

Intellectual Disability

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A child with an intellectual disability often demonstrates intellectual functioning (e.g. learning, reasoning, problem solving) that is significantly below average. In addition to this, intellectual disability also affects that child's adaptive behaviour including independence, self-help skills (e.g. dressing, toileting) and social skills. These may vary according to the age of the child.

The causes of intellectual disability can vary from genetic conditions, injuries, infections or problems around the time of birth. For many children however, no cause is found.

The age of onset for these conditions to occur is during the developmental period. A formal assessment needs to be carried out in order for a child to be diagnosed with an intellectual disability. This is completed by a psychologist or qualified professional in the assessment of cognitive and adaptive behaviour.

Children with intellectual disabilities must be below average in both measured intelligence and adaptive behaviour. The range of intellectual disability is from mild to moderate to severe. It is believed that children with intellectual disabilities can be greatly assisted by early intervention and appropriate education.

All children with intellectual disabilities will learn and develop new skills, albeit at their own pace. They will often need plenty of time to review and practice new concepts and skills.

Developmental Areas

Children may display some of the following characteristics

Social and Emotional Development

- May experience delays in learning skills of sharing, turn-taking and playing by the rules
- May exhibit frustrations through aggressive behaviours
- May become overly affectionate
- Child may develop self help skills more slowly and need reminders for toileting
- May exhibit immature eating habits

Physical Development

- Be aware that children may be hesitant to explore due to lack of confidence in their own skills
- May experience some sensory defensive behaviours
- Delayed gross motor and fine motor co-ordination

Language and Communication Development

- Ability to communicate dependent upon degree of intellectual disability
- Delays will be present in all children
- Communication skills require practice and repetition

Cognitive Development

- Delays in learning skills of concentration, memory and the ability to generalise
- May need to 'learn' skills to play such as sharing and turn-taking, how to enter play situations and appropriate things to say and do during play episodes

Intellectual Disability Inclusion Strategies

Each child diagnosed with **Intellectual Disability** will be different and individual. It is important to gain information from the parents as to what characteristics of **Intellectual Disability** their child displays. It is important to work closely with the parents as well as any additional support specialists e.g. therapists who may be involved with the child. It is also important to gain an understanding from the parent as to what is the most important aspect of their child attending your service. What is it that parents hope to gain from using your service? The following inclusion strategies are just some examples which may be applied to support the inclusion process. This list is only the start and it is dependant on a variety of factors such as environment, length of time child is in care, child's interest, likes, dislikes and skills already achieved. The strategies are divided into developmental areas however some strategies overlap and assist in a variety of developmental areas.

Social and Emotional Development

- Find individual strengths and celebrate achievements
- Encourage play experiences and games that involve sharing and taking-turns.
- Support and respond to appropriate/desired behaviours in positive and consistent ways.
- Model appropriate behaviours.
- Encourage independence with self help tasks.
- Ensure the child has protective clothing for messy experiences.
- Use musical experiences for children to explore ideas and express feelings.

Physical Development

- Provide materials that the child is capable of manipulating including paint brushes, utensils etc.
- Model the use of materials for children e.g. playdough and encourage the child to manipulate materials themselves.
- Plan obstacle courses and outdoor experiences that encourage success e.g. low wide balance beams to walk along.

Language and Communication Development

- Use language that the child understands i.e. simplify language and use clear messages with one instruction at a time.
- Use clear positional and descriptive language.
- Use a range of communication strategies including pictorial and concrete representations.

Cognitive Development

- Use hands on/concrete experiences to increase concentration e.g. telling a story with props such as puppets or felt pieces.
- Extend children through experiences which they are most interested in and in which they experience the most success.
- Introduce challenges gradually and break complex tasks into smaller, manageable and achievable ones.
- Allow children enough time to complete tasks and practice skills.

References

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