



a Family Guide to **Special Education Services**

MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

VOLUME 8



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Family Guides for Special Education Services

- **VOLUME 1:** Autism (AU)
- **VOLUME 2:** Deaf-Blind (DB)
- **VOLUME 3:** Developmentally Delayed (DD)
- **VOLUME 4:** Emotional Disability (EmD)
- **VOLUME 5:** Hearing Impairment (HI)
- **VOLUME 6:** Intellectual Disability (ID)
- **VOLUME 7:** Language or Speech Impairment (LS)
- **VOLUME 8:** Multiple Disabilities (MD)
- **VOLUME 9:** Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
- **VOLUME 10:** Other Health Impairment (OHI)
- **VOLUME 11:** Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- **VOLUME 12:** Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- **VOLUME 13:** Visually Impaired (VI)
- **VOLUME 14:** Significant Cognitive Disability (SCD)

Other MDE Resources

- **General resources for parents:**
📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources
- **Parent Engagement and Support**
📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families
☎ 601.359.3498
- **Procedural Safeguards: Your Family's Special Education Rights**
📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Dispute-Resolution

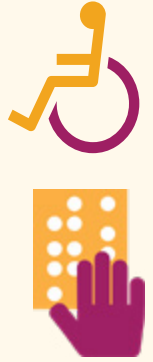
MULTIPLE DISABILITIES (MD)

MD Definition

Multiple Disabilities (MD) means concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that children cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Although disabilities in two (2) or more areas may exist in the following categories, Deaf-Blindness, Specific Learning Disability, Developmental Delay or Language or Speech Impairment, these categories do not constitute Multiple Disabilities, in and of themselves. Language/speech, along with another disability, is generally viewed as a secondary condition, not MD.

Multiple Disabilities

The child must have two (2) or more disabilities and severe educational needs that cannot be accommodated in special education programs designed for one (1) of the disabilities alone to be eligible under this category.



Evaluation Requirements

When the multidisciplinary evaluation team is considering eligibility under the Multiple Disabilities category, the categories that are evidenced by the data and a statement that the child cannot be appropriately served in a special education program designed solely for one of the disabilities must be included in the eligibility determination report.



Helpful Vocabulary

Accommodation—Tool that enables a student with a disability to better access the general curriculum. Some accommodations are applicable to instruction only (for example, an assignment that is shortened but still addresses the state standard); others are permitted for both instruction and assessment (for example, change in formatting or timing).

Adaptive skills (functional skills)—Those used in daily living such as eating, dressing, and toileting. These are also referred to as self-help skills.

Alternate assessment—Assessment of academic content used for accountability purposes. It is intended to be used with students with significant cognitive disabilities as determined by each state's eligibility criteria.

Alternate curriculum—The Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (MS AAAS) provide students with significant cognitive disabilities the skills, education, and experiences that prepare them for opportunities beyond high school. They also provide teachers a basis for curriculum development, lesson plan development, and instructional delivery which must occur.

Assistive augmentative communications (AAC)—All forms of communication (other than speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. Examples include visual schedules, first-then schedules, alphabet charts, picture boards, etc.

Assistive technology—Any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.

Cognitive—Involving conscious intellectual activity, such as thinking, reasoning, or remembering.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)—Foundational requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) stipulating that special education and related services must be provided at public expense (that is, without charge to parents), meet state requirements, include an appropriate education that leads to outcomes such as employment or higher education, and conform to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) prepared for the student.

Functional skills—Skills a student needs to live independently.

Goal—Statements that describe the skills, competencies, and qualities one should possess upon completion of a course or program. It usually involves identifying objectives, choosing attainable short-term goals, and then creating a plan for achieving those goals.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)—A law that makes available a free public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)—A document written for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with state and federal policies.

Modification—Adjustment to an assignment, test, or activity in a way that significantly simplifies or lowers the standard or alters the original measurement. Modifications change what a student is taught or expected to learn, and most are applicable to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Related services—Additional support services that a child with disabilities requires, such as transportation, occupational, physical, speech pathology services, interpreters, medical services, etc.

Self-contained classroom—A classroom—typically separated from general education classrooms but within a school—where a special education teacher is responsible for the instruction of all academic subjects.

Significant—Of a noticeably or measurably large amount.

Significant cognitive disability (SCD)—In order for a student to be classified as having a significant cognitive disability, **all** of the following criteria must be true:

- The student demonstrates significant cognitive deficits and poor adaptive skill levels (as determined by that student’s comprehensive evaluation) that prevent participation in the standard academic curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards, even with accommodations and modifications.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction in both academic and functional skills in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of those skills.
- The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is neither the result of excessive or extended absences nor is primarily the result of visual, auditory, or physical disabilities, emotional behavioral disabilities, specific learning disabilities, or social, cultural, or economic differences.

Specially designed instruction (SDI)—Universally required component that defines special education and stipulates that students with disabilities receive instruction that includes changes in content, methodology, and/or delivery. It is not dependent on setting and is a primary responsibility of special education professionals.

Multiple Disabilities Aren’t All the Same

The term multiple disabilities is general and broad. From the term, you can’t tell:

- How many disabilities a child has
- Which disabilities are involved
- How severe each disability is

To support, parent, or educate a child with multiple disabilities, it’s important to know:

- Which individual disabilities are involved
- How each disability can affect learning and daily living
- How severe (or moderate or mild) each disability is





Ways to Help at Home

Tips for Parents

Adapted from parentcenterhub.org/multiple

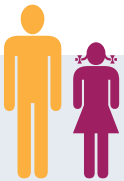
- **Learn about each of your child's disabilities.** The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child.
- **Love and play with your child.** Treat your child as you would a child without disabilities. Take your child places, read together, have fun.
- **Know your child's needs and play to her or his strengths.** Each child with multiple disabilities has learning needs, yes, but each also has her or his own set of skills, strengths, interests, enthusiasms, and preferences. These can be used to motivate your child and enrich learning, growth, and individuality.
- **Don't let the labels get you down.** What terms should you use to describe your child's disabilities? There may be many to choose from (e.g., delay, developmental disability, cerebral palsy, physical disability, speech or language disorder, multiple disabilities), and each one describes a different aspect of your child. Learn to understand and be comfortable with using each one. This will help you be an advocate for your child and her or his unique gifts and challenges.
- **Encourage your child to be independent.** For example, help your child learn self-care skills such as getting dressed, grooming, and doing laundry.
- **Team with the professionals working with your child.** As a parent, you have the right to participate in team meetings where your child's education or program is being planned. Be there. Share your unique knowledge of who your child is; advocate that the program addresses your child's needs.
- **Investigate assistive technology (AT).** AT is appropriate, even essential, for many children with multiple disabilities. Without AT, there may be many tasks they simply cannot do or will have difficulty doing. Computers, augmentative/alternative communication systems, communication boards, head sticks, and adaptive switches are some examples of helpful AT.
- **Practice and reinforce.** Do your child's disabilities affect her or his intellectual functioning? If so, she or he will be slower to learn new things and will have difficulty applying that learning in new situations. Be concrete. Give lots of hands-on opportunities for learning and practice. Give feedback immediately. Repeat the learning task in different settings.
- **Give your child chores.** Keep in mind your child's age, mental capacity, attention span, and abilities. If necessary, divide tasks into small steps. Explain and demonstrate what your child is supposed to do, step-by-step, until the chore is done. Offer help when it's needed and praise your child when things go well.

All About Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.

- AT can be low-tech (e.g., communication boards made of cardboard or fuzzy felt).
- AT can be high-tech (e.g., special-purpose computers).
- AT can be hardware (e.g., prosthetics, mounting systems, and positioning devices).
- AT can be computer hardware (e.g., special switches, keyboards, and pointing devices).
- AT can be computer software (e.g., screen readers and communication programs).
- AT can be inclusive or specialized learning materials and curriculum aids.
- AT can be specialized curricular software.
- AT can be much more—electronic devices, wheelchairs, walkers, braces, educational software, power lifts, pencil holders, eye-gaze and head trackers, etc.

**AT helps people who have difficulty speaking, typing, writing, remembering, pointing, seeing, hearing, learning, walking, and many other things.
Different disabilities require different assistive technologies.**



Supporting Children With Multiple Disabilities

Adapted from Center for Parent Information and Resources. "Multiple disabilities"—granite.pressbooks.pub/understanding-and-supporting-learners-with-disabilities/chapter/multiple-disabilities

Most children with multiple disabilities will need some level of help and support throughout their lives. How much support a child needs will depend on the disabilities involved. A child with mild multiple disabilities may only need intermittent support (i.e., support is needed every now and again, or for particular tasks). Children with multiple, more severe disabilities are likely to need ongoing support.

When considering what supports a child needs, it's helpful to think about major life activities. Major life activities include:

- Caring for oneself
- Performing manual tasks
- Seeing, hearing, eating, and sleeping
- Walking, standing, lifting, and bending
- Speaking and communicating
- Breathing
- Learning
- Reading
- Concentrating and thinking
- Working

- **Find out what your child is learning at school.** Look for ways to apply it at home. For example, if the teacher is reviewing concepts of money, take your child to the supermarket with you to help keep track of what money you're spending.
- **Look for social opportunities in the community** (e.g., scouts) or activities offered through the department of sports and leisure. Joining in and taking part will help your child develop social skills and have fun.
- **Talk with other parents whose children have disabilities**—especially those who have one or more of the same disabilities as your child. Other parents can be a fountain of practical advice and emotional support
- **Be patient, be hopeful.** Your child, like every child, has a whole lifetime to learn and grow.

Important Tips for Families of Children With Multiple Disabilities, Rare Conditions, or No Diagnosis

Adapted from navigatelifetexas.org/en/diagnosis-healthcare/children-with-multiple-disabilities-rare-conditions-undiagnosed

- Connect with a parent group for emotional support and education.
- Keep seeing your child's regular doctor. Your doctor should keep track of medical discoveries that might help you with a diagnosis. Think about using the medical home model.
- Celebrate your child's abilities. Your child needs to know that you see her or his promise and potential. When you focus on what your child can and does do well, your child will see those strengths, too. So will the rest of your child's care team and your loved ones.
- Don't just look in your city or town. Other states might have facilities with more up-to-date testing that can help with your child's diagnosis. Your insurance company, Medicaid, or your local Shriners Hospital for Children are a few choices that might help you pay for travel costs.
- Understand that your child's diagnosis might change multiple times. If you are trying to get healthcare and education services, any diagnosis might be more important right now than a final diagnosis.
- Look for university or medical center research groups that might be working to understand your child's condition or specific symptoms. Ask your doctor, talk to your support group, and search online to see if you can find any of these.
- Keep doing your research, too. You know your child better than anyone else, and you might find something your doctor doesn't know about yet. If you are overwhelmed with information, it is always okay to take a break and then go back to it.



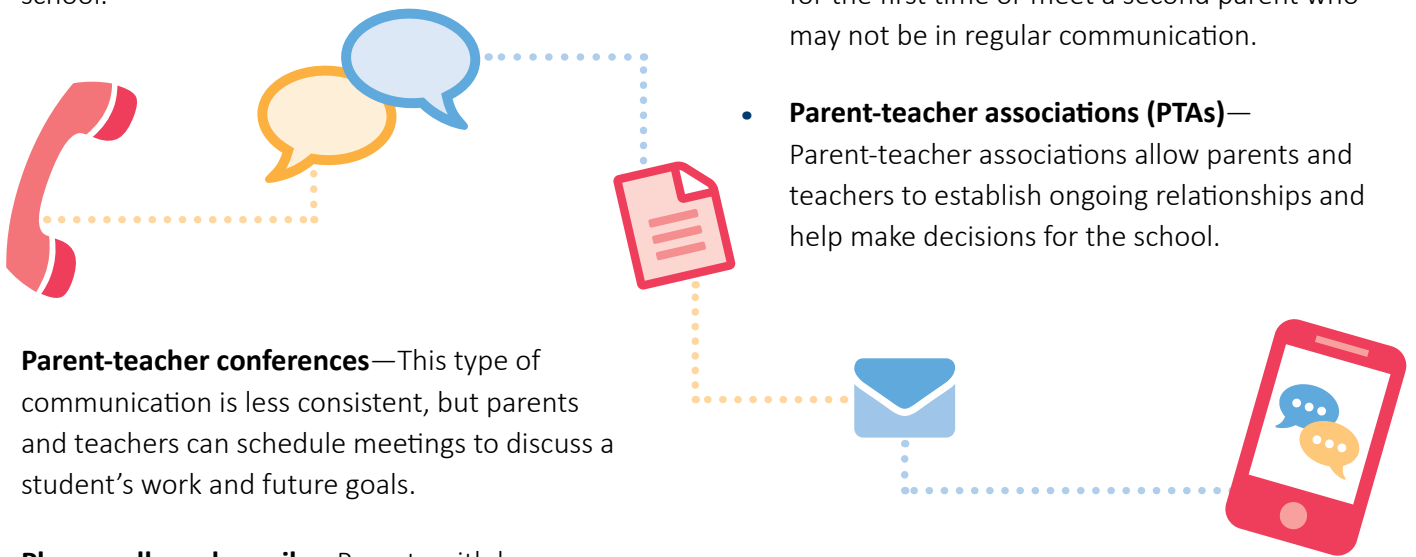


Successful Parent-Teacher Communication

Adapted from Parent-Teacher Communication: Strategies for Effective Parent Inclusion & Engagement | American University—soeonline.american.edu/blog/parent-teacher-communication

Communication is key to a successful inclusion classroom. Parents, general education teachers, and special educators can try the following tactics for successful parent-teacher communication:

- Regular in-person communication**—This type of communication works great for parents who typically drop off and pick up their children from school.
- Open houses**—Most schools host annual open houses where parents can visit their children’s classrooms. This allows teachers to meet parents for the first time or meet a second parent who may not be in regular communication.
- Parent-teacher associations (PTAs)**—Parent-teacher associations allow parents and teachers to establish ongoing relationships and help make decisions for the school.
- Parent-teacher conferences**—This type of communication is less consistent, but parents and teachers can schedule meetings to discuss a student’s work and future goals.
- Phone calls and emails**—Parents with busy work or personal schedules may not have the opportunity to go to the school or schedule conferences. These parents may be easier to reach via phone or email. Phone calls and emails can also be used by teachers to regularly communicate with parents between conferences.
- Text messages**—Some teachers use mass text messages or special messaging apps to communicate with parents. Several text services, such as Remind, cater specifically to teachers.
- Homework handouts and newsletters**—Teachers can create handouts containing information about homework and other tasks for students to take home. Teachers can also write weekly or monthly newsletters to update parents on what is going on in the classroom and how they can participate.
- Class websites**—Teachers can create classroom websites to post announcements, homework, and reminders to help ensure they don’t get lost in communication between the classroom and home. Similar methods of communication include social media sites or learning management platforms such as ClassDojo.





Resources

- Autism.com**—An online resource directory working to connect families and individuals on the autism spectrum with the therapeutic and educational services they deserve.

🔗 autism.com
- Autism Society of America**—Provides advocacy, education, information and referral, support, and community at national, state, and local levels through a strong nationwide network of affiliates. Autism Society also gives updates on the latest autism news and press releases.

🔗 autism-society.org
- Best Buddies International**—A national organization dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation of people with intellectual and development disabilities. The intellectual disability community that Best Buddies serves includes, but is not limited to, people with Down syndrome, autism, Fragile X, Williams syndrome, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury, and other undiagnosed disabilities.

🔗 bestbuddies.org

☎ 800.892.8339
- Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)**—Provides information about characteristics of multiple disabilities, impairments, causes, information on contacts for assessment, and support. It also provides tips for teachers and parents and a list of related resources, articles, and organizations to contact.

🔗 parentcenterhub.org/multiple
- Child Mind Institute**—An independent, national nonprofit that focuses on the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders and offers guidance on how to respond to parents' challenges and concerns regarding a child who needs support along with extensive information about concerns and disorders and guides for getting help and caring for the individual.

🔗 childmind.org/audience/for-families

☎ 212.308.3118
- Family Connect**—Provides information about family life when your child has multiple disabilities, pressures on the family, and strategies for parents, especially ones who have other children.

🔗 familyconnect.org/multiple-disabilities

☎ 800.232.5463
- Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (LLS)**—LLS seeks to cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease, and myeloma and improve the quality of life of patients and their families. LLS provides free information and support services relating to diagnosis, treatment, management, facts, and statistics.

🔗 lls.org/disease-information

☎ 800.955.4572
- Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) Office of Special Disability Programs**—A state agency that provides resources to help Mississippians with disabilities overcome obstacles and face challenges. MDRS specializes in assisting individuals with the most severe physical disabilities to help them remain active in their homes and communities. Services are provided through an individualized plan of care and based on need as determined by functional assessment.

🔗 mdrs.ms.gov/SpecialPrograms

☎ 800.443.1000
- The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) Office of Special Education**—A service-oriented office that seeks to improve the education experience for children with disabilities.

🔗 mdek12.org/OSE
- Mississippi Hearing-Vision Project**—A federally funded project led by the University of Southern Mississippi College of Education and Human Sciences that provides technical assistance and training for individuals living in Mississippi between the ages of birth and 21 years with varying degrees of hearing and vision loss. Any parent, family member, or service/care provider of an individual, birth through 21 years of age with both vision and hearing loss, may request services.

🔗 usm.edu/education-human-sciences/mississippi-hearing-vision-project.php

☎ 601.266.4568

- National Center on Health, Physical Activity & Disability (NCHPAD)**—The premier resource for information on physical activity, health promotion, and disability, serving individuals with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities across the lifespan. NCHPAD features a variety of online resources and services.

📌 nchpad.org

☎️ 800.900.8086
- National Federation of the Blind**—An organization that offers many programs, services, and resources for parents of blind children. Explore the links to resources and contact your state affiliate to ask about additional programs available in your local area.

📌 nfb.org/about-us/state-affiliates/mississippi

📌 nfb.org
- National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC)**—Provides a list of disability resources organized by subject to help parents find agencies, organizations, and online resources for treatment, benefits, and services.

📌 naric.com
- U.S. Department of Education**—Their mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

📌 ed.gov
- U.S. Department of Education-Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services**—The mission of the Office of Special Education Programs is to lead the nation's efforts to improve outcomes for children with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families, ensuring access to fair, equitable, and high-quality education and services.

📌 ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers

MDE-specific resources include:

- General resources for parents:**

📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources
- Parent Engagement and Support**

📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families

☎️ 601.359.3498
- Procedural Safeguards: Your Family's Special Education Rights**

📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Dispute-Resolution

Acknowledgments

