

Eligibility Criteria Checklist for a Diagnosis of Autism

Autism is defined as a clinical disorder. Clinical diagnosis is made by a professional with expertise in evaluating students with a variety of behavioral and emotional disorders, including Autism. Typically, such evaluations are conducted by student psychiatrists, clinical student psychologists, clinical neuropsychologists and specially trained neurologists and developmental pediatricians. In addition, many professionals may administer brief screening tools or parent/guardian report rating scales designed to identify students who may be at risk of a pervasive developmental disorder, or who may show early signs of the disorder.

****Important Point** - The eligibility criteria for classifications under IDEA are not specifically stated under the law. Therefore, the eligibility criteria for a particular disability may differ from State to State.

Therefore, the information pertaining to “eligibility” is the authors’ professional interpretations based on reviewing the States’ guidelines and criteria for autism.

To receive the classification of Autism as student with a disability for special education services under IDEA, criteria 1 through 7 should be met:

_____ 1.) **The student exhibits impairments in communication.** The student is unable to use expressive and receptive language for social communication in a developmentally appropriate manner; lacks nonverbal communication skills or uses abnormal nonverbal communication; uses abnormal form or content when speaking and/or is unable to initiate or sustain conversation with others.

_____ 2.) **The student exhibits difficulties in forming appropriate relationships.** The student exhibits deficits relating to people, marked lack of awareness of other's feelings, abnormal seeking of comfort at times of distress, absent or abnormal social play, and/or inability to make friends. The student does not relate to or use objects in an age appropriate or functional manner.

_____ 3.) **The student exhibits unusual responses to sensory information.** The student exhibits unusual, repetitive, non-meaningful responses to auditory, visual, olfactory, taste, tactile, and/or kinesthetic stimuli.

_____ 4.) **The student exhibits impairments in cognitive development.** The student has difficulty with concrete versus abstract thinking, awareness, judgment, and/or the ability to generalize. The student may exhibit perseverative thinking or impaired ability to process symbolic information.

_____ 5.) **The student exhibits an abnormal range of activities.** The student shows a restricted repertoire of activities, interests, and imaginative development evident through stereotyped body movements, persistent preoccupation with parts of objects, distress over trivial changes in the environment, unreasonable insistence on routines, restricted range of interests, or preoccupation with one narrow interest.

_____ 6.) **The student has been previously diagnosed with autism by a qualified professional.** A licensed clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, clinical neuropsychologist, specially trained neurologists, developmental pediatrician, or other specific medical or mental health professional qualified to diagnose autism has previously diagnosed the student; accompanied by a report with recommendations for instruction.

_____ 7.) **The disability (autism) is adversely affecting the student's educational performance.** The IEP Committee uses multiple sources of information to determine that educational performance is adversely affected and is not primarily due to an emotional disability.