

*Socially Maladjustment vs
Emotional Disturbance*

Why does it matter?

- One is a disability and provides protections under IDEA while the other does not guarantee the child special treatment
- Important in determining whether or not to conduct an initial evaluation
- Extremely important when conducting MDR when looking at students with disabilities under 504 and IDEA
- Extremely important in determining discipline measures to take
- Also important in determining interventions

Definition of Emotional Disturbance according to Bulletin 1508

- Emotional Disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a student's educational performance: (Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.)
 1. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
 2. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
 3. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
 4. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and/or
 5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Definition of Socially Maladjustment

- SM has never been defined in the federal law, the description of this construct has been left to individuals and organizations within the field, as well as to the state and local education agencies responsible for implementing special education services.
 - Many experts in the mental health and education field define social maladjustment as behaviors that are willful, deliberate, planned, or otherwise within the control of the student.

Definition of Socially Maladjustment (Continued)

- Researchers from the University of Oregon studying this issue have concluded, “Most concerned researchers, practitioners, writers, and agencies who have made serious attempts to tackle this question have concluded that [social maladjustment] can be operationalized as a pattern of engagement in purposive antisocial, destructive and delinquent behavior.”

Common Characteristics associated with Socially Maladjustment

- Student engages in antisocial and delinquent behavior within the context of a deviant peer group.
- Student maintains social status within deviant peer group by engaging in antisocial and delinquent behavior.
- Problem behavior is “willful;” individual is making a “choice” to do it and could stop the problem behavior if they desired.
- Problem behavior is purposive, goal-oriented, or instrumental; student engages in it to “get something” they want.
- Ability to display appropriate emotional responses to certain situations in order to manipulate

Common Characteristics associated with Socially Maladjustment (Continued)

- Behavior for the socially maladjusted student is motivated by self-gain and strong survival skills.
- Student with SM believes that behavioral rules should not apply to them, or that they should be able to self-select their own rules of conduct.
- Students with SM are shrewd, callous, streetwise, and lack remorse.
- Students with SM often show little or no remorse when they have acted inappropriately (Theodore, Akin-Little, & Little, 2004).

Common Characteristics associated with Socially Maladjustment (Continued)

- it is possible for a student to exhibit behaviors characteristic of both disorder and then appropriately be certified as emotionally impaired
- Social maladjustment includes those disorders that, by their very nature, tend to manifest in an externalized response. These are most commonly referred to as conduct disorders, oppositional disorders or antisocial disorders.

Common Characteristics associated with Emotional Disturbance

- Display symptoms of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem.
- Worry excessively, present with physical complaints, and display feelings of inferiority in social situations.
- Socially withdrawn, nervous, and lacking in self-confidence.
- Inability to form interpersonal relationships.

Common Characteristics associated with Emotional Disturbance (Continued)

- An inappropriate manifestation of physical symptoms or fears in response to school or personal difficulties
- Inappropriate behavior (e.g., dangerously aggressive towards others, self-destructive, severely withdrawn, non-communicative).
- May exhibit distorted thinking, excessive anxiety, bizarre motor acts, and abnormal mood swings.

Differences between ED and SM

- An emotionally disturbed student would have a chemical/ neurological of a known or unknown origin. Someone with schizophrenia, depression, anxiety would fall into this category. Socially maladjusted would be more of the student who grows up in a bad neighborhood and "embraces" it fully. A gang member, for instance, may qualify by school checklists for an emotional issues. However, it is by choice or habit, not by a chemical or neurological issue.

Assessment Tools

- Survey of Common Characteristics Emotionally Impaired vs. Socially Maladjustment
- Differential Scales of Social Maladjustment and Emotional Disturbance (DSSMED)
- Behavior Assessment System for Children –2nd edition (BASC-2)

Survey of Common Characteristics Emotionally Impaired vs. Socially Maladjustment

- Survey in which you rate certain behaviors on a scale from 1 to 5 and then add up the behaviors checked off for ED and SM.

Differential Scales of Social Maladjustment and Emotional Disturbance (DSSMED)

Comprised of 46 items using a 5-point Likert-type scale that measures the behavioral symptoms of social maladjustment or emotional disturbance.

Accurately differentiates between individuals with social maladjustment and those with emotional disturbances.

Can be used as a universal screening instrument in the process of pre-referral identification of socially and emotionally “at risk” students.

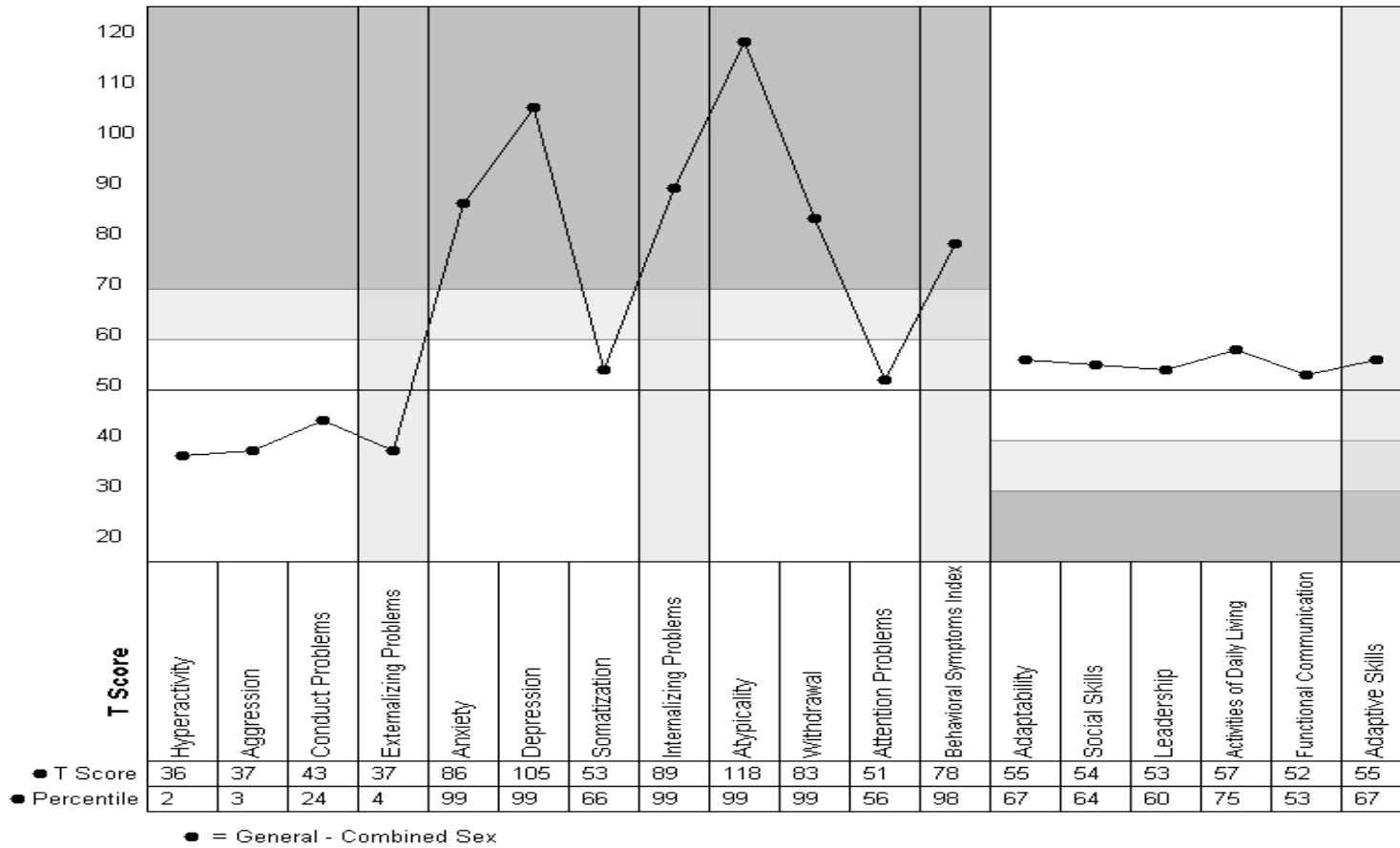
Behavior Assessment System for Children –2nd edition (BASC-2)

- Socially maladjusted students would likely have elevated scores in:
 - Leadership
 - Social Skills
 - Externalizing Problems
 - Activities of Daily Living
 - Functional Communication
 - Conduct Problems

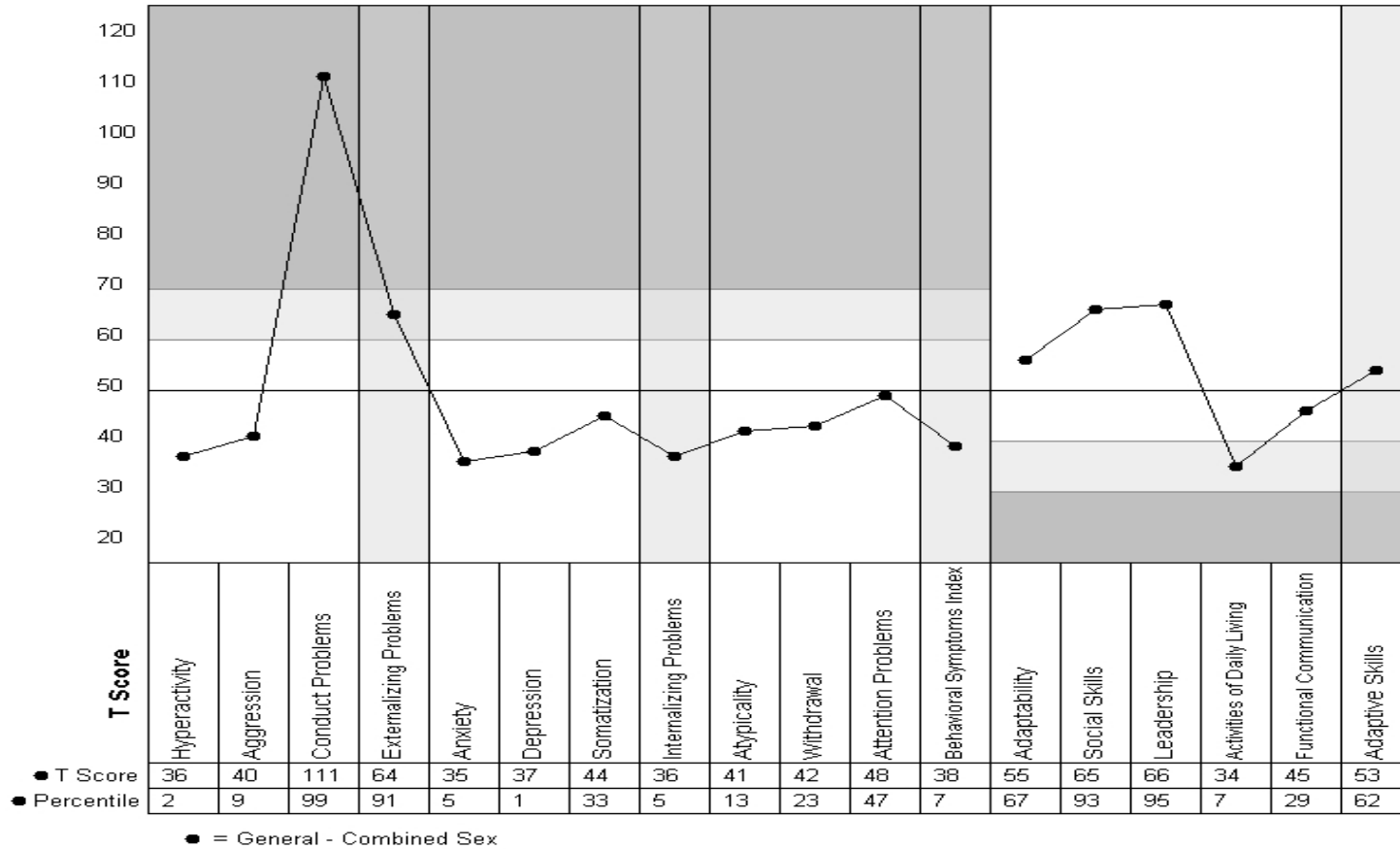
Behavior Assessment System for Children – 2nd edition (BASC-2)

- Emotionally Disturbed students would likely have elevated scores in:
 - Internalizing Problems
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Withdrawal
 - Atypicality

BASC-2 graph for student that is potentially ED



BASC-2 graph for student that is potentially SM



Functional Behavior Assessment and Manifestation Determination Reviews

- Determining the function of the behavior
 - Was the behavior exhibited in order to alleviate stress?
 - Was the behavior exhibited so the student could gain the approval of his peers or a way to gain a sense of power and control?

Court Cases

- *Springer v. Fairfax County Sch. Bd.*, 27 IDELR 367 (4th Cir. 1998).
- The parents of a student who failed the 11th grade unilaterally placed him at a private school and requested the district fund the student's placement. According to the parents, the student qualified for special education due to a serious emotional disturbance. The district concluded the student did not have a SED and refused to fund the private placement. At due process, a level I hearing officer agreed with the parents, and granted the request for reimbursement. On appeal by the district, a level II hearing officer reversed. A district court upheld the level II decision and the parents appealed to circuit court. The circuit court agreed with the district court, finding the student did not meet the eligibility criteria for SED. **The student's misbehavior, which included 29 truancy, drug use and theft, was not consistent with SED, it was consistent with his diagnosed social maladjustment.** A diagnosis of social maladjustment alone does not qualify a student as SED. The circuit court noted that none of the psychologists who evaluated the student concluded he was SED, not even the parents' expert. **The student maintained satisfactory relationships with teachers and peers, and did not manifest "pervasive" unhappiness or depression. Further, the student's educational difficulties were the result of his misbehavior, not a SED.** Accordingly, the student was not eligible for special education and the district was not required to reimburse the parents for the costs of the unilateral private placement. The parents' objection to the district court's refusal to admit the testimony of a certain expert witness was rejected by the circuit court. There was no evidence this witness was unable to testify at the administrative proceedings, and the witness was not going to furnish new evidence. The district court decision was upheld.