Intellectual disability: GP information sheet

Intellectual disability affects how a person learns, understands and manages everyday tasks, starting in childhood. Every person is different, with their own personality, interests and strengths. People take part in family, school and community life in their own way.

About this sheet. We have written this sheet as psychologists, in the hope that GPs may find some of it useful. It offers general information only and is not a clinical tool.

How it may show up in everyday life

Some people, or the people close to them, may notice things like these. They can look quite different from one person to the next.

Learning

- New skills might take more time
- Information may be easier in small steps
- Repetition could help things stick

Communication

- Words might come later than for peers
- Some people may use signs or pictures
- Being understood can feel very important

Everyday skills

- Dressing or self care might need extra support
- Routines may feel helpful
- Independence can grow over time

Social life

- Social rules might feel confusing
- Friendships may look different
- Belonging can matter a great deal

For young children

- Families might notice milestones arriving later
- Play may look different
- Early support can be welcomed

Through life

- Needs might change at school, work or home
- Transitions could feel big
- Strengths and interests often shine

What the person might be bringing

Families may come with many questions, hopes and worries. Some might feel tired or uncertain about where to turn, while others may simply want to understand their child better.

A warm, curious conversation may help it feel safer to talk. Feeling heard can be a meaningful first step.

What GPs already do well

Opening gently

GPs are often the first person a family talks to. A gentle opening can help them share what they have noticed.

Listening to the story

GPs often know the person, and sometimes their family, over many years. That wider view of someone's life can be very valuable.

A steady point of contact

GPs can be a familiar, steady presence for the person and their family over many years.

Seeing the whole person

GPs often hold the bigger picture of someone's health and wellbeing, which can help families feel understood.

What psychology may offer

Understanding

- Time to make sense of experiences
- A thorough assessment, where the family would like one
- Recognising strengths as well as challenges
- Information to help with school planning

Practical and family support

- Ideas for building everyday skills
- Support with behaviour and emotions
- Support for parents, carers and families
- Working alongside schools and other professionals

Everyday things some people find helpful

These are simply possibilities. What helps one person may not suit another.

- Clear, simple routines
- Visual supports and pictures
- Learning in small steps
- Celebrating small achievements
- Time for favourite activities
- Connecting with other families

Trusted Australian resources

Raising Children Network raisingchildren.net.au

NDIS ndis.gov.au

Council for Intellectual Disability cid.org.au

Referring to Strategic Psychology

Our psychologists work with children, adolescents and adults. If a client would like to see one of our team, they can call us on 02 6262 6157 or visit strategicpsychology.com.au. Medicare rebates may be available with a GP referral.

This sheet offers general information for GPs to consider. It does not replace clinical judgement.