The 13 Disability Categories Under IDEA

IDEA – **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** requires public schools to provide special education and related services to eligible students. If a child qualifies, the school develops an Individualized Education Program (IEP). To qualify, a child must have a disability that adversely affects their educational performance and fall into one of 13 disability categories.

1. **Specific Learning Disability (SLD)**
   - Specific Learning Disability is the most common category under IDEA. It refers to difficulties in understanding or using language that affect skills such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning, or math. Examples may include dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and other learning differences.
2. **Other Health Impairment**
   - Other Health Impairment refers to health conditions that limit a child's strength, vitality, or alertness, which affects their ability to learn. One common example is ADHD, which can impact attention, organization, and executive functioning.
3. **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**
   - Autism is a developmental disability that significantly affects social interaction and communication. Students with autism may also show repetitive behaviors, sensory differences, or difficulty adjusting to changes in routine.
4. **Emotional Disability**
   - This category includes mental health conditions that significantly affect a student's ability to learn and function at school. Examples may include anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, depression, or obsessive-compulsive disorder when they impact educational performance.

5. **Speech or Language Impairment**
    - Speech or language impairment refers to communication difficulties such as stuttering, problems pronouncing sounds, voice disorders, or difficulty understanding or using language. These challenges can affect a child's ability to communicate and participate in school activities.
6. **Visual Impairment (including blindness)**
    - A visual impairment is a vision problem that cannot be fully corrected with glasses or contacts and adversely affects a child's educational performance. This category includes both low vision and blindness.
7. **Deafness**
    - Deafness means a severe hearing loss where a child cannot process language through hearing, even with amplification like hearing aids, and it significantly affects educational performance.
8. **Deaf/Hard of Hearing**
    - Deaf/Hard of hearing refers to a hearing loss that may range from mild to severe but still allows a child to process some language through hearing, often with amplification. It is different from difficulties with auditory processing or language processing.
9. **Deaf-blindness**
    - Deaf-blindness means a child has both hearing and vision impairments. The combination creates communication and learning needs that cannot be met by programs designed for only deafness or only blindness.
10. **Orthopedic Impairment**
    - An orthopedic impairment is a severe physical disability that affects movement or physical functioning. Examples include cerebral palsy, amputations, muscular dystrophy, or bone disorders that impact learning.
11. **Intellectual Disability**
    - Intellectual disability involves significantly below-average intellectual functioning and limitations in adaptive skills, such as communication, self-care, and social skills. These limitations affect a child's ability to learn in school. Down syndrome is one example.
12. **Traumatic Brain Injury**
    - Traumatic Brain Injury is a brain injury caused by an external physical force, such as a blow or accident. It can affect thinking, memory, behavior, communication, or physical abilities.
13. **Multiple Disabilities**
    - Multiple disabilities means a child has two or more disabilities that together create educational needs that cannot be addressed in a program designed for just one disability category.

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