

What is an Intellectual Disability?

DSM-V defines intellectual disability as a disorder with onset during the developmental period that includes both intellectual functioning including abstract thinking, judgment, academic learning, problem solving. Adaptive functioning including limitations in activities of daily living, communication, social participation, and independent living across multiple environments such as home, school, work and community. Deficits are on the onset during the developmental period.

According to the American Association on Intellectual Disabilities (AAIDD), Intellectual Functioning refers to general mental capacity such as, learning, reasoning and problem-solving.

Types

Although historically, the levels of severity was based on I.Q. scores, this has changed to adaptive functioning which determines the levels of support required.

Mild

- Social Domain- There may be difficulties in regulating emotions and behaviors in an age-appropriate manner. There tends to be a limited understanding of calculated risk, and social judgment.
- Practical Domain- May need assistance in independent living skills such as grocery shopping, transportation, banking and food preparation.

Moderate

- Social Domain: Capacity for relationships is evident in ties to family and friends and may have successful friendships across life and sometimes relationships in adulthood.
- Practical Domain: Can care for personal needs involving eating, dressing and hygiene and as an adult participate in all household tasks.

Severe

- Social Domain: Spoken language is limited. Speech may be single words or phrases. The individual understands simple speech.
- Practical Domain: Requires support for all activities of daily living, including meals, dressing and bathing. The person will require supervision at all times. Unable to make responsible decisions regarding self-care.

Profound

- **Social Domain:** Has limited understanding of symbolic communication in speech and gestures. The person expresses his or her own desires and emotions through non-verbal communication.
- **Practical Domain:** The child or adult is dependent on other people for basic needs including self-care and independent living including health and safety.

Global Developmental Delay

Children under the age of 5 are given this diagnosis when an individual fails to meet expected developmental milestones in several areas of intellectual functioning. This includes children who may be too young to participate in standardized testing.

Causes

Causes can include:

- Complications during childbirth
- Problems after birth
- Chromosomal (Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome)
- Metabolic
- Nutritional
- Genetic
- Poverty and cultural factors

Prevalence

- Approximately 1% of the world population
- Prevalence for severe intellectual disability is 6 per 100
- In the United States, Intellectual disability comprises of 3 percent of the general population
- Nationally, 34% of people with intellectual disability are employed
- Males are more likely than females to be diagnosed with both mild and severe