

# Handy Handouts®

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## Special Education Eligibility Categories

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In order to receive special education services at school, a student must: (a) have a formal evaluation by a Special Education Team; (b) meet at least one of 13 different categories; and (c) meet the “3 Prongs of Special Education.”

When the team meets to discuss the “3 Prongs of Special Education,” they must conclude that:

- The student has a disability.
- The disability adversely affects the student’s educational performance at school.
- The student requires specially designed instruction in order to gain access to the general curriculum.



The 13 categories under which a student can qualify for special education services are:



**1. Autism** – The student has a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction (i.e., engaging in repetitive activities and movements, resisting change in routines, and responding unusually to sensory experiences).



**2. Deaf-Blindness** – The student has a combination of hearing and vision impairments that severely affects communication and development.



**3. Deafness** – The student has a severe hearing impairment that affects his/her ability to process language, with or without amplification.



**4. Emotional Disturbance** – The student exhibits one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time:

- inability to learn that cannot be explained
- inability to build or maintain relationships with peers and teachers
- inappropriate behavior or feelings in normal circumstances
- unhappy or depressed mood
- tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears because of personal or school problems
- schizophrenia



**5. Hearing Impairment** – The student has a permanent or inconsistent hearing impairment.



**6. Intellectual Disability\*** – From a very young age, the student has a significantly below-average IQ and decreased functional skills.

*\*Note: In years past, “Mental Retardation” (MR) was the term used to describe intellectual disabilities; however, this term is no longer used or acceptable.*



**7. Multiple Disabilities** – The student has several disabilities (not including deaf-blindness), that severely affect his/her education.



**8. Orthopedic Impairment** – The student has severe difficulty as the result of a birth defect, disease, or other physical impairment (e.g., cerebral palsy or amputation).

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(cont.)



### 9. Other Health Impairment

– The student has decreased strength, energy, or attention that affects his/her educational performance stemming from chronic or acute health problems (e.g., ADHD, diabetes, epilepsy, etc.).



### 10. Specific Learning Disability

– The student has difficulty understanding and/or using spoken or written language. This may affect his/her ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. This is not due to other disabilities (visual, hearing, motor, or intellectual), disadvantages (environmental, cultural, or economic), or an emotional disturbance.



### 11. Speech or Language Impairment

– The student has a communication disorder that affects fluency (stuttering), articulation, language, and/or voice.



### 12. Traumatic Brain Injury

– The student has acquired a brain injury affecting one or more areas: cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem solving, sensory, abilities, motor abilities, psychosocial behavior, physical functions, information processing, and speech. This does not apply to a brain injury occurring at birth or one that is degenerative.



### 13. Visual Impairment Including Blindness

– The student has a vision impairment affecting his/her education, even with correction.



Members of the special education team include a school psychologist, special education teacher, speech-language pathologist, and/or other related service providers. This team will work together to evaluate your student and determine the most appropriate way for him/her to receive services or help at school. If you suspect that your child/student may need special education services, contact your local school and request an evaluation.

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- [577 – Hearing Loss](#)
- [627 – What is Articulation?](#)
- [630 – Autism—the Basics](#)

#### Resources:

- “Categories of Disability under IDEA,” Center for Parent Information and Resources, accessed December 20, 2016, [http://www.parentcenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/repo\\_items/gr3.pdf](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/repo_items/gr3.pdf).
- “Disability Profiles,” Special Education Guide, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.specialeducationguide.com/disability-profiles/>.
- “Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004,” U.S. Department of Education, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/>.

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