

Q. What are emotional/behavioural difficulties?

A. The term 'emotional/behaviour difficulty' (EBD) is widely used to describe a very diverse range of difficulties. Generally, a student with such difficulties will present with negative behaviours which impinge on their learning and often on their social development.

Q. What are some characteristics of an emotional/behavioural difficulty?

A. The manifestation of emotional/behavioural difficulties will vary from student to student. Some of the characteristics and behaviours seen in students with an EBD include:

- Aggressive or anti-social behaviour
- Inattentiveness, distractibility, impulsivity
- Impaired social interaction
- A general inability to cope with the routine of daily tasks
- Obsessive and repetitive behaviours
- Attention-seeking behaviour, such as negative interactions or a poor attitude towards work, peers or teachers
- Depressed behaviour, such as withdrawal, self-injurious behaviour or eating disorders.

Many children who do not have emotional/behavioural difficulties may display some of these characteristics at various times during their development. However, children with an EBD generally manifest such behaviours over long periods of time.

Q. What can be done to help someone with an emotional/behavioural difficulty?

A. It is important for anyone involved in the care and education of a student with serious emotional/behavioural difficulties to establish supportive links. Usually, parents and family are the first to notice the special needs that these children have. Serious difficulties in socialisation and a general inability to cope with the routine of daily tasks become apparent within the school setting. Formal diagnosis involves assessment by a psychologist and, in some cases, a psychiatrist.

Every student is different and every situation is different also. The manifestation of behaviours associated with EBD can be extremely diverse and, consequently, approaches to supporting such a student in crisis demands flexibility and consistency, and perhaps most importantly, should offer non-judgemental nurturing. Working with or caring for a student with EBDs can be challenging emotionally. It is essential to arrive at the understanding that the 'negative behaviours' are patterns which the student has developed in order to attempt to communicate troublesome emotions and to find some closure, release or acknowledgement of their anguish. Objectivity is the key to effective management of challenging behaviour. The student's need and the origin of their upset, ultimately, should be the focus of the carer. However, it would be unrealistic to assume that all parents, teachers and carers have the necessary skills to attend to a child with very serious emotional difficulties. In such cases, expert help is required. This support may involve psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, therapists, special needs teachers and carers and may require that the child attends a special unit/school on a daily basis or, in some cases, in a residential setting.

Related Links

[CARI \(Children At Risk in Ireland\) Foundation](#)

[National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities \(NICHY\) \(US\)](#)

[Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(US\)](#)

[A.W.C.E.B.D.\(Association of Workers for Children with Emotional/Behavioural Difficulties\) \(UK\)](#)