

# Intellectual disability (Mental Retardation)

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Physical growth and mental development is a natural process of growing up for all children, but the pace of development and the progress of milestones which occurs in a sequence is unique for each child. For children with intellectual disabilities their level of mental abilities and their mental growth is not matching to their chronological age. Hence these children would always function well below their chronological age in all aspects of development.

A visible factor in a child with intellectual disability is the deficits visible in adaptive behaviour and in their intellectual functioning. These children do not have any distinctively seen motor disabilities or any particular physical features.

The level of their intellectual disability can be categorised into mild, moderate and severe based on various modes of assessment done on these children.

While most of these daily activities and certain basic concepts are learnt quite naturally by observing others in a normal child. Each and every concept or activity has to be taught explicitly and with full support and guidance, and they need opportunities to practice, learn and develop skills.

Each child has a preferred learning style for themselves. Some children learn by listening (auditory learners) some of them learn by seeing or doing. When teaching the children the instructor has to modify their methods according to the learning style.

Learning new skills takes a lot of effort in the beginning. These children learn through repetitive practices, making mistakes and through proper guided training. Any new skill has to be taught after explaining the purpose of the activity and explaining the steps involved to achieve that task. This will facilitate the children to comprehend about the whole process and what is expected to be done.

**For example:** If one has to teach the task of making the child wear their own socks. First the instructor or the parent has to explain why one should wear socks for the shoes. And then explain how to make oneself comfortably seated, before attempting to wear the socks, and then move on to teaching them the hand movements for pulling up the socks. So this will be the sequential order of teaching a small task and it can be broken into still smaller steps according to the understanding capacity of the child. This is known as task analysis, which is the main component of teaching any new concept.

## Teaching Tips:

- The child should understand and feel that they are getting the full support from the teacher and the parent.
- Teacher should not try to pressurise the child to do anything.
- Patience is the most important thing that the teachers and the parents should follow while training a child with intellectual disability. The child could make repetitive mistakes and take a while to complete a task. One might find it difficult to watch the child struggle with the task that might take others just a minute to complete it, but it is often necessary and well worth the time.
- Every small steps of attempt made by the child has to be praised appropriately. It is not necessary that one should reserve the praises for the time when the child is able to complete the whole task. Teaching should be done at the child's own pace, and be sure to praise every effort of the child. The child has to feel and know that their efforts are being noticed and teachers are feeling proud and happy of their accomplishment.
- If the child faces a few setbacks in a particular task, then it is advisable to wait for few weeks and then restart that activity than to push them to perform it immediately.

