

Intellectual Disability

FAST FACTS



■ What is Intellectual Disability?

Intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in *intellectual functioning* and in *adaptive behavior*, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. Mental retardation was used to refer to it in the past.

■ Intellectual disability is a below-average cognitive ability with three characteristics:

1. Intelligent quotient (or I.Q.) is between 70-75 or below
2. Significant limitations in adaptive behaviors (the ability to adapt and carry on everyday life activities such as self-care, socializing, communicating, etc.)
3. The onset of the disability occurs before age 18.

■ Causes of Intellectual Disability

- ✓ **Genetic conditions:** These include things like Down syndrome and fragile X syndrome.
- ✓ **Problems during pregnancy:** Things that can interfere with fetal brain development include alcohol or drug use, malnutrition, certain infections, or preeclampsia.
- ✓ **Problems during childbirth:** Intellectual disability may result if a baby is deprived of oxygen during childbirth or born extremely premature.
- ✓ **Illness or injury:** Infections like meningitis, whooping cough, or the measles can lead to intellectual disability. Severe head injury, near-drowning, extreme malnutrition, exposure to toxic substances such as lead, and severe neglect or abuse can also cause it.

■ Signs of Intellectual Disability

There are many signs of an intellectual disability. For example, children with an intellectual disability may:

- ✓ sit up, crawl, or walk later than other children;
- ✓ learn to talk later, or have trouble speaking,
- ✓ find it hard to remember things,
- ✓ not understand how to pay for things,
- ✓ have trouble understanding social rules,
- ✓ have trouble seeing the consequences of their actions,
- ✓ have trouble solving problems, and/or
- ✓ have trouble thinking logically.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA is one of America's most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life -- to enjoy employment opportunities, to purchase goods and services, and to participate in State and local government programs and services.

■ Diagnosis of Intellectual Disability

Intellectual disabilities are diagnosed by looking at two main things. These are:

- ✓ the ability of a person's brain to learn, think, solve problems, and make sense of the world (called *IQ* or *intellectual functioning*); and
- ✓ whether the person has the skills he/she needs to live independently (called *adaptive behavior*, or *adaptive functioning*).

■ Statistics of Intellectual Disability

An estimated seven to eight million Americans have an intellectual disability (ID). This means about one in ten families in the United States are affected by an ID. Previously, the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV, APA, 2000)*, reported 2-3% of people meet the criteria for ID. This was because the diagnostic criterion required an IQ score of approximately 70 or below. A score of 70 is two standard deviations below the average score for all people. Statistically, two standard deviations below average equal 2.5% of the population.

References

The ARC (For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities): www.thearc.org

The U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: www.eeoc.gov

AAIDD(American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities): www.aamr.org

NICHCY(National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities): nichcy.org

ADA(Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act): www.ada.gov