

Crisis Communication: Understanding and Communicating with an Evolving Audience

Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division

Communication Issues for People with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

Outline

- **Information about Intellectual Disability (ID)/ Developmental Disability (DD)**
- **General characteristics of persons with ID/DD**
- **Communication issues**
- **How to be of assistance**

Information About Intellectual Disability (ID) / Developmental Disability (DD)

Why Learn About Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

- **Knowing about ID/DD can help you do a better job because you will understand more about what is going on with the folks you might encounter**

Why Learn About Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

- **Your job will actually become easier as you change your approach when working with individuals who have ID/DD because you will be able to have more successful outcomes**

What ID / DD Is NOT

- **NOT a medical illness or disease**
- **NOT a mental illness**

What Intellectual Disability IS:

- **Intellectual Disability (formerly known as mental retardation) is defined as follows:**
 - **Significantly sub-average intellectual functioning**
 - **An intelligence quotient (IQ) of approximately 70 or below**

What Intellectual Disability IS:

- **Significant deficits in adaptive functioning in at least 2 of the following areas:**
 - **Communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-direction, functional academic skills, work, leisure, health and safety**

What Intellectual Disability IS:

- **Onset before age 18 years**
 - **Prior to the 18th birthday**

What Developmental Disability IS:

- **General definition**
 - **Mental impairment manifested before age 22 (22nd birthday), is likely to continue indefinitely, and results in substantial functional limitations in at least 3 major life areas (refer to previous list with ID)**

What Developmental Disability IS:

- **The larger “umbrella” term under which several condition categories fall**
- **ID is one diagnosis that falls within the DD classification**
 - **Other conditions that can be encompassed are autism, cerebral palsy, and epilepsy**

General Characteristics of Persons with ID and/or DD

Characteristics of Persons with ID/DD

- May learn to sit up, to crawl, or to walk later than others as children, or they may learn to talk later, or they may not develop verbal expressive skills
- Can learn, but may learn at a slower rate/pace

Characteristics of Persons with ID/DD

- Tend to think in very concrete/simplified terms
- Can have a tendency to want to “please” those they think are in authority, so they might give answers or information that is not accurate simply because it is what they think the person wants to hear

Characteristics of Persons with ID/DD

- Have trouble understanding concepts and social cues that would alert them to danger related to actions of others – may limit their ability to understand that they are in dangerous situations

Characteristics of Persons with ID/DD

- Can have trouble expressing themselves/communicating
 - Makes it easier for people to take advantage of them
 - Can make it difficult for others to understand the person is trying to tell them they are in trouble/afraid

Characteristics of Persons with ID/DD

- Can find it hard to remember things
- May have trouble understanding social rules/laws
- Some have trouble comprehending cause and effect
- Problem-solving skills limited

Characteristics of Persons with ID/DD

- Processing information can be difficult – may take them more time
- May also have physical challenges that make them more vulnerable and make it more difficult for them to manage a crisis/emergency situation

Characteristics of Persons with ID/DD

- Some might be more fearful than situation warrants due to inability to understand what is happening

Communication Issues

Issues that Complicate Communication

- May not understand the meaning of words, so will not know what they are being asked about or what they are being asked to do
- Can have fairly good receptive skills, but may not be able to express their needs, thoughts, feelings very well

Issues that Complicate Communication

- Some have very limited ability to speak at all
 - Might use communication device to assist them
- Many have speech problems that make it difficult for others to understand them

How to Be of Assistance to Individuals with ID/DD

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- You may need to adjust the way you interact with individuals who might have these limitations, but need your assistance
 - Use very simple vocabulary words
 - Keep your sentences/instructions short

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- Ask one simple question at a time
 - Give only one instruction
 - Try to avoid asking yes-no questions to get descriptive information

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- Wait for the answer before continuing
 - Give time for the person to process the information you have given before expecting a response from them

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- Have the person repeat what you said to make sure (s)he understood it
- You may need to repeat information/instructions multiple times before the person “gets it”

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- Do not ask leading questions because the person may think what you are asking is what they are “supposed to” say
 - Do not say, “John told you to take off your clothes, didn’t he?”

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- A person with ID might say, “yes” simply because (s)he thinks that is what they are supposed to say

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- Understand that some people with ID/DD have limited verbal skills, so it is difficult for them to communicate their needs
 - They become frustrated when they can't get their ideas across to others and problem behaviors can occur

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- May need to ask the family/other caregivers how the person indicates their needs, then pay attention when the person 'signals' that they have a need
- May need to learn some sign language or use a person's own signs or communication board, etc.

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- Let the person know they are safe/that you will not let anyone hurt them
- Let the person know that they can tell you if they are experiencing problems without fear of teasing or scolding

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- If you are having trouble understanding someone's speech, ask them to show you what they want/need

How to Be of Assistance to People with ID/DD

- Understand that people with ID/DD may "communicate" their discomfort /fear/anxiety/depression through behavioral signs/symptoms rather than with words
 - Assist the person to use calming techniques if they begin to get upset

Calming Strategies

- Encourage individuals to use the following techniques if they become angry or upset
 - It may require you to do the exercise with the person

Calming Strategies

1. Take a deep breath
 - Demonstrate taking in a deep breath
 - Hold it for approximately 5 seconds
 - Breathe out very slowly

Calming Strategies

- Have the individual do the exercise with you and praise any attempts to perform the task
- Repeat several times and offer lots of praise for continuing to participate

Calming Strategies

2. Count to 10
 - Count slowly to 10 and encourage the individual to count with you
 - If the individual can count, (s)he may be able to do this without you counting along with them
 - Encourage them to count slowly, and think about each number

Calming Strategies

- If the individual cannot count on their own, you or others will need to have them say each number after you say it until they reach the number 10
- Offer lots of praise for participating in the exercise

Calming Strategies

3. Tell someone/talk it out
 - If the individual is verbal, ask her/him if there is someone they know how to call that they could talk with to help them feel better/calmer

Calming Strategies

4. Walk away/go to a quieter place
 - Explain to the individual that (s)he can go to a quiet area if that will help them feel calmer
 - If there is such an area where you are located

Calming Strategies

- 5. Things that are specific to the person**
- Ask the person or their caregiver if they have specific/special activities that help him/her to calm down
 - If coloring with a red marker helps the person release anger, allow them to do that

Calming Strategies

- Others might calm if they can sing or draw a picture
- This can be very individualized

Contact Information

**Alabama Department of Mental Health
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