

## DSM5TR Definition of a Mental Disorder

Each disorder identified in Section II of the manual (excluding those in the chapters “Medication-Induced Movement Disorders and Other Adverse Effects of Medication” and “Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention”) must meet the definition of a mental disorder. Although no definition can capture all aspects of the range of disorders contained in DSM-5, the following elements are required:

- **A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) and conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are not mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual, as described above.**

The diagnosis of a mental disorder should have clinical utility: it should help clinicians to determine prognosis, treatment plans, and potential treatment outcomes for their patients. However, the diagnosis of a mental disorder is not equivalent to a need for treatment. Need for treatment is a complex clinical decision that takes into consideration symptom severity, symptom salience (e.g., the presence of suicidal thoughts), the individual’s distress (mental pain) associated with the symptom(s), disability related to the individual’s symptoms, risks and benefits of available treatments, and other factors (e.g., psychiatric symptoms complicating other illness). Clinicians may thus encounter individuals whose symptoms do not meet full criteria for a mental disorder, but who demonstrate a clear need for treatment or care.

The fact that some individuals do not show all symptoms indicative of a diagnosis should not be used to justify limiting their access to appropriate care.

It should be noted that the definition of mental disorder was developed for clinical, public health, and research purposes. Additional information is usually required beyond that contained in the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria in order to make legal judgments on such issues as criminal responsibility, eligibility for disability compensation, and competency.