



## Intellectual Disability

- “In general, a person with an intellectual impairment is regarded as having a permanent condition that significantly impacts his or her ability to learn and process information. They may also experience difficulty with the development of adaptive skills. Adaptive skills are age-appropriate behaviors necessary for independent and safe functioning in daily life, such as grooming, dressing, safe food handling, holding a job, money management, cleaning, making and sustaining friendships, and personal responsibility. Children and adults with intellectual impairments may have difficulty comprehending what is seen or heard and inferring information from social cues and body language. They may require repeated opportunities to master new information, and they often benefit from having new information presented in a variety of formats; using auditory, visual, physical, or multisensory methods can be helpful. Key spiritual concepts must be presented in a manner simple enough to be understood and accepted, yet deep enough to impart a personal, meaningful understanding of the gospel.
  - In some cases, the individual was born with a congenital condition that includes a component of intellectual disability, such as chromosomal defects like Down Syndrome. The impairment may also have occurred because of brain damage while in the womb or at or near birth due to some type of trauma or incident. In addition, some older children or adults are diagnosed with an intellectual impairment after a traumatic event, such as an acute illness affecting the neurological system and brain, severe stroke, or a significant traumatic brain injury. In other cases, impaired intellectual functioning is present without any identifiable cause.
  - It is typically not possible to tell from looking at a person the extent of his or her intellectual impairment and attempting to make such an assessment based upon physical characteristics must be avoided.
  - This type of special need can impact all ages and may occur at any point in the lifespan. In some cases, the individual does not comprehend his or her limitations. In other cases, especially with an intellectual impairment that developed later in life, the individual may be aware of the fact that he or she functions differently from how they did in the past. Such can be the case with an elderly person who is impacted by intellectual disabilities following a stroke or other neurological diagnoses later in life. Individuals who have difficulty coping with this change may experience sadness, frustration, anger, or embarrassment.

- In addition to the impact on learning and adaptive skill development, adults and children with intellectual impairments may have co-existing conditions that impact communication, social-emotional functioning, and physical development. It is most often impossible to determine the extent to which the individual has challenges in these areas, and care must be taken not to assume that the individual is affected by these issues.
- In a church setting, the determination of a special need is typically based upon self-reporting or the report of family members or caregivers. Most importantly, church members must avoid pre-determining the scope or range of disability in a person with physically obvious needs. In some cultures, identifying and acknowledging an intellectual impairment or disability is not acceptable. So, instead of inquiring about details regarding the special need and its cause, it is often more helpful to approach these individuals by asking, “How may we help?” Asking how to help is productive, considerate, and acceptable—and it avoids labeling the individual. In addition, offering assistance can foster a positive relationship based on Christian care and concern.”

(Source: *Keys to Special Needs Ministries: Intellectual Disability*, General Conference Sabbath School & Personal Ministries Department, Author: Fran Chaffee Grossenbacher, Editor: Gary B. Swanson)