

Who Qualifies for an IEP?

Not every child struggling in school qualifies for an IEP. Under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, a child must meet two key criteria:

1. They have a qualifying disability that affects their ability to learn.
2. They require special education services to make progress in school.

These are the categories schools use to determine eligibility for special education services:

1. Autism

A developmental disability that affects communication, social skills, and behavior. It may also impact how a child responds to sensory input. Autism is a spectrum, so the level of need varies widely.

2. Deaf-Blindness

A combination of both hearing and vision impairments. This dual disability makes it extremely difficult to access information and requires highly specialized support.

3. Deafness

A severe hearing impairment that affects a child's ability to process spoken language, even with hearing aids. It can impact communication, language development, and learning.

4. Developmental Delay

Used for children ages 3–9 who show delays in physical, cognitive, communication, social-emotional, or adaptive development. It allows younger children to receive early intervention services before a more specific diagnosis is made.

5. Emotional Disturbance

A condition that may include anxiety, depression, withdrawal, aggression, or difficulty building relationships. These behaviors must significantly affect a child's ability to learn and participate in school.

6. Hearing Impairment

A hearing loss that may be permanent or fluctuating and affects a child's educational performance. This category is used when the hearing loss isn't severe enough to be classified as deafness.



Who Qualifies for an IEP? (continued)

7. Intellectual Disability

Characterized by below-average intellectual functioning and challenges with everyday skills like communication, self-care, and social interaction.

8. Multiple Disabilities

When a child has more than one disability (excluding deaf-blindness), and the combination causes significant learning challenges that cannot be met through services for just one of the disabilities alone.

9. Orthopedic Impairment

A physical disability that affects a child's ability to move or control their body. This may be due to conditions like cerebral palsy, amputation, or muscular dystrophy.

10. Other Health Impairment (OHI)

Includes medical conditions that limit a child's strength, energy, or alertness—such as ADHD, epilepsy, diabetes, or heart conditions. These can affect a child's ability to focus and learn.

11. Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

A disorder in one or more basic learning processes, such as reading (dyslexia), writing (dysgraphia), or math (dyscalculia). Children with SLDs may struggle with processing or using information efficiently.

12. Speech or Language Impairment

Difficulties with speaking, understanding, or using language. This can include problems with articulation, stuttering, or expressive/receptive language delays.

13. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

An acquired brain injury caused by an external force (like a car accident or fall) that affects memory, attention, reasoning, behavior, or physical functioning, and impacts learning.

