

Communicating with People Who Have Intellectual Disability

Don't "Talk Down." Never treat adults with Intellectual Disability as if they were children. Avoid "baby talk." It is insulting, and it will not make you easier to understand.

Listen Carefully. Give your full attention. Never assume the person has nothing to say.

Be Clear. Communicating in a clear and caring way is very important. Use simple words and sentences. Break down information or instructions into small steps. Present one step at a time. Repeat yourself, if necessary.

Be Understanding. People with Intellectual Disability are often aware of their limitation, but they have the same needs and emotions as anyone else.

Be Respectful. Always treat people who have Intellectual Disability with respect.

Replace the Myths with the Truth

Intellectual Disability is a condition that is often misunderstood. This lack of understanding has generated myths which have contributed to incorrect assumptions about Intellectual Disability.

Myth: People with Intellectual Disability are mentally ill.

Truth: Intellectual Disability and mental illness are two different conditions. Intellectual Disability is a lifelong condition that begins in childhood. It affects a person's learning ability. Mental illness causes emotional difficulties, and can occur at any time in life. In most cases, mental illness can be successfully treated.

Myth: People with Intellectual Disability don't have the same feelings as other people.

Truth: People with Intellectual Disability seek happiness and love like everyone else. They can also feel hurt or upset by unkind behaviour.

Myth: People with Intellectual Disability are violent.

Truth: People with Intellectual Disability are no more likely to be violent than other people.

Myth: Intellectual Disability cannot be prevented.

Truth: Some cases of Intellectual Disability can be prevented through newborn screening tests, designed to identify and treat conditions that cause Intellectual Disability. Other preventative measures include good prenatal care, avoiding alcohol and other drugs during pregnancy, and screening tests designed to detect lead poisoning.

Cochrane Temiskaming Resource Centre

Offers Community Support Workers, Behaviour Assessment and Intervention, Psychometric Assessment Services, Speech & Language Services, Day Program, and Residential Services for adults.

Access Better Living

Offers Respite.

Association for Community Living

Offers Residential and Day Program Services, Respite Services, Supported Independent Living, and Supported Employment Programs.

Children's Treatment Centre

Offers Social Work, Occupational Therapy, and Physiotherapy.

Community Care Access Centre

Offers Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, and Health Education Programs.

Kunuwanimano Child and Family Services

Offers Family Services, Academic Upgrading, and Cultural Awareness Programs.

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Offers the Ontario Disability Support Program, and Special Services at Home.

Misiway Milopemahtesewin Community Health Centre

Offers Counselling, and Health Education Programs.

Northern College Employment Services

Offers Job Connect Program, and Community Disability Support Program.

Timmins Learning Centre

Offers Academic Upgrading.

Family Village

<http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/>

J. P. Das Developmental Disabilities Centre, University of Alberta

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~jpdasddc/parents/index.html>

Linking People with Disabilities to a World of Resources

<http://www.enablelink.org/index.html>

Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities

<http://www.oadd.org>

Special Olympics Northern Ontario

<http://www.specialolympicsnorth.com>

Special Olympics Ontario

http://www.osoinc.com/soo/school_overview.html

University of London: UK (Learning About Intellectual Disabilities and Health)

<http://www.intellectualdisability.info/home.htm>

COCHRANE TEMISKAMING *Resource Centre*



PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

What is Intellectual Disability?

A person who has Intellectual Disability has a slower rate of general intellectual development and significant difficulties with everyday living skills (adaptive behaviour skills). Onset of these challenges occurs prior to eighteen (18) years of age.

General Intellectual Development. A person's general intelligence involves their ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly, and learn from experience. A person with Intellectual Disability learns more slowly and with greater difficulty.

Everyday Living Skills. A person's everyday living skills (adaptive behaviour skills), involves their ability to function and meet environmental demands on a daily basis. These include using skills for communicating (e.g., speech, language, listening), functioning in the community, applying academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics), caring for their living environment, protecting their health (e.g., against illness or injury), engaging and planning in leisure and recreational activities, providing personal care (e.g., eating, dressing, bathing, grooming, hygiene), exercising independence, responsibility, and self-control; interacting socially, and working. A person with Intellectual Disability has greater difficulty learning to function independently.

Assessment of General Intellectual and Adaptive Behaviour Skills

Psychologists/Psychological Associates make an important contribution to the diagnosis of Intellectual Disability through psychological testing (i.e., general intellectual and everyday living skills).

What Causes Intellectual Disability?

Any condition that impairs the brain's development before birth, during birth, or in childhood, can cause Intellectual Disability. In many cases, the cause of Intellectual Disability is not known.

Down syndrome is a non-inherited disorder that affects physical and mental development. Tests during pregnancy can help detect this disorder.

Fragile X syndrome is a leading inherited cause of Intellectual Disability. Genetic testing can identify carriers and people who have this syndrome.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the leading preventable cause of Intellectual Disability in North America. FASD occurs in some children whose mothers drank alcohol during pregnancy. Children with FASD have behavioural, mental, and sometimes physical birth defects.

Lead poisoning in childhood can cause permanent brain damage. Fortunately, it can often be prevented, especially if detected and treated before damage occurs.

Head injuries caused by automobile crashes, falls, or child abuse, can harm a child's brain.

Infections during pregnancy that can lead to Intellectual Disability include cytomegalovirus (CMV), rubella, chicken pox, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), and other sexually transmitted diseases (STD). A pregnant woman may show no signs of infection, but it can still harm her unborn baby. **Drugs** in a pregnant woman's body can harm her unborn baby. These can include illegal drugs (e.g., cocaine, heroin, ecstasy), and certain prescription drugs (consult your physician or pharmacist). **Premature birth** can lead to complications, including permanent brain damage.

Other causes of Intellectual Disability include other genetic disorders, health problems during pregnancy, poor nutrition, and neglect.

Intellectual Disability Affects People in Different Ways

Most people with Intellectual Disability are mildly affected. They may learn a little more slowly than others. However, with early intervention in infancy, special education in childhood, and support as adults, most can lead independent lives.

A small number have more serious problems. Some people with Intellectual Disability may be unable to work or live on their own. With support, they can succeed to the best of their abilities.

People with Intellectual Disability may also have physical health problems. These may include hearing and vision problems, seizures, heart problems, or cerebral palsy (a disorder that affects movement, balance, and coordination).

Special Supports, Programs, and Resources to Help People with Intellectual Disability

People with Intellectual Disability can develop their abilities to the fullest with support and understanding. They have hopes and dreams like everyone else, and they have a lot to offer as members of the community. However, they often require and benefit from special services in the community that enable them to live more independent lives (e.g., self-care, transportation, cooking, caring for an apartment, work).

Family Support: Family support refers to a variety of services that allow a person with Intellectual Disability to live at home. Services that may be offered include respite, child care, transportation, counseling, training, recreation, and financial assistance.

Early Intervention Services: These services identify infants and toddlers with Intellectual Disability, and provide instruction and therapy as early as possible (usually before three years of age). The Infant Development Program at the Cochrane Temiskaming Resource Centre provides this service.

Community Resources: Places that may offer services or referrals for people with Intellectual Disability include schools, churches, local businesses, public and private agencies, and hospitals.

Residential or Community Living Programs: Options may include living in a Group Home, which provides professional care and supervision for a small group of people with Intellectual Disability; Supervised Home or Apartment, which involves semi-independent living with staff located on site; and Independent Living, which provides an opportunity to live on one's own with support, which is provided as needed.

Government Programs: Government programs, such as Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD), and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), pay monthly benefits to people who have Intellectual Disability. Other funding support may be available through Special Services At Home (SSAH), and Respite programs.

Special Education Can Help People with Intellectual Disability

The Education Act: The Education Act requires all provinces in Canada to provide a free, appropriate, public education, to children with Intellectual Disability. This includes related services such as transportation, speech and language therapy, if needed, and as much contact as possible with other students.

Inclusion: Inclusion (sometimes called integration, or "mainstreaming"), means a child with Intellectual Disability spends part or all of the day in classes and activities with children who do not have Intellectual Disability.

Vocational Education: This may include job training, job coaches, and other services to help people with Intellectual Disability find and keep jobs. People with Intellectual Disability have much to offer!

Parenting a Child with Intellectual Disability

This process can be rewarding and exhausting. These tips can help you cope.

- Get information about Intellectual Disability and the services available in your area. Ask questions. It's your right and your responsibility to take part in decisions involving your child.
- Find programs that fit your child's needs. Be assertive! Ask for specific programs if you feel they will help your child.
- Encourage your child to do his or her best. Consider your child's successes and abilities. Don't dwell on limitations.
- Think of the whole family. It is important to understand that a sibling may have trouble coping with a sister or brother who has Intellectual Disability.
- You're not alone. Help is available for you and your child!