

AUTISM

Definition:

Autism is a developmental disability, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a student's educational performance and significantly affects developmental rates and sequences, verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction and participation. Other characteristics often associated with autism are unusual responses to sensory experiences, engagement in repetitive activities and stereotypical movements and resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines. Students with autism vary widely in their abilities and behavior. The term does not apply if a student's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the student has an emotional and behavioral disorder. [refer to 34 CFR 300.7(c)(1)(i)] The term of autism may also include students who have been diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, Rett's Disorder, or Childhood Disintegrative Disorder provided the student's educational performance is adversely affected and the student meets the eligibility and placement requirements. Autism may exist concurrently with other areas of disability.

Eligibility and Placement.

Eligibility shall be based on assessment of the five characteristic areas associated with autism. The assessments shall minimally document that each of the characteristic areas of (1) developmental rates and sequences, (2) social interaction and participation and (3) verbal and non-verbal communication are significantly affected. The adverse effect on a student's educational performance shall be documented. The determination of deficits shall be based on the following criteria:

- 1. Developmental rates and sequences.** A student exhibits delays, arrests, and/or inconsistencies in the acquisition of motor, sensory, social or cognitive skills. Areas of precocious or advanced skill development may also be present, while other skills may develop at typical or extremely depressed rates. The order of skill acquisition frequently differs from typical developmental patterns.
- 2. Social interaction and participation.** A student displays difficulties and/or idiosyncratic differences in interacting with people and participating in events. Often a student is unable to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships with people. A student may seek consistency in environmental events to the point of exhibiting rigidity in routines.
- 3. Communication (verbal and/or nonverbal).** A student displays a basic deficit in the capacity to use verbal language for social communication, both receptively and expressively. Characteristics may involve both deviance and delay. Verbal language may be absent, or, if present, may lack usual communicative form, or the student may have a nonverbal communication impairment.

4. **Sensory processing.** A student may exhibit unusual, repetitive or unconventional responses to sensory stimuli of any kind. A student's responses may vary from low to high levels of activity.
5. **Repertoire of activities and interests.** A student may engage in repetitive activities and/or may display marked distress over changes, insistence on following routines and a persistent preoccupation with or attachment to objects. The capacity to use objects in an appropriate or functional manner may be absent, arrested, or delayed. A student may have difficulties displaying a range of interests and/or imaginative play. A student may exhibit stereotypical body movements.

The following **evaluations and assessments** shall be utilized to determine the presence of the characteristics of autism.

1. Comprehensive psychological evaluation to include a formal assessment of intellectual functioning and an assessment of adaptive behavior.
2. Educational evaluation to include an assessment of educational performance and current functioning levels.
3. Communication evaluation to include assessment of verbal and non-verbal communication.
4. Behavioral evaluations to include assessment of social interaction and participation, peer and adult interactions, capacity to relate to others, stereotypical behaviors, resistance to change, atypical responses to sensory stimuli, persistent preoccupation with or attachment to objects and other behaviors often associated with autism.
5. Developmental history to include developmental differences and delays and age of onset. A student may be diagnosed as a student with autism after age three if the characteristics of autism are met. [refer to 34 CFR 300.7(c)(1)(ii)]

A student with autism may be served by any appropriately certified teacher in any educational program as described in the student's individualized education program (IEP). The identification of autism for educational programming does not dictate a specific placement; however, it is based on the assessed strengths, weaknesses and individual goals and objectives of the student.