjusted youth often displays behavior which may be highly valued within a small subgroup, but which may not be within the range of culturally-permissible behavior. Socialized or under-socialized forms of aggression may be a feature of social maladjustment.

HOW IS AN EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENT DETERMINED?

A determination of emotional impairment (EI) eligibility is based on data provided by a multidisciplinary evaluation team, which includes a comprehensive evaluation by a psychologist or psychiatrist and a school social worker. Other participants and sources of information include the student, a parent, general education teacher, and sometimes a special education teacher.

When evaluating a student suspected of having an emotional impairment, the evaluation team must document of all of the following:

- Current ability and achievement levels
- The student's performance and social-emotional functioning in the school setting, as well as his/her adaptive behavior within the broader community
- A systematic observation of the behaviors of primary concern which interfere with educational and social needs
- Any intervention strategies used to improve the behaviors, and the length of time they were utilized
- Relevant medical information, if any

After collecting the required information/data, the evaluation team must consider the following diagnostic assurance statements before making a recommendation regarding the student's eligibility:

1. Over an extended period, the student has manifested problems primarily in the affective domain to the extent that he/she cannot benefit from learning experiences without special education support.
2. The problems are characterized by one or more of the following behaviors:
   o An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships within the school environment
   o Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances
   o A general, pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
   o A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears in association with personal or school problems
   o In addition to the above behaviors, this student exhibits maladaptive behaviors related to schizophrenia or similar disorders
3. The behaviors are not primarily the result of intellectual, sensory, health factors or social maladjustment.
4. The suspected disability is not due to limited English proficiency, or lack of instruction in math or the essential components of reading.
5. This student requires special education programs/services.