

# UNDERSTANDING EVALUATIONS

## Educational versus Medical Disability

**Eligibility for special education services is based on different criteria than a medical diagnosis.**

A medical disability is diagnosed by a healthcare professional. An educational disability follows the state and federal special education criteria.



**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) identifies learning and developmental disabilities in an educational setting.**

IDEA is a federal special education law that provides rights and protections to students with disabilities to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

**A Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) diagnosis identifies which mental health conditions may impact a child's overall well-being.**

The DSM is a medical book of mental health conditions and brain-based disorders.



**Both DSM and IDEA can help determine which supports and interventions are needed, but they serve different purposes in addressing a child's needs.**

States must use IDEA policies and guidelines to identify a student as having a disability in the school setting. A medical diagnosis can be part of the information used. Healthcare professionals specialize in medical needs and schools specialize in educational needs.

There are differences in eligibility criteria and services provided from a medical specialist versus a school. Families are encouraged to share private or medical evaluations with the school, as the school will consider the provided information. But, the outside diagnoses alone do not satisfy the standards for special education eligibility.