
Intellectual Disability

What is an Intellectual Disability?

Intellectual disability refers to a substantial limitation in intellectual functioning compared to people of the same age, in the same situation. They have impaired learning ability and are unable to function independently without specialised education and ongoing support.

Intellectual disability is not a mental illness. There is delayed development and difficulties in learning are almost always permanent.

No person shall be considered to have an intellectual disability until assessed by health professionals. In considering intellectual disability a range of personal skills and capabilities are taken into account. With appropriate support the life functioning of a person with such a disability will generally improve.

Older people may acquire brain damage through accident, injury or disease with much the same effect as an intellectual disability.

What causes it?

There are number of possible causes, but most intellectual disabilities do not have a known cause.

Possible causes include:

- Infections such as rubella or meningitis
- Intoxication with alcohol during pregnancy
- Injury at birth
- Metabolism
- Chromosomal abnormalities leading to Downs or Turners syndrome

Symptoms

The more serious the disability the more likely they are to have:

- Associated physical disabilities
- Difficulty in functioning independently
- Difficulty with communicating
- Difficulty with social interactions

It is difficult to describe typical symptoms. People with mild disabilities often show no outward signs. People with profound disabilities need constant care. In between there is a huge range.

Needs Assessment Service

This is a free service which aims to assist those with disabilities to live a quality independent lifestyle. The facilitator will assess your needs, co-ordinating all organisations that may be needed to best meet your needs.

You may be eligible to receive carer support days, personal care, home help, assistance with travel and assistance with essential equipment and house alterations.

How to help

Encourage the person to extend their skills and capabilities, perhaps with professional help. An intellectual disabled person's abilities are often underestimated.

Every parent feels protective but it is necessary part of their development to allow them to take risks, for example, trying to get work.

Extra stress caused by caring for a person with an intellectual disability is felt by everyone in the family and needs to be recognised.

People react in different ways to those who have an intellectual disability. Some are embarrassed and avoid contact, others are over-protective and insist on helping people with things they are able to do by themselves.

Where to go for Support

CCS

CCS is New Zealand's largest organisation representing people with physical disabilities. It is dedicated to ensuring that no person is denied opportunities because of their disability.

For more information phone 03 348 8974

IHC

IHC advocates and promotes the welfare of all people with an intellectual disability. They ensure that there is appropriate support and assistance for carers. They provide home support, shared care, foster care holiday programmes and a parent support group.

For more information phone 03 385 1058

Caring for Carers

Joining a carer support group can relieve some of the stress you are under as a carer. The constant tasks, the concerns, grief, drama, moments of joy, frustration and exhaustion are all part of the day to day existence of a carer.

As a carer, it is important to remember that you are an individual with needs of your own. Ensure that you take care of yourself by arranging your day so that you have some time for yourself. Meeting with other carers can also ease the loneliness that carers can often experience.

Caring for Carers has a Newsletter and several support meetings each month and ongoing telephone support. These services are provided to help make your job easier.

Caring for Carers is situated:

4th floor, Securities House
221 Gloucester Street, Christchurch.
Postal address: P O Box 13 167, Christchurch
Phone: 377 8426
Fax: 377 8420
Email: caringforcarers@xtra.co.nz