Educational Assessment and Identification Procedures to Classify Students as Emotionally Disturbed in the State of Connecticut

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Background

Emotional Disturbance (ED)

“...exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics and affects educational performance negatively: a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory of health factors; b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; c) inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances; d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.”

(IDEA, 2004)
Connecticut State Guidelines

- Best Practices in Prevention and Intervention,
- Definition and Interpretation, Assessment and Eligibility
- Key Elements for Effective Individualized Program Services
- Tools to Assist Planning and Placement Teams
- Empirically Supported Prevention and Intervention Strategies
Characteristic has been exhibited to a marked degree (i.e., significantly greater frequency and/or intensity than seen in peer group)  

__ Yes ___ No

Characteristic has an adverse effect on educational performance  

__ Yes ___ No

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Limiting Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check all that apply (student must manifest at least one characteristic)</td>
<td>Long Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Inability to learn, which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or other health factors</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers</td>
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<td>c. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances</td>
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<td>d. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression</td>
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<td>e. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems</td>
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**Characteristics**

At least one characteristic has been checked.  

__ Yes ___ No
State Guidelines

Assessment and Eligibility

● Comprehensive Assessment with multiple sources of information:
  ○ clinical/structured interviews
  ○ systematic observations
  ○ behavior checklists and rating scales
  ○ self-reports, work samples
  ○ standardized assessment instruments

● Family and development history

● Educational/classroom performance, information regarding student’s cognitive, academic, communication, adaptive and motor functioning

● Behavioral evaluations
Assessment

● Allen and Hanchon (2013)
  ○ 214 school psychologists
    ■ 28% of the sample reported consistent use of a comprehensive approach
    ■ 30% reported they use of four of the five critical data sources

● Scardamalia, Bentley-Edwards and Grasty (2018)
  ○ 179 school psychologists reviewed a mock special education report & made an eligibility determination
    ■ 56 indicated that the student met ED criteria
    ■ While 119 indicated that the student did not
      ● Different interpretations of assessment results and application of five criteria for ED
The research aimed to explore how school psychologists in Connecticut identify and assess ED, and whether these processes are aligned with state guidelines.
Research Questions

1. What are school psychologists doing to identify and assess students with an Emotional Disturbance classification?

2. Are the assessment and identification processes aligned with the guidelines suggested by the state?
Methods

- List of contact information for special education directors or directors of pupil services (117 school systems)
- Survey distributed to public school psychologists (5 min)
- Inclusion: school psychologist in CT, must work in public school
Survey Questions

1. In conducting an assessment to evaluate a child’s eligibility for an Emotional Disturbance classification, I have used: *
   
   Mark only one oval.
   - Clinical/structured interviews
   - Systematic observations
   - Behavior checklists/rating scales
   - Self-reports from students
   - Work samples
   - Standardized assessment instruments
   - Developmental history
   - Other: ___________________________

2. In determining eligibility for a student with a suspected classification of an Emotional Disturbance, the Planning and Placement Team completed the Team Worksheet and attached it to the assessment records.
   
   Mark only one oval.
   - Yes
   - No

3. In determining eligibility for a student with a suspected classification of an Emotional Disturbance, the Planning and Placement Team considered and documented alternative strategies (e.g. universal, targeted and intensive interventions).
   
   Mark only one oval.
   - Yes
   - No

4. In determining eligibility for a student with a suspected classification of an Emotional Disturbance, the Planning and Placement Team, we used assessment procedures to analyze factors that underlie the student’s behavior or emotional response by identifying the target behavior, the function or purpose of the behavior and the factors maintaining the behavior.
   
   Mark only one oval.
   - Yes
   - No

5. In conducting an assessment to evaluate a child’s eligibility for an Emotional Disturbance classification, parent input and information were included.
   
   Mark only one oval.
   - Yes
   - No
Results

- Clinical Interviews: 84% Used, 16% Did not use
- Systematic Observations/Behavior Checklists: 95% Used, 5% Did not use
- Self-Report: 100% Used, 0% Did not use
- Work Samples: 89% Used, 11% Did not use
- Standardized Assessments: 58% Used, 42% Did not use
- Developmental History: 97% Used, 3% Did not use
Discussion

- Most districts report following most ED assessment procedures
- Reliability of survey information results may not be accurate
- But can we include an analysis of work samples more in our assessment of emotional disturbance?
- Comprehensive evaluations, important to consider all areas
Future Research

- Devise survey questions differently to obtain more accurate results
- Observations of schools
- Interviews
References


