

# Intellectual and Developmental Disability



Intellectual and Developmental disability is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and in adaptive behaviour, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills. An intellectual disability is a condition that can be enhanced through the provision of individualized supports. Common characteristics of an *Intellectual and Developmental disability* include delayed acquisition of milestones (e.g., sitting up, crawling, walking), limited reasoning or conceptual abilities, poor social skills and judgement, aggressive behaviour as a coping skill, and communication difficulties.

Intellectual and Developmental disability has many causes which, as an end result, affect the functioning of the central nervous system. Causes can be genetic (e.g., Fragile X syndrome), or metabolic (e.g., PKU), prenatal (e.g., rubella or birth trauma), perinatal (e.g., prematurity or the result of a childhood injury or infection). Sometimes the cause for the condition is undetermined.

## Implications for Planning and Awareness

- Meet with the student and parents early in the school year to discuss how the school can support the student's unique needs. This could include finding out about specific health concerns or sensory difficulties that might affect the student at school, along with successful strategies used at home and in the community.
- If needed, collaborate with the parents and health care professionals to develop a written medical management plan that aligns with school and jurisdictional policies and protocols. This plan should include specific information, such as:
  - medical concerns that may affect the student at school
  - the role of school staff in managing medical concerns
  - steps for management of associated medical concerns
  - physical activities that are safe and appropriate for this student
  - when emergency measures should be taken.
- If required, work with the parents to carry out a risk assessment prior to field trips to plan for the student's safe and successful participation.
- Collaborate with the parents and student to consider if, and how, they would like to share information on the student's specific condition with peers. If they wish to do so, consultation with health providers, such as community health nurses, may be helpful.
- Learn as much as you can about what a intellectual and developmental disability is, and how this condition may affect learning and social and emotional well-being. Reading, asking questions and talking to qualified professionals will help you to make informed decisions about how to best support the student's success in the classroom.

Your awareness needs to begin with conversations with the student's parents.



- Collaborate with the school and/or jurisdictional team to identify and coordinate any needed consultation and supports. If required, work with specialists to arrange for any specialized equipment or modifications to the physical environment.
- Develop a system for sharing information with relevant staff members about the student's strengths, specific needs and strategies that support this student's success.

### Implications for Instruction

- Work with school or jurisdictional teams and/or specialists to identify the learning implications of the student's delays, including cognitive, language, attention, fine (cutting, colouring, printing) and gross (running, jumping) motor delays, and develop solutions or strategies to support the student.
- Understand that skills may develop at a slower rate, so the gap between the student and peers may widen with age.
- Develop a set of photos, illustrations and/or symbols that can be used to create visual tools, such as a picture schedule, to build and support student understanding.
- Provide additional supports, such as small group instruction, extra practice time manipulatives and visuals (e.g., picture symbols) to aid understanding.
- Ensure the student has support with gross and fine motor tasks, as needed. The student may have difficulty with buttons, zippers and snaps and may be late in toilet training.
- Provide students with a work buddy to help with simple instructional and non-instructional tasks.

### Implications for Social and Emotional Well-being

- Teach the student basic conversational skills, such as:
  - greeting people and starting a conversation
  - taking turns
  - asking and answering questions.
- Explicitly teach social communication skills, such as how to read body language and expressions.
- Use modelling, storytelling and role-plays, along with direct instruction to reinforce what is acceptable social behaviour in the classroom.
- Pair with positive peers to ensure the student does not feel left out during recess or other school activities. If the student has physical limitations, find alternative ways to promote involvement.
- Engage the student and parents in planning for transitions between grade levels and different schools.

Parents know their children well and can offer insights on how to support their social and emotional well-being. There is strength in collaborating on strategies that could be used at home, at school and in the community.



**As you consider the implications for this disability, think about the following questions:**

1. Do I need further conversations with the parents to better understand this student's strengths and needs?  Yes  No
2. Do I need targeted professional learning?  
If yes, what specific topics and strategies would I explore?  Yes  No
3. Is consultation with jurisdictional staff required?  
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?  Yes  No
4. Is consultation with external service providers required (e.g., Regional Educational Consulting Services, Student Health Partnership, Alberta Children's Hospital, Glenrose Hospital)?  
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?  Yes  No
5. Are further assessments required to assist with planning for this student?  
If yes, what questions do I need answered?  Yes  No
6. Is service to the student from an external provider required?  Yes  No  
If yes, what outcomes would be anticipated?

