



# Signs and Symptoms of Mental Health Disorders

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# Part I

Psychiatric disorders  
and people with  
developmental disabilities

## **Fact:**

There is evidence that people with developmental disabilities will experience mental health disorders or problems more than the general population.

## Fact:

- **1 in 4** adults experience a mental health disorder each year.
- **1 in 17** lives with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression.
- **1 in 10** children live with a serious mental or emotional disorder.

## Estimates:

- Persons with developmental/intellectual disabilities are 2 – 4 times more likely than general population to have psychiatric disorders.
- As many as one third (1/3) have behavioral, mental or personality disorders, requiring mental health services.

## Fact:

Persons with intellectual disabilities present similar diagnosis (symptoms and behaviors) as persons without intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

## Fact:

Persons with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities are underserved in the mental health world.

They often have less access to mental health services or inadequate care.



# Part 2

Common behaviors and emotions of persons with developmental disabilities.

# Definition of Developmental Disability

## Lanterman Act

- Intellectual disability, autism, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, or conditions similar to intellectual disability.
- Condition must be significant and have started prior to age 18.

Conditions that are only physical, psychiatric, or learning disorders are not considered developmental disabilities.

# Definition of Intellectual Disability

American Association on Intellectual and  
Developmental Disabilities - AAIDD

Significant limitations in intellectual ability and adaptive behavior (thinking/reasoning, social and practical skills).

Both limitations can be affected positively by individualized supports.

# What is Intelligence?

Capability to:

Think, understand complex ideas,

Reason, plan, solve problems,

Learn quickly, and learn from experience.

Represented by Intelligent Quotient (IQ) scores from standardized tests. Mental retardation is generally thought to be an IQ of 70 or below. ( AAIDD , 2002)

# Common Symptoms of Autism

## Impairment in social interaction

- ✓ No use of nonverbal behaviors
- ✓ No development of age appropriate relationships
- ✓ Lack of spontaneous interest or sharing enjoyment
- ✓ No social or emotional exchange

# Common Symptoms of Autism

- Impairment in communication
  - ✓ Delay/lack of development in spoken language
  - ✓ Inability to start or carry on conversation
  - ✓ Individual- one's own - language
  - ✓ Lack of play or social activities
  - ✓ Restricted, repetitive play or activities

# Neurophysiological (brain impacted) Disabilities

- Cerebral Palsy (CP) - limitation of motor function (move and/or control movements)
- Seizure Disorders
- Sensory Impairments

# What is Adaptive Behavior?

- Conceptual (thinking/understanding) skills
- Social skills
- Practical skills

That people learn so they can function in everyday life. Significant limitations in adaptive behavior can impact daily life.



# Adaptive Behavior

Tests can determine limitations in:

- Conceptual skills – Reasoning, language, reading and writing, money concepts, self-direction.
- Social skills - interpersonal, self-esteem, follows rules/laws, manages responsibility, avoids victimization, not vulnerable or easy to fool.

# Adaptive Behavior

- Practical activities of daily living like:
  - ✓ personal care - eating, dressing, bathing, mobility and toileting.
  - ✓ self-management – making meals, taking medication, using a phone, managing money, using transportation, housekeeping.
  - ✓ occupational skills - maintaining a safe environment.

# Adaptive Behavior

A significant limitation in one area can have an impact large enough on to indicate a general deficit in adaptive behavior. (AAIDD 2002)

# Also Experienced by Persons with Developmental Disabilities

## Poor Impulse Control

- ✓ Often related to frustration
- ✓ Seen as outbursts of anger - aggressive towards others. If more impaired, more likelihood of self-injurious behaviors
- ✓ Lack of communication skills may lead person to impulsive behaviors.

# Also Experienced by Persons with Developmental Disabilities

- Examples of Behaviors
  - ✓ Hyperactivity
  - ✓ Short attention span
  - ✓ Temper tantrums
  - ✓ Talking to Self
  - ✓ Close Imaginary Friends
  - ✓ Unconscious filling in of gaps

# Also Experienced by Persons with Developmental Disabilities

- Speech
  - ✓ Mode of speech usually repetitive,
  - ✓ Repeating same theme or statement
  - ✓ May be loud, without being irritated or aggressive

# Also Experienced by Persons with Developmental Disabilities

- Other Responses
  - ✓ High threshold for pain and fever
  - ✓ Oversensitivity to loud sounds or being touched
  - ✓ Reactions to light and odors
  - ✓ Fascination with certain moving objects

# Also Experienced by Persons with Developmental Disabilities

- Abnormalities in Eating Patterns
  - ✓ Overeating /Abnormal increased appetite
  - ✓ Limiting diet to select foods
  - ✓ Eating non-food substances
  - ✓ Nocturnal eating



# Also Experienced by Persons with Developmental Disabilities

- Abnormalities with Sleeping Habits
  - ✓ Repeated awakening at night with unusual behaviors (rocking)
  - ✓ Repeated naps during the day
  - ✓ Awakening at night with nightmares
  - ✓ Insomnia

## Note:

These issues often become worse when a person also has mental health problems and mental illness.

# Disorders often go Hand in Hand

- Learning
- Motor Skills
- Communication
- Attention Deficit
- Disruptive Behavior
- Feeding and Eating

# Disorders often go Hand in Hand

- Tics (sudden, rapid movements)
- Toileting disorder
- Separation anxiety
- Not speaking in certain situations
- Inappropriate ways of relating socially
- Repetitive, nonfunctional behavior

## Part 3

Behaviors and Symptoms:  
Developmental?  
Medical?  
Mental Health?  
or combination?

# Clues in Behavior #1

- Overwhelming fear or terror
- Change in ability to cope
- Change in behavior

## Clues in Behavior #2

- Decreased ability to handle stress
- Increase in maladaptive behavior
- New onset/increase in self-injurious behavior

# Clues in Behavior #3

- Change in mood
- Loss of motivation
- Inability to express emotions
- Extreme overreaction to small things



## Clues in Behavior #4

- Extremely low self-esteem
- Suicidal thoughts
- Change in energy or sleep patterns
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Excessive changes in appetite.

# Clues in Behavior #5

## More or Less:

- Hyperactivity
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Lethargy
- Withdrawal

# Clues in Behavior #6

- Changes in perceptions
- Extreme sensitivity to light, color, noise
- Believing thoughts are controlled by others

# Clues in Behavior #7

- Fear of touching or being touched
- Changes in sense of self
- Sense of body boundaries changing
- Hallucinations-Auditory or Visual

# Part 4

What to do .....  
if a change is noticed or suspected.

Behaviors and symptoms may indicate a mental health concern or illness with our loved one, client, consumer...or ourselves.

# If you Suspect Something, Ask Yourself:

- Why now?
- Are there factors leading to this concern?
  - ✓ Change of routine? (separation from family, illness, traumatic event)
  - ✓ Recent medical problem?
  - ✓ Substance abuse?
  - ✓ Peer problems, dating, legal, gangs?
- Other reasons to go to therapy

# Don't Misinterpret!

Don't misunderstand inappropriate, negative behavior as "bad."

**They may be trying to tell you something**