

Understanding Adverse Educational Impact within the Autism Evaluation Process



WHAT IS ADVERSE EDUCATIONAL IMPACT?

For a student to qualify for special education services, results of a school-based evaluation must support the presence of (a) an educational disability and (b) documentation that the disability adversely affects the student's educational performance in his/her learning environment. This second piece refers to adverse educational impact, which is defined as any time that the student's educational performance is impacted by a disability such that s/he needs the support of specially designed instruction or related services beyond what can be provided within the regular educational environment (TDOE, 2018).

HOW DO TEAMS DETERMINE ADVERSE EDUCATIONAL IMPACT WITHIN THE AUTISM EVALUATION PROCESS?

A comprehensive evaluation should be performed by a multidisciplinary team using a variety of sources of information that are

sensitive to cultural, linguistic, and environmental factors, and should include the following:

- developmental history,
- health/medical history,
- behavioral observations,
- communication skills, including pragmatic language;
- cognitive/developmental skills;
- social-emotional and behavioral functioning, including adaptive behavior and social skills;
- sensory processing/sensory regulation; and
- academic skills.

Once the team has determined that the student has a disability, the school team, including the student's caregiver(s), then use the information gathered to determine how the student's disability affects his/her involvement and progress in the general education setting.

ADVERSE EDUCATIONAL IMPACT AND THE AUTISM EVALUATION PROCESS

Special education law has established that a child's educational needs include academic, social, health, emotional, communicative, physical, and vocational skills. It's important to remember that adverse educational impact does not just apply to academic performance and grades but includes other areas of functioning as well. For students on the autism spectrum, adverse educational impact can present in a variety of ways, including possible difficulties in the following areas:

- **Pragmatic language:** Understanding nonliteral usage of words and sentences and understanding different forms of gestures and facial expressions.
- **Relationship skills:** Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.
- **Self-management:** Regulating one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.
- **Executive function:** Managing time, completing tasks, and engaging in activities of daily living.
- **Transitions:** Transitioning between activities or tasks within the classroom or transitioning from one class to another.

Remember that for autism it is important to consider the above areas of functioning when determining adverse educational impact. If a student is not accessing the educational environment in the same way as his or her peers, it will be important to identify the ways in which adverse educational impact is present.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Check out these important points to remember about adverse educational impact as it pertains to autism evaluations:

A child's educational needs include not only academics but also social, health, emotional, communicative, physical, and vocational skills. If a student is not accessing the educational environment in the same way as his or her peers, it is important to identify in what ways adverse educational impact is present.

As part of the comprehensive evaluation process, direct and indirect information pertaining to all domains of functioning should be gathered and incorporated to best understand the student's level of functioning.

This information should then be compiled to help determine what interventions are appropriate to help the student access the curriculum and educational environment.

RESOURCES

For more information on the autism evaluation process, see the following links:

Autism Evaluation Guidance:

tn.gov/education/families/student-support/special-education/special-education-evaluation-eligibility.html

Tennessee Department of Education Special Education Framework:

tn.gov/content/tn/education/families/student-support/special-education.html