

Developmental Disabilities 101 Supplemental Handout

The Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act is codified in the California Welfare and Institutions Code. You may find the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act and related laws in Divisions 4.1, 4.5, and 4.7 of the Welfare and Institutions Code and Title 14 of the Government Code.

Per California's Lanterman Act:

“Developmental disability” means a disability that originates **before an individual attains 18 years of age**; continues, or can be expected to continue, indefinitely; and constitutes a substantial disability for that individual.

As defined by the Director of Developmental Services, in consultation with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, this term shall include (the following categories of conditions): **intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, and autism, and a 5th Category**. This term shall also include disabling conditions found to be closely related to intellectual disability or to require treatment similar to that required for individuals with an intellectual disability but shall not include other conditions that are solely physical in nature. The disability must present a significant disability in three or more functional life areas.

A bit more about each of the categories:

Intellectual Disability: A category of developmental disability. According to the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-5), an Intellectual Disability involves impairments of general mental abilities that impact adaptive functioning in three areas. These areas impact how a person copes with everyday tasks.

- Conceptual skills (learning, receptive/expressive language, self-direction) — language and literacy; reasoning and memory; time and number concepts; and self-direction.

- Social skills— interpersonal skills, social responsibility, judgment, self-esteem, empathy, social problem solving, and the ability to follow rules and to avoid being victimized.
- Practical skills (self-care, capacity for independent living, economic self-sufficiency) —activities of daily living (personal care), healthcare, travel/transportation, schedules/routines, safety, use of money, organizing school and work tasks.

Symptoms must begin in the person’s developmental period, and are considered chronic, or life-long.

Cerebral Palsy: A category of developmental disability, also a physical disability. Cerebral palsy (CP) is a condition that affects the control over one’s own movements. CP most often starts at birth or within the first few years of life. The early signs usually appear before age 3. Symptoms may change over time, and may differ from person to person and may include:

- Difficulty with fine motor tasks, such as writing or using scissors
- Difficulty maintaining balance or walking
- Involuntary movements

Some people with cerebral palsy may have other medical disorders, including seizures or cognitive impairments.

Epilepsy: Can be a category of developmental disability. A neurological condition that makes people susceptible to seizures. A seizure is a change in sensation, awareness, or behavior brought about by a brief electrical disturbance in the brain. This means there is a change in how the brain cells send electrical signals. Signs of seizures may cause:

- Moments of sensory disruption
- Short periods of unconsciousness

- Staring spells
- Convulsions

Some may have only one symptom and others may have multiple symptoms. Epilepsy can be caused by anything that affects the brain, including tumors, strokes, genetics, or other causes.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A category of developmental disability. A complex and broad range of conditions characterized by a variety of symptoms. It is neurodevelopmental in nature. The term spectrum refers to the wide range of symptoms, skills and levels of functioning. Signs may include deficits or differences in:

- Social-emotional reciprocity -- for example, abnormal social approach and difficulty of normal back-and-forth conversation; reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; difficulty or failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.
- Nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction.
- Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships -- for example, difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; absence of interest in peers.

A person with autism may demonstrate restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, such as:

- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech (e.g., simple motor stereotypies, lining up toys or flipping objects, echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases).
- Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns or verbal nonverbal behavior – for example, extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions, rigid thinking patterns, greeting rituals, the need to take a same route or eat the same food every day.

- Restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus – for example, a strong attachment to unusual objects, or a perseverative interest.
- Hyper or hypo reactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment – for example, an apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement.

A note about the '5th Category'...

There are several conditions that may present in an individual and may impact an individual's areas of functioning in a way that would be categorized as eligible under the '5th Category', per the Lanterman Act. The diagnosis alone does not determine this eligibility, just as many individuals with autism spectrum disorder may not qualify for CA's I/DD services system, as the spectrum encompasses a range. Below are just two examples of diagnoses that may or may not fall under the 5th Category, per CA's Lanterman Act eligibility for Regional Center Services:

Traumatic brain injury (TBI): Can be a developmental disability if it occurs in the developmental period of one's life. A form of acquired brain injury. It occurs when a sudden trauma causes damage to the brain. TBI can result when the head suddenly and violently hits an object, or when an object pierces the skull and brain tissue. Symptoms of a TBI can be range in significance, depending on the extent of the damage to the brain. In CA, if the TBI occurs before the age of 18, a person may qualify for Regional Center services through Lanterman Act eligibility.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD): A complex, neurodevelopmental disability caused by prenatal alcohol poisoning to the developing brain and body in utero. The result is deficits that occur in thinking, learning, social skills, self-

regulation, mental health, adaptive functioning (independent living skills) and physical health that often require intervention, regardless of IQ.