



SA Federation for
Mental Health

NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

(INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDER)

What it is:

Intellectual disability is characterised by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and abilities, and adaptive function and behaviour, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. The disability originates during the developmental period, so during early childhood or adolescence. Limitations in intellectual abilities refers to intellectual functions that include problem solving, practical understanding, reasoning, learning from example or instructions, and abstract thinking. This can include verbal communication, working memory and perceptual reasoning. Typically an IQ score of 70 or below is indicative of limitations in intellectual functioning. However, IQ scores are estimates of conceptual functioning, and may not give an accurate indication of the individual's actual level of functionality in daily life.

Limitations in adaptive functioning refers to how the individuals is able to perform conceptual, social, and practical skills that are learned and performed by people in their everyday lives. This includes skills like language and literacy, time, and number concepts; interpersonal skills, gullibility, the ability to follow rules/obey laws and to avoid being victimized; personal care, occupational skills, travel/transportation, safety, use of money, and use of the telephone.

Intellectual disabilities are classified according to severity into four categories. Mild, moderate, severe or profound. Each level of severity comes with its own degree of intellectual, physical and adaptive functioning, and will require a specific level of support or care. There can be multiple causes for intellectual disability; it may be caused by a genetic syndrome, such as Down syndrome, or it may be caused by an illness such as meningitis or by brain trauma.



**SA Federation for
Mental Health**

Common symptoms:

1. Limitations in intellectual functioning, such as academic learning, reasoning, problem solving, judgment and abstract thinking
2. Limitations in adaptive functioning, such as failing to meet developmentally appropriate levels of independence and responsibility. For example, the individual requires support in areas such as personal care, communication, or independent living at home, school and in the community
3. The onset of these symptoms were during the developmental period, or before the age of 18 years

Causes:

There are a number of possible causes for intellectual disability. Intellectual disability may be caused by a genetic syndrome such as Down syndrome or it may co-occur with another disorder such as autism spectrum disorder. Prenatal causes can include brain malformation, maternal diseases, and the influence of alcohol or other substances. Perinatal causes can include labour and delivery related brain trauma or injury, and postnatal causes may include traumatic brain injury, infections such as meningitis, or seizure disorders.