

Tell me About ID: Making the Definition of Intellectual Disability Accessible Around the World

AAIDD International Interest Network

AAIDD (2011) defined intellectual disability (ID) as “a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18”. The integration of intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior constructs to ID definition has triggered important issues as the DSM-V (APA, 2013) consideration of adaptive skills to diagnose ID. This new definition stands as a crucial framework to understand ID. Since then, international researchers and policy makers have been adopting this definition.

Nevertheless, practitioners, families, and individuals with intellectual disabilities from diverse backgrounds may still have difficulties accessing and comprehending this definition. Therefore, the AAIDD International Interest Network is committed to make this definition accessible across countries and cultures. We as a group started the initiative “Tell me about ID”. First, members from six countries formed a taskforce to transform the definition into plain English, that is thinking of non-academia people (e.g., people with disabilities and their families, practitioners) as the target audience. Second, we request assistance for members to translate the agreed-upon definition into different languages.

A group of task force (Aesha John, Cristina Simões, Mayumi Hagiwara, Giulia Balboni, Laura Gomez, and Cheng eun Lee) helped review the definition. We also confirmed with the work group that our draft was consistent with the upcoming 12th edition of Intellectual Disability: Definition, Classification, and Systems of Supports.

Definition of Intellectual Disability

Intellectual disability is characterized by important limitations in both **intellectual functioning** and in **adaptive behavior**. This limitations begin **before 18 years old**.

Intellectual functioning is also known as intelligence. This is an intellectual capacity including several skills (for example, learning, reasoning, problem solving...).

One way to measure intellectual functioning is by using an IQ test.

Adaptive behavior is the set of skills that are learned and performed by people in their everyday lives.

- Conceptual skills—language and literacy, time, and number concepts; and self-direction.
- Social skills—interpersonal skills, social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, naiveté (i.e., wariness), social problem solving, and the ability to follow rules/obey laws and to avoid being victimized.
- Practical skills—activities of daily living, job related skills, healthcare, travel/transportation, schedules/routines, safety, use of money, use of the telephone.

We typically use standardized tests to assess these skills and identify necessary supports.


Additional Considerations

In defining and assessing intellectual disability, it is important to take into account additional factors, such as the community environment and cultural differences in the way people communicate, move, and behave. Assessments must also assume that limitations in individuals often coexist with strengths and that a person's level of life functioning will improve if appropriate personalized supports are provided over a sustained period. Only on the basis of such many-sided evaluations, professionals can determine whether an individual has intellectual and developmental disability and tailor individualized support plans to enhance personal outcomes.

Thank you for the following members who reviewed the document in English: Aesha John, Cristina Simões, Mayumi Hagiwara, Giulia Balboni, Laura Gomez, Cheng eun Lee, Caya Chiu & Cristina Mumbardó.

Next, we recruited bilingual members from the AAIDD Interest Network to translate and validate the TipSheet. We currently have eight versions and more to come.

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| Dutch (Netherlands) • E-QUAL (Jos Van Loon and Ilse Goethals) https://goo.gl/cjM4ey  | Italian (Italy) • Giulia Balboni • Alice Bacherini https://goo.gl/3r2YfC  | Japanese (Japan) • Mayumi Hagiwara https://goo.gl/tx4ErK  | Korean (Korea) • Hyojeong Seo • Chung eun Lee https://goo.gl/MjqPLU  |
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| Portuguese (Portugal) • Cristina Simões https://goo.gl/5bZzfr  | Russian (Russia) • Elena Morgacheva https://goo.gl/BNgKqr  | Spanish (Spain) • Laura Gómez • Cristina Mumbardó https://goo.gl/QYrTM9  | Traditional Chinese (Taiwan) • Caya Chiu https://goo.gl/hLHGt2  |
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