

Introduction

Parents with intellectual disabilities often experience difficulties carrying out the daily tasks associated with parenting due to their learning needs. Additionally, research has shown that children of parents with intellectual disabilities may be at greater risk for foster care due to these parenting difficulties.

As providers for these families, we are often the first to recognize the specific needs of these parents; however, at times, we struggle with how to best meet their particular needs.

Research and present practice have shown that parents with intellectual disabilities are most receptive to services that are *individualized* to meet their specific learning styles.

This guide is designed to provide simple strategies that have been found to be effective with parents with intellectual disabilities. We hope that this resource offers suggestions that can be incorporated into your daily practice.

WIHD creates better futures for people with disabilities, for vulnerable children, and for their families and caregivers. WIHD accomplishes its mission through:

- Professional education
- Innovative services and supports
- Community training and technical assistance
- Research and information dissemination

We envision a future in which people with disabilities and vulnerable children live healthy and productive lives as full members of society.



Supporting Parents with Intellectual Disabilities:
A Practical Guide for Providers



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How do I assess the needs of a parent with intellectual disabilities?

- Determine what the parent already knows about the topic to be discussed.
- Explore how the parent learns best- with words, pictures and/or modeling.
- Prioritize the most important tasks to present.

How should I provide information to a parent with intellectual disabilities?

- Encourage a partnership approach by letting the parent set the pace.
- Break complex tasks into smaller steps.
- Model or demonstrate new skills.
- Be mindful that a parent might have reading difficulties. Read written material out loud if needed.
- Use videos, tapes, and visual aids.
- Use repetition, reminders, and cues.

How can I help strengthen the support network of a parent with intellectual disabilities?

- Identify family and community supports (e.g., faith-based) and provide contact information for these supports.
- Connect the parent with other parents.

How can I help support the organizational skills of a parent with intellectual disabilities?

- Help the parent arrange his/her schedule so that he/she can feasibly attend appointments.
- Help the parent develop a system for documenting his/her child's medical and medication history (e.g., with a binder or folder).
- Assist the parent in writing down information to be shared at appointments with different providers (e.g., school staff).
- Help the parent identify and write down questions he/she would like to ask providers during the next appointment.
- Encourage the parent to document information from appointments, such as follow-up appointment dates or medication instructions.



How do I ensure that a parent with intellectual disabilities understands the information I am presenting?

- Use either/or questions rather than yes/no questions.
- Let parent practice new skills and/or role-play situations.
- Ask parent to repeat back in his or her own words.
- Help parent think of examples from his/her own experience that connect to what you are teaching.

For additional strategies & further resources regarding supporting parents with intellectual disabilities, please contact:

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