

Serious Emotional Disturbance Among Native Populations

National American Indian & Alaska Native School Mental Health Program



Tips for helping students with SED in inclusive classrooms

- Acknowledge the problem
- Reward positive behaviors
- Make learning relevant
- Classroom behavior chart
- Create a silent signal
- Identify and affect depression
- Help students cope with stress

Resources:

Cartledge, G., Kea, C. D., & Ida, D. J. (2000). [*Anticipating differences—Celebrating strengths: Providing culturally competent services for students with serious emotional disturbance.*](#) *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 32(3), 30-37.

Simmons, T. M., Novins, D. K., & Allen, J. (2004). [*Words have power:\(re\)-defining serious emotional disturbance for American Indian and Alaska Native children and their families.*](#) *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, The Journal of the National Center*, 11(2), 59-64.

References

Lambert, M. C., Cullinan, D., Epstein, M. H., & Martin, J. (2021). [*Differences between students with emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, and without disabilities on the five dimensions of emotional disturbance.*](#) *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 1-16.

MANICKAVASAGAN, T. EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE. *Inclusive Education*, 265.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (n.d.). *Adults with SMI and children/youth with SED.* SAMHSA.

A serious emotional disturbance (SED) is "a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder in children and youth experienced in the past year, resulting in functional impairment that substantially interfered with or limited the child's or youth's role or functioning in family, school, or community activities" (SAMHSA). This fact sheet summarizes the data surrounding SED in Native populations, along with best practices for working with Native children and youth with a SED.

Inclusive education for children with a SED (MANICKAVASAGAN, n.d.)

To be labeled with emotional disturbance, a student must be identified as "emotionally disturbed" by a sanctioned labeler such as a physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, caseworker, judge, or law enforcement officer. People in these professions attempt to be objective, but they differ in:

- Perceptions of the seriousness and appropriateness of various behaviors
- Ability to know students of different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds
- Views of how disruptive behaviors should be treated

Characteristics and behaviors seen in children who have an emotional disturbance include:

- Hyperactivity
- Aggression
- Self-injury
- Withdrawal
- Immaturity
- Learning difficulties

Differences between students with/without SED, learning disabilities, on the 5 dimensions of SED (Lambert et al., 2021)

- Test scores for students with a SED were substantially higher than the test scores of students with no disabilities across each of the primary characteristics
- Highlights that important behavioral differences exist between these student populations, presenting teaching, professional preparation, and research implications

