

Multiple Disabilities

Characteristics and Background Information: Children with multiple disabilities will have a combination of various disabilities that may include: speech, physical mobility, learning, mental retardation, visual, hearing, brain injury and possibly others. Along with multiple disabilities, they can also exhibit sensory losses and behavior and or social problems. Children with multiple disabilities - also referred to as multiple exceptionalities will vary in severity and characteristics. These students may exhibit weakness in auditory processing and have speech limitations. Physical mobility will often be an area of need. These students may have difficulty attaining and remembering skills and or transferring these skills from one situation to another. Support is usually needed beyond the confines of the classroom. There are often medical implications with some of the more severe multiple disabilities which could include students with cerebral palsy and severe autism and brain injuries. There are many educational implications for these students.

What can you do: Early intervention is necessary - as soon as the child begins school Involvement of the appropriate professionals, i.e., occupational therapists, speech/language therapists, physio therapists, etc. A team approach at the school level involving external agency/community liaison who meet on a regular basis is essential. The physical arrangement of the classroom will need to best accommodate this child. Consideration of special equipment and assistive technology is essential. Integration among their peers is important to assist these students with social development. It's important to integrate multiply disabled children as much as is possible. Research does indicate that when these students attend their community school and participate in the same activities as their peers is social skills develop and are enhanced. (Sometimes these students are place full time in a regular classroom with support, however, in the majority of cases, these students are place in a developmental skills type of classroom with some integration. Ensuring that all students demonstrates respect for the multiply disabled student becomes a teacher responsibility and needs to be taken seriously with ongoing activities that develop respect from the other students in the class. An Individual Education Plan will need to be carefully planned out and adjusted on a regular basis and will need to be aligned to the child. Remember, these children are often completely dependent upon others for most/all of their daily needs. Assistive technologies may assist this child and the support team will need to decide which assistive technologies will be most appropriate. (In the IDEA act: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY. Consider whether the child requires assistive technology devices and services. (See §300.346(a)(2)(v).) A safety plan will need to be developed and is often included in the IEP. Care needs to be given in your expectations of this student to ensure the child doesn't not become frustrated. Most importantly, these idenditified children are to be given the same rights as non-identified school age children including screening, evaluation and an appropriate program and services.