

# Characteristics of students with emotional or behavioural disorders



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## Introduction

Students with emotional disturbances are a vulnerable population who require multiple levels of support and understanding that may not be as demanding for those who are found eligible for other disabilities. Although students with emotional disabilities are a small percentage of those who are identified as having a disability, the “label” of emotional disturbance carries a stigma that often causes students and families to feel burdened and heavy-laden. Students’ manifestation of emotional disturbances are not isolated to the classroom but occur across their interpersonal and academic environments. According to the Center for disease Control, approximately 15% of children under 17 years of age had parents who sought support concerning their child’s emotional or behavioral challenges. Nearly three million children have been prescribed medication for their disability. According to research, there is no race or ethnicity that is exempt from experiencing emotional and/or behavioral disorders however, African-American students have been identified at greater rates and overrepresented in this disability category than any other culture (Lambert, January, Cress, Epstein & Cullinan, 2018; Woolfolk, 2013)

There are multiple mental diagnoses under emotional disturbance: oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, eating disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and psychotic disorder. According to research, cognitively, students with emotional and behavioral disorders receive and process information different from those children who do not have the disability (Taylor, Smiley, Richards, 2015; Woolfolk, 2013). Children who exhibit severe emotional disturbances will <https://assignbuster.com/characteristics-of-students-with-emotional-or-behavioural-disorders/>

display distorted thinking, aggressive and excessive behavior and anxiety, difficulty with following directions, depression, low self-esteem, and abnormal mood swings over a long period of time which indicate that they have extreme challenges with fully being capable of coping with their environment or peers. Other characteristics and behaviors observed are hyperactivity, poor academic performance, delinquency, dropping out of school, self-injurious behavior, learning disabilities and immaturity (Smith & Tyler, 2010; Taylor, Smiley & Richards, 2015; Walker, Clancy, Tsai & Cheney, 2013; Woolfolk, 2013).

Students who have emotional and behavioral disorders often have significant difficulties in the classroom and learning environments. The purpose of this paper is to examine critical components in an effective educational program for students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders; current research describing the necessary components of programs for students with EBD, the strength and weaknesses of current programs used in many schools today and outline a school approach that supports proactive and corrective behavior management based on a school and on common behavioral characteristics of students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders.

### Components of an Effective Program for Students with Emotional and/or Behavioral Disorders

To secure positive educational and social outcomes for students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders, educational leaders must implement research-based methods and strategies, position well-trained professionals and create an atmosphere which incorporates all stakeholders in the

students' life; parents, community, teachers, staff and peers. Students with emotional disturbances will often test the boundaries in any structured environment and teachers need to be prepared to respond with proven strategies and interventions that will support the various dynamics of the students' needs. According to Simpson, Peterson & Smith (2011), effective EBD programs should be structured with systematic and data-based interventions with methods to assess and monitor the effectiveness, opportunities to incorporate and practice new skills, a process to select the appropriate intervention for the behavior(s) that is (are) manifesting, multi-tiered treatments and interventions and a commitment to implement the procedures and protocols with fidelity.

A key component to implementing these methods successfully is the formation of trusting and affirmative human relationships. Students do not respond in a positive manner to individuals who they perceive as uncaring or apathetic. Qualified and committed professionals should be at the core of the programs for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Teachers and staff who possess the general and special education skills and knowledge in assessments, curricula, management and social skill instruction collaboration and the importance of family involvement are considered experts in this area and deemed indispensable (Simpson, Peterson & Smith, 2011; Sparks, 2013).

Environmentally, students with emotional and behavioral disorders need a positive, structured environment which supports growth, the students' social, behavioral and academic needs and maximizes students' learning.

Reasonable academic and behavioral expectations, seating arrangements  
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that meet the individual needs, tendencies and dispositions, appropriate and supportive learning environments and rules which are implemented at the beginning of the year, followed consistently and written in simplistic terms that are positive and minimal. Students should clearly understand the consequences for breaking the rules and the consequences must be predictable and enforced consistently whenever they are broken (Simpson, Peterson & Smith, 2011; Taylor, Smiley, Richards, 2015).

Successful behavior management supports are created with the use of applied behavior analysis and behavior modification tools through which antecedents or “triggers” and consequences can be identified. The information gathered allows teachers and staff to formulate reinforcement-oriented programs, extinction strategies, appropriate behavior reduction options and self-management options to promote positive and desired behaviors. Social skill and interaction supports should be constructed with direct skill instruction, peer development programs, cognitive-based and problem-solving oriented methods and used to address targeted behaviors in realistic settings and situations and with the consideration of applicable external factors (Simpson, Peterson & Smith, 2011).

Students with emotional disorders may have severe academic challenges. Recommended effective practices include instructional techniques that use presentations, demonstrations, prompts, guided and independent practice and consistent review. Focused instruction should be comprised of phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, phonics and comprehension.

External support from parents, family and community are also crucial components to forming an effective program. Schools must form intentional and meaningful relationships with the parents and families to create a united support system for students. Considering the tension and stress that often accompanies supporting EBD students, schools programs should offer emotional support and coping and stress support for parents, siblings and extended family members. Resources for alternate educational settings, transition planning, and positive behavioral support are beneficial to assist families. Community aids include affordable counseling, crisis-intervention programs, advocacy agencies, after-school and summer programs, public assistance, vocational rehabilitation services and medical and therapeutic programs (Simpson, Peterson & Smith, 2011).

### School Approach that Supports Proactive and Corrective Behavior Management

As with other exceptionalities, students with emotional and behavioral disorders need a positive, structured environment which supports growth, fosters self-esteem, and rewards desirable behavior. Rules and routines need to be established at the beginning of the school year, written in simplistic terms that are positive and minimal. Students should clearly understand the consequences for breaking the rules and the consequences must be predictable and enforced consistently whenever they are broken (Taylor, Smiley, Richards, 2015). Instead of issuing the consequence and expecting that the child fully understands, feedback should be provided to the student in a calm, detached, understanding yet firm manner so that the

student with an emotional or behavioral disorder can understand the “ why” of the consequence.

The implementation of five different types of self-management interventions are also effective in the instructional setting. Self-monitoring refers to the student taking on the role as the observer by both observing and recording targeted behaviors and self-evaluation involves using techniques in which the student compares his or her performance to established criteria. Self-instruction involves the students’ self-directed behavior to be guided through the use of self-statements and goal setting involves the student selecting a goal that is reasonable and attainable and creating personal guidelines to ensure commitment and progress toward that goal. Strategy instruction is the use of techniques involved in teaching the student steps that will be followed independently to problem solve or reaching a goal

To effectively support positive behavior, students with emotional and behavioral disorders often need to receive instruction in a special education setting with an established rewards system. Students with emotional or behavior disorders respond well to token economies, a classroom behavior, a lottery system or a positive peer review.

As per IDEA, all students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive learning environment; preferably the general education classroom. Students with emotional and/or behavioral and communication disorders require a certain instructional structure within their learning environment that allows them the opportunities to access the curriculum according to their abilities as well as

address their challenges and difficulties that hinder them. If a teacher fosters positive interactions between themselves and their students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, the more likely that the positive interactions will be ongoing. As a long term result, the students are motivated to engage in learning opportunities and few problem behaviors occur. If there are negative interactions between staff and student then that cycle will continue and ultimately influence the learning atmosphere of the entire classroom (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012).

In conclusion, students with high incidence disabilities need to have their self-esteem and self-worth heightened as they navigate through their educational experience, especially in the general education classroom. Inclusion within the general education setting should be a time for the students to feel independent, a sense of ownership and a sense of belonging, as many times there is an internal feeling of isolation and separateness. Teaching children with emotional and behavioral disorders can be extremely challenging and teachers have the best chance of positively influencing outcomes for students with EBD when they implement practices that are evidence based and academically focused. With that combination students are given a greater chance of long-term success (Farley, Torres, Wailehua, & Cook, 2012).

## References

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