Oklahoma State Department of Education
Special Education Services • 405-521-3351 • www.ok.gov/sde/special-education

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

FACT SHEET

Definition of Intellectual Disabilities under IDEA

Intellectual disability means significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance. 34 CFR 300.8(c)(6)

EVALUATIONS

Evaluations are multi-criterion in scope and consist of standardized assessment tools, adaptive behavior scales, observations, checklists, and other relevant tools. One component of the comprehensive evaluation process includes the IQ test or cognitive abilities test. It is a major tool in measuring intellectual functioning, which is the mental capacity for learning, reasoning, problem solving, and so on. A test score below or around 70—or as high as 75—indicates a limitation in intellectual functioning. In addition, sociocultural and adaptive behavior information are collected in conjunction with intelligence testing to determine if an intellectual disability exists. Examples include:

- Community environment typical of the individual's peers and culture
- Linguistic diversity
- Cultural differences in the way people communicate, move, and behavior
- Conceptual skills—language and literacy; money, time, and number concepts; and self-direction
- Social skills—interpersonal skills, social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, naïveté (i.e., wariness), social problem solving, and the ability to follow rules, obey laws, and avoid being victimized
- Practical skills—activities of daily living (personal care), occupational skills, healthcare, travel/transportation, schedules/routines, safety, use of money, use of the telephone

POSSIBLE CAUSES

Doctors have found many causes of intellectual disabilities. The most common are:

- Genetic conditions. Sometimes an intellectual disability is caused by abnormal genes inherited from parents, errors when genes combine, or other reasons. Examples of genetic conditions are Down syndrome, fragile X syndrome, and phenylketonuria (PKU).
- Problems during pregnancy. An intellectual disability can result when the baby does not develop inside the mother properly. For example, there may be a problem with the way the baby's cells divide as it grows. A woman who drinks alcohol or gets an infection like rubella during pregnancy may also have a baby with an intellectual disability.
- Problems at birth. If a baby has problems during labor and birth, such as not getting enough oxygen, he or she may have an intellectual disability.
- Health problems. Diseases like whooping cough, the measles, or meningitis can cause intellectual disabilities. They can also be caused by extreme malnutrition (not eating right), not getting enough medical care, or by being exposed to poisons like lead or mercury.

An intellectual disability is not a disease. You can't catch an intellectual disability from anyone. It's also not a type of mental illness, like depression. There is no cure for intellectual disabilities. However, most children with an intellectual disability can learn to do many things. It just takes them more time and effort than other children. This disability originates before the age of 18.

INCIDENCE

Location	Estimate (%)	90% (margin of error)	Base Population	Sample Size
United States	4.8	± 0.04	285,260,000	2,833,215
Oklahoma	6.1	± 0.30	3,432,100	34,161

http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/reports/acs.cfm?statistic=1

POSSIBLE SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS:

Usually, the more severe the degree of intellectual disability, the earlier the signs can be noticed. However, it might still be hard to tell how young children will be affected later in life. There are many signs of intellectual disability. For example, children with intellectual disability may:

- Sit up, crawl, or walk later than other children
- Learn to talk later, or have trouble speaking
- Find it hard to remember things
- Have trouble understanding social rules
- Have trouble seeing the results of their actions
- Have trouble solving problems

TEACHING TIPS/INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Teach one concept or activity component at a time
- Teach one step at a time to help support memorization and sequencing
- Teach students in small groups, or one-on-one, if possible
- Always provide multiple opportunities to practice skills in a number of different settings
- Use physical and verbal prompting to guide correct responses, and provide specific verbal praise to reinforce these responses
- Adapted equipment—such as a special seat or a cut-out cup for drinking;
- Assistive technology—such as a word processor, special software, or a communication system;
- Training for staff, student, and/or parents;
- Peer tutors;
- A one-on-one aide;
- Adapted materials—such as books on tape, large print, or highlighted notes; and
- Collaboration/consultation among staff, parents, and/or other professionals.

THIS INFORMATION DEVELOPED FROM THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

- **Project IDEAL**
  www.projectidealonline.org/intellectualDisabilities.php
- **American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**
  www.aaidd.org/
- **National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**
  www.nichcy.org
- **University of Cornell, Employment and Disability Institute**
  www.disabilitystatistics.org/reports/acs.cfm?statistic=1