EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

Serious emotional disturbance, also referred to in the law as emotional disturbance, refers to an established pattern exhibiting one of more of the following characteristics.

- 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

Symptoms of Emotional Disturbance

According to Nielsen (2009), some basic characteristics and behaviors are commonly seen in children who have been diagnosed with emotional disturbance. Such characteristics include the following:

- Hyperactivity
- Short attention span
- Impulsiveness
- Inconsistencies of behavior
- Low frustration tolerance
- Aggression (acting out, fighting)
- Self-injurious behavior
- Withdrawal from interaction with others
- Inappropriate social skills
- Immaturity (inappropriate crying, temper tantrums)
- Poor coping skills
- Learning problems
- Unfocused
- Unexplainable mood shifts

Children with the most serious emotional disturbances exhibit distorted thinking, excessive anxiety, bizarre motor acts, and abnormal mood swings. This may include children with schizophrenic disorders, affective disorders, anxiety disorders, and other sustained disorders of conduct or adjustment when an established pattern adversely affects educational performance and results in an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relations necessary to the learning process. It should be noted that the established pattern of behavior must occur to a marked degree and over a long period of time.

Educational Strategies for Serious Emotional Disturbance

It is important to remember and understand that all children will misbehave at some time, but students who meet the Serious Emotional Disturbance criteria have a continuous pattern of misbehavior that consistently disrupts the classroom.