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## Challenges faced by the families: Having children with intellectual disabilities

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### Abstract

Families raising children or adult individuals with intellectual disabilities face unique and ongoing challenges that can impact various aspects of their lives. These challenges encompass areas such as education, healthcare, social inclusion, financial strain, and caregiver support. Accessing appropriate educational support and accommodations, promoting social inclusion, and navigating the healthcare system are common hurdles for families. Financial strain due to the costs of care and support services, as well as caregiver burnout, are significant concerns. Transitioning to adulthood presents additional challenges, including securing employment, housing, and ongoing support services. Addressing stigma, advocating for policy changes, and promoting awareness are essential for addressing the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. Despite these challenges, families demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness in navigating the complexities of raising children or supporting adult individuals with intellectual disabilities. Ongoing efforts to address these challenges through collaboration, advocacy, and support are crucial for promoting the well-being and inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families.

**Keywords:** Intellectual disability, family, children with intellectual disability, mild/adult intellectual disability

### Introduction

Intellectual disabilities, formerly known as mental retardation, refer to limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour. These limitations manifest during the developmental period and impact various aspects of life, including communication, self-care, and social skills. Intellectual disabilities can range from mild to profound and may be caused by genetic conditions, prenatal exposure to toxins, or environmental factors. Individuals with intellectual disabilities often require additional support and accommodations to thrive in daily life and reach their full potential. Intellectual disabilities, also referred to as cognitive or developmental disabilities, are characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour. Intellectual functioning involves skills such as reasoning, problem-solving, and learning, while adaptive behaviour encompasses everyday social and practical skills. These disabilities typically originate before the age of 18 and can affect an individual's ability to communicate, learn, and function independently etc.

There is a wide spectrum of intellectual disabilities, ranging from mild to severe, with varying degrees of impairment. Causes can include genetic factors, prenatal exposure to toxins or infections, complications during childbirth, or environmental factors. While intellectual disabilities are lifelong conditions, early intervention, educational support, and appropriate accommodations can help individuals with these disabilities lead fulfilling lives and achieve their potential. It's important to promote inclusion, understanding, and support for individuals with intellectual disabilities to ensure they have equal opportunities and access to resources.

### Brief overview of the historical background

The historical understanding and treatment of intellectual disabilities have evolved significantly over time.

- **Ancient Times:** In ancient civilizations such as Greece and Rome, individuals with disabilities were often viewed with superstition or fear. Some societies practiced infanticide or abandonment of infants with disabilities, while others provided limited care within the family or community.
- **Middle Ages:** During the middle ages, attitudes towards disabilities became more influenced by religious beliefs.

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People with disabilities were often seen as cursed or possessed by evil spirits. Some religious institutions provided care and shelter for individuals with disabilities, but they were often segregated from mainstream society.

- **Enlightenment Era:** In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Enlightenment brought about changes in attitudes towards disabilities. Philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized the importance of education and social integration for individuals with disabilities. However, widespread societal stigma and discrimination persisted.
- **19<sup>th</sup> Century:** The 19th century saw the emergence of institutions for individuals with intellectual disabilities, often referred to as "asylums" or "poorhouses." These institutions provided custodial care but often lacked adequate treatment or educational opportunities. The focus was on segregation and control rather than rehabilitation or support.
- **Early 20th Century:** In the early 20th century, eugenic ideas gained popularity, leading to the promotion of sterilization laws and policies aimed at preventing the reproduction of individuals with disabilities. People with intellectual disabilities were often marginalized and denied basic human rights.
- **Mid-20th Century:** The mid-20th century saw significant advancements in the understanding and treatment of intellectual disabilities. The development of standardized intelligence tests, such as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, helped to classify and assess individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- **Deinstitutionalization Movement:** Starting in the mid-20th century, there was a shift towards deinstitutionalization, with the closure of large institutions and a focus on community-based services and supports. This movement aimed to promote independence, inclusion, and quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- **Civil Rights Era:** The civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s led to legislative changes that protected the rights of individuals with disabilities. Laws such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 aimed to ensure equal access to education, employment, and community services.
- **Advancements in Education and Support:** In recent decades, there have been significant advancements in education, early intervention, and support services for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The focus has shifted towards inclusion, empowerment, and promoting self-determination for individuals with disabilities.

The historical background of intellectual disabilities reflects changing societal attitudes, evolving understanding of disability rights and inclusion, and advancements in medical, educational, and social services. While significant progress has been made, challenges remain in achieving full inclusion and equality for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

### Nature of intellectual disability

The nature of intellectual disabilities is complex and multifaceted.

- **Biological Basis:** Intellectual disabilities often have a biological basis, including genetic factors, prenatal exposure to toxins or infections, complications during childbirth, or medical conditions affecting brain development.
- **Developmental Impact:** Intellectual disabilities typically emerge during the developmental period, before the age of 18. They can affect various aspects of cognitive functioning, adaptive behaviour, and social-emotional development.
- **Continuum of Severity:** Intellectual disabilities exist on a continuum, ranging from mild to profound. The level of impairment can vary widely among individuals, impacting their abilities in different ways.
- **Lifelong Condition:** Intellectual disabilities are lifelong conditions. While individuals may develop skills and abilities over time with appropriate support and intervention, the underlying cognitive limitations persist throughout life.
- **Heterogeneity:** There is considerable heterogeneity among individuals with intellectual disabilities. This includes differences in cognitive strengths and weaknesses, adaptive skills, comorbid conditions, and support needs.
- **Impact on Daily Life:** Intellectual disabilities can significantly impact daily functioning, including communication, learning, self-care, social interaction, and independent living skills.
- **Need for Support:** Individuals with intellectual disabilities often require ongoing support, accommodations, and services to optimize their quality of life, promote independence, and facilitate participation in society.

Understanding the nature of intellectual disabilities involves recognizing the complexity of factors contributing to these conditions and the diverse needs of individuals affected by them. It emphasizes the importance of individualized support, early intervention, inclusion, and advocacy to promote the well-being and rights of people with intellectual disabilities.

### Definition of intellectual disability

Psychologists define intellectual disabilities as significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, originating before the age of 18. These limitations affect an individual's ability to effectively function in everyday life and typically require ongoing support and accommodations. Intellectual functioning refers to skills such as reasoning, problem-solving, and learning, while adaptive behaviour encompasses practical skills necessary for independence, such as communication, self-care, and social interaction. The severity of intellectual disabilities can vary widely, ranging from mild to profound, and may be caused by genetic conditions, prenatal factors, or environmental influences. Psychologists emphasize the importance of early identification, intervention, and individualized support to help individuals with intellectual disabilities reach their full potential and participate fully in society.

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defines intellectual disabilities as a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive

behaviour, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18. Intellectual functioning refers to general mental capacity, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and adaptive behaviour, which refers to conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills that are learned and performed by people in their everyday lives.

### Characteristics of intellectual disability

Intellectual disabilities are characterized by a wide range of cognitive and adaptive functioning limitations, which can vary in severity.

- **Intellectual functioning:** Individuals may have limitations in areas such as reasoning, problem-solving, abstract thinking, learning, and academic skills.
- **Adaptive behaviour:** Difficulties with practical life skills such as communication, self-care, social skills, safety awareness, and using community resources.
- **Developmental delays:** Delays in reaching developmental milestones, both physical and cognitive, during infancy and childhood.
- **Challenges in social interaction:** Difficulty understanding social cues, maintaining friendships, and navigating social situations.
- **Communication difficulties:** Challenges in expressing oneself verbally or nonverbally, understanding language, and using language effectively.
- **Memory deficits:** Difficulty in retaining and recalling information, which can affect learning and daily functioning.
- **Attention and executive function deficits:** Difficulty with attention span, organization, planning, and problem-solving.
- **Motor skills deficits:** Challenges in fine and gross motor skills, affecting tasks such as writing, drawing, and coordination.
- **Dependence on others:** Individuals may require varying degrees of support and assistance with daily tasks and decision-making throughout their lives.
- **Vulnerability to exploitation and abuse:** Due to challenges in understanding and navigating social situations, individuals with intellectual disabilities may be at increased risk of exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

It's important to recognize that each individual with an intellectual disability is unique, with their own strengths, challenges, and support needs. Additionally, the severity and manifestation of these characteristics can vary widely among individuals.

### Factors affecting of intellectual disability

- **Genetic Factors:** Inherited genetic conditions, such as Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, or other chromosomal abnormalities, can lead to intellectual disabilities.
- **Prenatal Factors:** Exposure to environmental toxins, infections, or substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol or drugs, can impact fetal development and increase the risk of intellectual disabilities.
- **Perinatal Factors:** Complications during childbirth, such as oxygen deprivation or premature birth, can result in brain injury or developmental delays leading to intellectual disabilities.
- **Postnatal Factors:** Traumatic brain injury, infections,

malnutrition, or exposure to toxins in early childhood can also contribute to intellectual disabilities.

- **Medical Conditions:** Certain medical conditions, such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy, or untreated hypothyroidism, can co-occur with intellectual disabilities and exacerbate cognitive impairments.
- **Social and Environmental Factors:** Socioeconomic factors, inadequate access to healthcare, limited educational opportunities, neglect, abuse, or lack of supportive family and community environments can impact cognitive development and contribute to intellectual disabilities.
- **Psychological Factors:** Emotional trauma, neglect, or adverse childhood experiences can affect cognitive and emotional development, potentially leading to intellectual disabilities or exacerbating existing impairments.
- **Brain Disorders:** Structural or functional abnormalities in the brain, including neurodevelopmental disorders like autism spectrum disorder, can contribute to intellectual disabilities.
- **Unidentified or Untreated Conditions:** Undiagnosed or untreated medical conditions, such as hearing loss or vision impairment, can impede learning and cognitive development, leading to intellectual disabilities if not addressed.

Understanding and addressing these contributing factors are essential for early identification, intervention, and support for individuals with intellectual disabilities, promoting their well-being and maximizing their potential.

### Types of intellectual disability

Intellectual disabilities can be categorized into various types based on their underlying causes, severity, and associated features.

- **Genetic Intellectual Disabilities:** These are caused by genetic abnormalities, such as Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, or Williams syndrome.
- **Developmental Intellectual Disabilities:** These arise from developmental disorders or delays, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or specific learning disorders.
- **Acquired Intellectual Disabilities:** These result from factors occurring after birth, such as traumatic brain injury, infections (e.g., meningitis), or exposure to toxins.
- **Mild Intellectual Disabilities:** Individuals with mild intellectual disabilities often have IQ scores ranging from 50-70 and may experience challenges with learning and social skills, but can typically function independently with support.
- **Moderate Intellectual Disabilities:** Those with moderate intellectual disabilities usually have IQ scores between 35-49 and may require more support with daily living skills and academic learning.
- **Severe Intellectual Disabilities:** Individuals with severe intellectual disabilities typically have IQ scores between 20-34 and may require extensive support for communication, self-care, and other daily activities.
- **Profound Intellectual Disabilities:** These are the most severe form of intellectual disabilities, characterized by IQ scores below 20 and significant impairments in all areas of functioning, often requiring constant care and supervision.

- **Syndromic Intellectual Disabilities:** These are associated with specific genetic syndromes or conditions, such as Rett syndrome or Angelman syndrome.
- **Non-Syndromic Intellectual Disabilities:** These do not have associated physical or genetic features and are typically diagnosed based on cognitive and adaptive functioning assessments.

Each type of intellectual disability presents unique challenges and may require different approaches to support, intervention, and accommodation. It's essential to consider individual needs and strengths when providing assistance and resources to individuals with intellectual disabilities.

### Genetic intellectual disability

Genetic intellectual disabilities refer to conditions caused by genetic abnormalities or mutations that affect cognitive functioning. These disabilities result from alterations in the individual's genetic makeup and can impact various aspects of intellectual development, including learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and adaptive behaviour. Examples of genetic intellectual disabilities include:

- **Down syndrome:** Caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21, resulting in characteristic physical features and varying degrees of cognitive impairment.
- **Fragile X syndrome:** Caused by a mutation in the FMR1 gene on the X chromosome, leading to intellectual disabilities, behavioural challenges, and physical characteristics such as a long face and large ears.
- **Williams syndrome:** Caused by a deletion of genetic material on chromosome 7, resulting in distinctive facial features, cardiovascular issues, and intellectual disabilities alongside strengths in socialization and language.
- **Prader-Willi syndrome:** Caused by the absence of genetic material on chromosome 15, leading to intellectual disabilities, compulsive eating, obesity, and other physical and behavioural challenges.

These are just a few examples, but there are numerous other genetic conditions that can result in intellectual disabilities. Genetic intellectual disabilities vary in severity, presentation, and associated features, and they often require specialized support and intervention tailored to the individual's needs. Early diagnosis, genetic testing, and ongoing management are essential for individuals with genetic intellectual disabilities to receive appropriate care and support throughout their lives.

### Developmental intellectual disability

Developmental intellectual disabilities refer to conditions characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour that originate during the developmental period, typically before the age of 18. These disabilities affect a person's ability to learn, reason, solve problems, and adapt to the demands of everyday life. Developmental intellectual disabilities can encompass a wide range of conditions, including:

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by challenges with social communication and interaction, as well as restricted interests and repetitive behaviours.

Many individuals with ASD also have intellectual disabilities, although some may have average or above-average intelligence.

- **Specific Learning Disorders (SLD):** SLDs are conditions that affect specific academic skills, such as reading, writing, or math. While not always associated with intellectual disabilities, some individuals with SLD may have difficulties with intellectual functioning that impact their academic performance.
- **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. While ADHD itself does not necessarily involve intellectual disabilities, some individuals with ADHD may experience challenges with cognitive functioning that impact their academic or occupational performance.
- **Global Developmental Delay (GDD):** GDD is diagnosed when children fail to meet developmental milestones in several areas, including cognitive, motor, language, and social skills. Some children with GDD may later be diagnosed with intellectual disabilities if their developmental delays persist.
- **Intellectual Developmental Disorder (IDD):** IDD is a general term used to describe intellectual disabilities that are present from childhood and significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour.

Developmental intellectual disabilities can vary widely in severity and presentation. Early identification, intervention, and ongoing support are crucial for individuals with developmental intellectual disabilities to maximize their potential, enhance their quality of life, and achieve greater independence.

### Mild intellectual disability

Mild intellectual disabilities refer to a level of cognitive impairment that is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, typically falling within the range of an IQ score of approximately 50 to 70. Individuals with mild intellectual disabilities may experience challenges in learning, problem-solving, and adapting to the demands of daily life, but they are often capable of functioning independently to some extent, especially with appropriate support and accommodations. Characteristics of mild intellectual disabilities include:

- **Learning Challenges:** Individuals may have difficulties acquiring academic skills, such as reading, writing, and math, and may require additional support in educational settings.
- **Social and Communication Skills:** While individuals with mild intellectual disabilities may struggle with social interactions and communication, they can often develop basic social skills and form relationships with others.
- **Adaptive Behaviour:** Adaptive behaviour refers to practical skills necessary for independent living, such as self-care, household tasks, and navigating community resources. Individuals with mild intellectual disabilities may require support or guidance in these areas but can often learn to perform these tasks with assistance.
- **Employment and Independence:** With appropriate support and vocational training, individuals with mild intellectual disabilities can often find employment and

live relatively independent lives. However, they may benefit from ongoing assistance or supervision in certain aspects of daily living.

It's important to recognize that individuals with mild intellectual disabilities have unique strengths, interests, and abilities, and they may excel in certain areas despite their challenges. Providing tailored support, accommodations, and opportunities for skill development can help individuals with mild intellectual disabilities reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

### Moderate intellectual disability

Moderate intellectual disabilities refer to a level of cognitive impairment that is characterized by more significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour compared to mild intellectual disabilities. Individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities typically have IQ scores ranging from approximately 35 to 49. Characteristics of moderate intellectual disabilities include:

- **Learning Challenges:** Individuals may have difficulty acquiring academic skills and may require specialized instruction and support in educational settings. They may struggle with reading, writing, and math skills, among others.
- **Social and Communication Skills:** Individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities may experience challenges in social interactions and communication. They may require assistance in understanding social cues, forming relationships, and engaging in appropriate social behaviours.
- **Adaptive Behaviour:** Adaptive behaviour refers to practical skills necessary for daily living, such as self-care, hygiene, household tasks, and safety awareness. Individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities may require significant support and supervision in these areas, although they may be able to learn basic skills with assistance.
- **Employment and Independence:** Individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities may face barriers to employment and independent living. With appropriate support and vocational training, they may be able to engage in supported employment or participate in structured day programs to develop skills and gain independence to the extent possible.

It's important to recognize the unique strengths, abilities, and potential of individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities and provide them with opportunities for growth, learning, and inclusion in the community. Tailored support, accommodations, and interventions can help individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.

### Severe intellectual disability

Severe intellectual disabilities refer to a significant level of cognitive impairment characterized by profound limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour. Individuals with severe intellectual disabilities typically have IQ scores below 35. Characteristics of severe intellectual disabilities include:

- **Limited Cognitive Functioning:** Individuals with severe intellectual disabilities may have very limited cognitive abilities, including difficulties with reasoning,

problem-solving, and understanding abstract concepts.

- **Minimal Communication Skills:** Communication abilities may be severely impaired, with limited or no verbal language skills. Individuals may rely on nonverbal communication methods or may have difficulty expressing their needs and wants.
- **High Dependence on Others:** Individuals with severe intellectual disabilities often require extensive support and assistance with all aspects of daily living, including personal care, mobility, feeding, and safety.
- **Significant Adaptive Behaviour Challenges:** Adaptive behaviour skills, such as self-care, social skills, and safety awareness, may be severely limited. Individuals may require constant supervision and assistance to perform even basic tasks.
- **Limited Independence:** Due to the level of impairment, individuals with severe intellectual disabilities may have limited opportunities for independent living and may require ongoing care and support throughout their lives.

It's crucial to provide individuals with severe intellectual disabilities with comprehensive support, specialized interventions, and a nurturing environment that promotes their well-being, independence to the extent possible, and inclusion in the community. These individuals have unique strengths and abilities, and with the right resources and support, they can lead fulfilling lives and make meaningful contributions to their communities.

### Profound intellectual disability

Profound intellectual disabilities refer to the most significant level of cognitive impairment, characterized by severe limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour. Individuals with profound intellectual disabilities typically have IQ scores below 20. Characteristics of profound intellectual disabilities include:

- **Severely Limited Cognitive Functioning:** Individuals with profound intellectual disabilities have extremely limited cognitive abilities, with significant challenges in understanding, reasoning, problem-solving, and learning.
- **Minimal or Absent Communication Skills:** Communication abilities are severely impaired, with limited or no verbal language skills. Individuals may rely on nonverbal communication methods such as gestures, vocalizations, or facial expressions, but communication is often very limited.
- **High Dependence on Others:** Individuals with profound intellectual disabilities require extensive support and assistance with all aspects of daily living, including personal care, mobility, feeding, and safety. They are highly dependent on caregivers for their basic needs.
- **Limited or No Adaptive Behaviour Skills:** Adaptive behaviour skills, including self-care, social skills, and safety awareness, are severely limited or absent. Individuals may require constant supervision and assistance to perform even the most basic tasks.
- **Limited Independence and Functional Abilities:** Due to the severity of impairment, individuals with profound intellectual disabilities have very limited opportunities for independent living and may require 24-hour care and support throughout their lives.

Providing comprehensive support, specialized interventions, and a nurturing environment is essential for individuals with profound intellectual disabilities to ensure their well-being, quality of life, and inclusion in the community. These individuals have unique strengths and abilities, and with the right resources and support, they can experience meaningful connections and enriching experiences despite their significant challenges.

### Syndromic intellectual disability

Syndromic intellectual disabilities refer to a category of intellectual disabilities that are associated with specific genetic syndromes or medical conditions. These conditions are characterized by a combination of intellectual impairments and other physical, behavioural, or developmental features that are characteristic of the syndrome. Examples of syndromic intellectual disabilities include:

- **Down syndrome:** A genetic condition caused by the presence of an extra copy of chromosome 21, resulting in characteristic facial features, developmental delays, and intellectual disabilities.
- **Fragile X syndrome:** A genetic disorder caused by a mutation in the FMR1 gene on the X chromosome, leading to intellectual disabilities, behavioural challenges, and physical characteristics such as a long face and large ears.
- **Rett syndrome:** A rare genetic disorder that primarily affects females, characterized by developmental regression, loss of motor skills, intellectual disabilities, and distinctive hand movements.
- **Angelman syndrome:** A genetic disorder characterized by intellectual disabilities, developmental delays, seizures, and a happy demeanour, often associated with laughter and frequent smiling.
- **Prader-Willi syndrome:** A genetic disorder caused by the absence of genetic material on chromosome 15, leading to intellectual disabilities, compulsive eating, obesity, and other physical and behavioural challenges.

These are just a few examples of syndromic intellectual disabilities, but there are many other genetic syndromes and medical conditions associated with intellectual impairments. Syndromic intellectual disabilities vary widely in their presentation, severity, and associated features, and individuals with these conditions may require specialized medical care, educational support, and interventions tailored to their specific needs.

### Non-syndromic intellectual disability

Non-syndromic intellectual disabilities refer to intellectual disabilities that occur without the presence of specific genetic syndromes or identifiable medical conditions. Unlike syndromic intellectual disabilities, which are associated with distinct physical, behavioural, or developmental features characteristic of a particular syndrome or condition, non-syndromic intellectual disabilities do not have these accompanying features.

- Instead, non-syndromic intellectual disabilities are typically diagnosed based on cognitive and adaptive functioning assessments, without the presence of additional physical or genetic abnormalities. These intellectual disabilities may result from a variety of causes, including genetic factors, prenatal exposure to

toxins or infections, complications during childbirth, or environmental influences.

- Non-syndromic intellectual disabilities vary widely in their severity, presentation, and underlying causes. Individuals with non-syndromic intellectual disabilities may have a range of cognitive and adaptive functioning levels, and their support needs may vary accordingly. Interventions for non-syndromic intellectual disabilities often focus on providing tailored educational support, therapies, and accommodations to help individuals maximize their potential and improve their quality of life.

### Challenges of families

Families who have children with intellectual disabilities often face unique challenges that can impact various aspects of their lives. Some of these challenges include:

- **Emotional Impact:** Parents and caregivers may experience a range of emotions, including grief, guilt, frustration, and anxiety, upon receiving a diagnosis of intellectual disability for their child. They may also grapple with uncertainty about their child's future and worry about their well-being.
- **Financial Strain:** Providing care for a child with intellectual disabilities can be financially burdensome. Families may incur expenses related to medical care, therapies, specialized equipment, and educational support services. These costs can strain family budgets and lead to financial stress.
- **Time and Energy Demands:** Caring for a child with intellectual disabilities often requires a significant investment of time and energy. Parents may need to juggle multiple responsibilities, including attending medical appointments, coordinating therapies, advocating for their child's educational needs, and providing ongoing support and supervision.
- **Social Isolation:** Families may experience social isolation due to the demands of caring for a child with intellectual disabilities. They may face challenges in finding inclusive recreational activities, forming friendships with other families, or participating in community events due to logistical or accessibility barriers.
- **Educational Advocacy:** Navigating the educational system can be challenging for families of children with intellectual disabilities. Parents may need to advocate for appropriate accommodations, individualized educational program (IEP), and specialized services to meet their child's unique learning needs.
- **Stigma and Discrimination:** Families may encounter stigma and discrimination from society due to misconceptions or stereotypes about intellectual disabilities. This can lead to feelings of isolation, marginalization, and frustration for both the child and their family members.
- **Siblings' Needs:** Siblings of children with intellectual disabilities may experience their own set of challenges, including feelings of resentment, jealousy, or guilt, as well as USED concerns about their sibling's well-being and future care.

Despite these challenges, families of children with intellectual disabilities also experience moments of joy, love, and resilience. By accessing support networks,

resources, and services, families can navigate these challenges more effectively and create fulfilling lives for themselves and their children.

### Strategies to reduce the challenges faced by families

Reducing the challenges faced by families with children who have intellectual disabilities requires a comprehensive and supportive approach. Some strategies to help alleviate these challenges:

- **Access Support Services:** Connect with local organizations, support groups, and service providers that specialize in intellectual disabilities. These resources can offer valuable information, guidance, and support tailored to the needs of families and children with intellectual disabilities.
- **Advocate for Educational Needs:** Work closely with your child's school to ensure they receive appropriate educational support and accommodations. Advocate for individualized educational program (IEP), specialized instruction, and access to assistive technology and resources to help them succeed academically.
- **Promote Social Inclusion:** Seek out inclusive social and recreational activities for your child to participate in, such as sports teams, clubs, or community programs. Encourage peer interactions and friendships to help foster social skills and a sense of belonging.
- **Provide Emotional Support:** Foster open communication and provide emotional support for your child and other family members. Encourage discussions about feelings, challenges, and accomplishments, and seek professional counselling or therapy if needed.
- **Create Routine and Structure:** Establish consistent routines and structures at home to help your child feel secure and supported. Provide clear expectations and guidance for daily activities, chores, and responsibilities to promote independence and self-confidence.
- **Foster Independence:** Encourage your child to develop independence skills appropriate to their abilities, such as self-care, decision-making, and problem-solving. Offer opportunities for them to practice these skills in a supportive environment.
- **Take Care of Yourself:** Remember to prioritize your own physical and emotional well-being as a caregiver. Take breaks when needed, seek respite care or support from family and friends, and engage in activities that help you recharge and reduce stress.
- **Educate Others:** Advocate for greater awareness and understanding of intellectual disabilities within your community, school, and workplace. Help educate others about the abilities and potential of individuals with intellectual disabilities to promote inclusion and acceptance.
- **Plan for the Future:** Begin planning for your child's transition to adulthood early, including exploring post-secondary education, vocational training, employment opportunities, and independent living options. Seek guidance from professionals and support organizations to help navigate this process.
- **Education and Advocacy:** Learn about your child's specific needs and rights within the educational system. Advocate for appropriate accommodations, individualized educational program (IEP), and support services to help your child succeed in school.
- **Encourage Independence:** Foster your child's

independence by providing opportunities for them to develop and practice self-care skills, decision-making abilities, and problem-solving strategies. Offer guidance and support as needed, but encourage autonomy whenever possible.

- **Establish Routines:** Establish consistent routines and structures at home to help your child feel secure and supported. Clear expectations and predictable schedules can promote a sense of stability and reduce anxiety for both your child and your family.
- **Provide Comprehensive Care:** Offer ongoing support and supervision with daily activities, including personal care, hygiene, meal preparation, and safety awareness. Seek out respite care and support services to help manage caregiving responsibilities and prevent burnout.
- **Address Emotional Needs:** Create a supportive and nurturing environment where your child feels valued, accepted, and understood. Foster open communication, validate their feelings, and provide reassurance during times of stress or uncertainty. Seek counselling or therapy for your child and family members as needed.
- **Access Financial Assistance:** Explore financial assistance programs, benefits, and resources available to families of children with intellectual disabilities. These may include government programs, insurance coverage, and community-based services that can help offset the costs of care and support.
- **Explore Housing Options:** Investigate housing options and supports available for adults with intellectual disabilities, including group homes, supported living arrangements, and independent living programs. Explore options that align with your adult child's preferences and level of independence.
- **Ensure Access to Healthcare:** Advocate for access to comprehensive healthcare services, including medical, dental, and mental health care, for your adult child. Seek out healthcare providers who have experience working with individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- **Support Employment Goals:** Help your adult child explore vocational training programs, job coaching services, and supported employment opportunities. Advocate for inclusive workplaces that accommodate their strengths and abilities.
- **Plan for Financial Security:** Develop a financial plan that addresses your adult child's long-term needs and ensures their financial security. Explore government benefits, trusts, and other financial resources that can help support their ongoing care and independence.
- **Foster Social Connections:** Encourage your adult child to participate in social activities, clubs, and community programs where they can build friendships and connections with peers. Seek out inclusive recreational opportunities and support their involvement in social networks.
- **Support Emotional Well-being:** Provide emotional support and encouragement to your adult child as they navigate adulthood. Foster open communication, validate their feelings, and help them develop coping strategies for managing stress and challenges.

By implementing these strategies and accessing available support services, families can reduce the challenges associated with supporting adult children with intellectual disabilities and help them lead fulfilling and meaningful lives as independent adults.

### Current issues faced by families having children with intellectual disabilities

- **Access to Education:** Ensuring equitable access to quality education and appropriate support services for children with intellectual disabilities remains a challenge in many places. Families may encounter barriers in accessing specialized education programs, assistive technology, and individualized support plans for their children.
  - **Healthcare Disparities:** Disparities in healthcare access and quality can impact families of children with intellectual disabilities. Access to specialized healthcare services, therapies, and early intervention programs may vary depending on factors such as geographic location, socioeconomic status, and insurance coverage.
  - **Financial Strain:** Providing care for a child with intellectual disabilities can place a significant financial burden on families. Costs associated with medical care, therapies, educational support, and adaptive equipment can strain family budgets and lead to financial stress.
  - **Social Inclusion:** Ensuring social inclusion and opportunities for children with intellectual disabilities remains an ongoing challenge. Families may face barriers in accessing inclusive recreational activities, community programs, and peer relationships for their children.
  - **Transition to Adulthood:** Planning for the transition to adulthood presents challenges for families of children with intellectual disabilities. Ensuring access to vocational training, employment opportunities, independent living options, and ongoing support services requires careful coordination and advocacy.
  - **Stigma and Discrimination:** Families may encounter stigma, discrimination, and negative attitudes toward intellectual disabilities in society. Addressing misconceptions, promoting awareness, and advocating for greater acceptance and inclusion are ongoing challenges for families.
  - **Support Services Availability:** Availability and accessibility of support services for families vary widely depending on geographic location, funding resources, and service provider capacity. Families may face waitlists, limited-service options, and gaps in service provision.
  - **Legal and Policy Issues:** Legal and policy issues related to disability rights, healthcare access, education, and employment can impact families of children with intellectual disabilities. Advocating for policy changes, enforcement of existing laws, and protection of rights are ongoing challenges for families and advocacy organizations.
  - **Caregiver Burnout:** Providing care for a child with intellectual disabilities can lead to caregiver burnout and stress for family members. Balancing caregiving responsibilities with other family and work obligations, as well as maintaining one's own physical and emotional well-being, requires ongoing support and self-care strategies.
  - **Educational Support:** Ensuring that children with mild intellectual disabilities receive appropriate educational support and accommodations in mainstream educational settings can be challenging. Families may encounter barriers in accessing individualized educational program (IEP), specialized instruction, and support services to address their child's learning needs.
  - **Stigma and Misunderstanding:** Families may encounter stigma, discrimination, and negative attitudes toward intellectual disabilities in society. Addressing misconceptions, promoting awareness, and advocating for greater acceptance and inclusion are ongoing challenges for families.
  - **Transition to Adulthood:** Planning for the transition to adulthood presents challenges for families of children with mild intellectual disabilities. Ensuring access to vocational training, employment opportunities, independent living options, and ongoing support services requires careful coordination and advocacy.
  - **Access to Healthcare:** Access to comprehensive healthcare services, including medical, dental, and mental health care, may be limited for families of children with mild intellectual disabilities. Families may encounter barriers in accessing specialized healthcare providers and services that understand their child's unique needs.
  - **Educational Advocacy:** Advocating for appropriate educational support and accommodations within the school system can be challenging for families. Navigating the educational system, attending meetings, and advocating for their child's needs may require time, resources, and support.
  - **Housing and Independent Living:** Finding appropriate housing options and supporting adult children with intellectual disabilities in living independently can be challenging. Limited availability of affordable and accessible housing, as well as barriers to accessing support services, can pose significant obstacles for families.
  - **Employment Opportunities:** Securing meaningful employment opportunities for adults with intellectual disabilities remains a challenge. Limited job prospects, discrimination in the workplace, and lack of access to vocational training and support services can hinder their ability to find and maintain employment.
  - **Healthcare Access:** Access to comprehensive healthcare services, including medical, dental, and mental health care, may be limited for adults with intellectual disabilities. Families may encounter barriers in accessing specialized healthcare providers and services that understand their adult child's unique needs.
  - **Financial Security:** Ensuring financial security and stability for adults with intellectual disabilities is a concern for many families. Limited employment opportunities, reliance on government benefits, and lack of access to financial planning and support services can impact their long-term financial well-being.
  - **Caregiver Support:** Providing ongoing care and support for adult children with intellectual disabilities can place a strain on family caregivers. Balancing caregiving responsibilities with other family and work obligations, as well as maintaining one's own physical and emotional well-being, requires ongoing support and resources.
- Addressing these issues requires a coordinated effort involving families, communities, healthcare providers, employers, policymakers, and advocacy organizations to ensure that children with intellectual disabilities and their



families receive the support and resources they need to thrive.

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