



Foundations of Special Education

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

Chapter 8: Emotional and Behavior Disorders

Discussion Questions

1. Emotional and behavior disorders include a wide range of conditions with very different characteristics. Why is it important for teachers to understand the individual needs of each student rather than relying on assumptions based on a disability label?
2. IDEA uses the eligibility category Emotional Disturbance, but many educators and families prefer the term emotional and behavior disorders. Why do you think the language used to describe disabilities matters? What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of changing the terminology?
3. The IDEA definition requires that a student's emotional or behavioral characteristics be present over a long period of time, occur to a marked degree, and adversely affect educational performance. Why are these criteria important when determining eligibility for special education?
4. The chapter distinguishes between internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Compare these two types of behaviors. Why might students with internalizing behaviors be more likely to go unidentified or receive services later than students with externalizing behaviors?

5. Risk factors are associated with a greater likelihood of developing emotional or behavior disorders, but they are not causes. Why is this distinction important? How should it influence the way teachers think about students and their families?
6. The chapter emphasizes that schools cannot eliminate every risk factor in a student's life but can strengthen protective factors. Identify some protective factors that teachers can intentionally promote in their classrooms? Explain how these could improve student outcomes.
7. Anxiety, depression, eating disorders, conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder all fall within the broad category of emotional and behavior disorders. How might the educational needs of students with these different conditions vary? What classroom supports might be appropriate for each?
8. Students with emotional and behavior disorders are more likely than students with other disabilities to experience disciplinary removals and to receive services in more restrictive educational settings. Why do you think this occurs? What can schools do to improve these outcomes?
9. Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) emphasizes teaching and reinforcing expected behaviors rather than simply responding to inappropriate behavior. How does this approach differ from traditional discipline? Why might it be particularly beneficial for students with emotional and behavior disorders?
10. Imagine you are teaching a student who frequently becomes anxious during classroom activities or transitions. What proactive strategies could you use to reduce anxiety, promote participation, and help the student experience success?

11. Positive relationships with caring adults are identified as one of the strongest protective factors for children and adolescents. What specific actions can teachers take to build trusting, supportive relationships with students while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries?
12. Students with emotional and behavior disorders often require collaboration among teachers, families, school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals. Why is collaboration especially important for these students? What role should the classroom teacher play within this team?
13. Teachers are often among the first adults to notice changes in a student's behavior, mood, or emotional well-being. What warning signs described in this chapter should prompt concern? How should teachers respond while remaining within their professional responsibilities?
14. Consider a classroom that includes several students with emotional and behavior disorders. What classroom management practices and instructional strategies would help create a learning environment that benefits these students while also supporting the learning of the entire class?
15. After reading this chapter, what is the single most important idea you think every classroom teacher should understand about supporting students with emotional and behavior disorders? Explain your answer using examples from the

About the Author

Dr. Kathleen VanTol has over 35 years of experience working in the field of education. She holds a doctorate in special education from Western Michigan University and is a professor of special education at Dordt University. She is also a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and a Board Certified Advocate in Special Education.

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