

ABOUT INTELLECTUAL, COGNITIVE AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

An intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and in adaptive behavior, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills and originates before the age of 18.⁸ Cognitive impairments are not caused by any one disease or condition. Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and conditions such as stroke and traumatic brain injury can cause cognitive impairment. Some causes of cognitive impairment are related to treatable health issues (e.g., medication side effects, vitamin B12 deficiency, and depression).⁹

A developmental disability means a severe, chronic disability of an individual 5 years of age or older that 1) is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of these, 2) manifests itself before an individual turns 22 years of age, 3) is likely to continue indefinitely, 4) results in substantial functional limitations in three or more areas of major life activity (e.g. self-care, language, learning, mobility) and 5) requires services, supports or other assistance for a lifelong or extended duration.¹⁰



Developmental and intellectual disabilities are not exactly the same. Developmental disability is used as an umbrella term that includes intellectual disability but also includes physical disabilities. Some developmental disabilities are only physical, such as blindness from birth. Some individuals have both physical and intellectual disabilities stemming from genetic or other physical causes (e.g., Down Syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome). Sometimes intellectual disabilities can stem from nonphysical causes, such as the level of child stimulation and adult responsiveness.¹¹

⁸ American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. FAQ on Intellectual Disability. Retrieved from http://www.aaid.org/content_104.cfm

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Brain Initiative. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain/>

¹⁰ Abbreviated from the definition of developmental disability as outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 102 (8)

¹¹ American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, FAQ on Intellectual Disability. Retrieved from http://www.aaid.org/content_104.cfm

¹² Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2010, March 17). Disability Statistics from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC). Retrieved from www.disabilitystatistics.org

According to the 2008 American Community Survey, approximately 13.5 million individuals in the U.S., or 4.8% of the U.S. population, have a cognitive disability.¹² In Delaware, approximately 36,000 individuals (4.5% of all Delawareans) have a cognitive disability.

Caring for people with intellectual/ cognitive and developmental disabilities

The following are some suggestions for having successful interactions with individuals with intellectual/cognitive disabilities.

- Allow plenty of time to teach a new task.
- Use repetition with precise language and simple wording.
- Treat adults as adults and children as children.
- Do not pretend to understand if you do not. Ask additional questions to clarify any information a patient may be sharing with you.
- Reduce distractions.
- Use pictures or objects to convey meaning, if appropriate.
- Allow a “wait time” for the patient to process information or respond to a question or to make a comment.
- Many people with cognitive/intellectual disabilities try to give the answer that they think you want to hear. Phrase questions in a neutral way to get accurate information and verify responses by asking each question in a different way.

Resources

Delaware Division of Developmental Disabilities Services
Woodbrook Professional Center
1056 South Governor’s Avenue, Suite 101
Dover, DE19904
1-866-552-5758 24-Hour Toll Free
302-744-9600 Phone
302-744-9632 Fax
<http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/ddds/index.html>

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
501 3rd Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20001
800-424-3688 Toll Free
202-387-1968 Phone
202-387-2193 Fax
<http://www.aidd.org>

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative
Locations in New Castle, Kent and Sussex Counties
800-870-3284 Toll Free (Delaware only)
302-651-6790 Phone
302-651-6794 TDD
302-651-6793 Fax
<http://www.dati.org>

“Overcoming Communication Barriers: Working with Patients with Intellectual Disabilities”
A reprint from *Australian Family Physician*, 38, 1-2, January/February 2009
<http://www.racgp.org.au/afp/200901/200901chew.pdf>