



**Children's Treatment Network**  
OF SIMCOE YORK

## **Intellectual Disabilities: An Introduction for Families**

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### **What is Intellectual Disability (ID)?**

- ID is a term that describes individuals whose intelligence (thinking, reasoning, problem-solving abilities) and daily living skills are well below other people of the same age.
- Children with ID learn and progress at a slower rate than typically developing peers. They may take longer to learn to reach developmental milestones, learn daily living skills, and learn academic skills at school.

### **Do children with Intellectual Disability 'catch up' to their peers or 'grow out of it'?**

- ID is a lifelong disability. This means that children with ID do not 'catch up' to peers in terms of their intellectual abilities. However, with varying levels of support, individuals with ID can live very rich and productive lives.
- Adults with ID require different levels of support for work, living situations, and other daily activities.

### **What other terms are used for Intellectual Disability?**

- Other terms for ID are Developmental Disability (DD) and Mental Retardation (MR).
- When a child is very young, terms like Developmental Delay or Global Developmental Delay may be used. Some of these children may be later diagnosed with ID.

### **How is Intellectual Disability Diagnosed?**

- ID is formally diagnosed through a psychological assessment, using IQ testing and measures of daily living skills (also called adaptive functioning).
- A comprehensive assessment includes a review of developmental history and current functioning, as well as formal testing.
- ID is often diagnosed during pre-school or childhood years. Sometimes it is diagnosed later.

### **What causes Intellectual Disability?**

- ID has many different causes. Understanding causes includes consideration of risk factors (biological, environmental) and timing of exposure (before, during, after birth).
- In many cases, it is not possible to identify a specific cause.

### **Do children with Intellectual Disability have other disabilities?**

- Children with ID may or may not have other disabilities
- Some common associated disabilities are Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Vision or Hearing Impairments
- Children with ID can also have mental health disabilities (e.g., anxiety, depression). This is called 'dual diagnosis.'



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#### Is Intellectual Disability the same as a Learning Disability?

- No, learning disabilities are specific learning problems in children with average intelligence.
- ID impacts children's functioning in many areas of daily living and are not specific to school or learning issues.

#### Are there different levels of Intellectual Disability?

- Yes. There are 4 classifications of Intellectual Disability, based on IQ level.
- **Mild:** About 85% of children with ID. Children with mild ID can learn reading, writing, and math skills between grade 3-6 level. In adulthood, they may have jobs and live independently or with some support.
- **Moderate:** About 10% of children with ID. Children with moderate ID may be able to learn some basic literacy skills. They are able to learn functional daily living skills, such as safety and self-care. Adults with moderate ID usually require more support for work and daily living.
- **Severe:** About 5% of children with ID. Children with severe ID may not be able to read or write, although they may learn self-help skills and routines. They usually require more supervision in their daily activities and living environment.
- **Profound:** About 1% of children. Children with profound ID will need intensive support for the rest of their lives. They may be able to communicate by verbal or other means. Some children and adults have medical conditions that require ongoing nursing and therapy support.

#### Who can provide support?

- The amount of services that a child needs will vary for each individual based on the level of intellectual disability, daily living skills, and resources at home and in the community.
- Individuals with ID will need different amounts of support from different people at different times in life. Case Coordination is offered through community agencies. Case Coordination involves helping families navigate available supports and services.
- York Region: York Support Services Network (905-898-3721; [www.yssn.ca](http://www.yssn.ca))
- Simcoe County: Simcoe Community Services (705-726-9082; [www.simcoecommunityservices.ca](http://www.simcoecommunityservices.ca)) or Catulpa Community Support Services (705-733-3227; [www.catulpa.on.ca](http://www.catulpa.on.ca))
- School-aged children with ID usually receive school program that is modified to their specific needs. Communicating with your school to set up supports is important.

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#### References:

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. [www.aidd.org](http://www.aidd.org)

Canadian Association for Community Living. [www.cacl.ca](http://www.cacl.ca)

Kids Health [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

Answers to Parents Questions on Mental Retardation. <http://www.communityinclusion.org>