

Tips On How To Interact With A Person Who Has Intellectual Disabilities

Disability Justice Initiative

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
DJI @ NDCPD, 1-800-233-1737

- Use People First Language—avoid words or phrases like “retarded” or “disabled person”, instead use “person with a disability”.
- Speak directly to the person, even if someone else is with them.
- Be patient, give ample time to respond to questions and process information.
- Keep sentences short and simple; speak slowly and clearly.
- Avoid “yes” or “no” questions; ask open-ended questions.
- Ask the person to repeat information back to you.
- Avoid questions about time, complex sequences, or reasons for behavior.
- Be age appropriate—treat adults as adults.
- When possible, say it and show it—use pictures, symbols, or actions to convey meaning.



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CHARACTERISTICS OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES MAY INCLUDE:

- Limited vocabulary, may have speech defect.
- Difficulty understanding or answering questions.
- Inability to read or write.
- Mimics responses or answers.
- Easily influenced by and anxious to please others.
- Difficulty making change, using the telephone, telling time, etc.
- Low frustration tolerance.
- Doesn't understand seriousness of situation.

- May not consider consequences of actions; acts impulsively.
- May not understand rights.
- May be overly willing to confess.
- Difficulty recalling facts in detail.
- Tendency to be overwhelmed by police authority.
- May not admit having a disability.
- Says what s/he thinks others want to hear.



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