



# INTRODUCTION TO NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

In the 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). In the DSM-5, the section, “Disorders Usually First Diagnosed in Infancy, Childhood, or Adolescence” was replaced with a new section, “Neurodevelopmental Disorders.”

According to the APA, neurodevelopmental disorders are a group of conditions with onset in the developmental period. The disorders typically manifest early in development, often before the child enters grade school, and are characterized by developmental deficits that produce impairments of personal, social, academic, or occupational functioning. The range of developmental deficits varies from very specific limitations of learning or control of executive functions to global impairments of social skills or intelligence.

Neurodevelopmental disorders included in the *Collection* are:

- Intellectual Disability
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Motor Disorders

## Co-Occurring Disorders (Dual Diagnosis)

Neurodevelopmental disorders frequently co-occur. For example, individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may have intellectual disability, and children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may also have a specific learning disorder.

In addition, youth with a neurodevelopmental disorder may also have a diagnosable mental health disorder. Unfortunately, symptoms of mental health disorders are sometimes attributed to the primary neurodevelopmental disorder. Clinicians who do not recognize the possibility of dual diagnosis may leave mental health issues untreated and exacerbate symptoms. A dual diagnosis may cause significant clinical impairment, placing additional challenges on youth with developmental disorders and their families and greatly reduce quality of life. For this reason, it is important that accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment be obtained.

Service providers may use structured or semi-structured tools developed for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders to improve the accuracy of the mental health diagnosis. A full psychiatric/behavioral assessment is a critical step to help accurately diagnose a co-occurring mental health disorder.

***The Collection of Evidenced-Based Practices for Children and Adolescents with Mental Health Treatment Needs, 10<sup>th</sup> Collection***  
*Virginia Commission on Youth, 2025*

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