



Education for Lifelong Mental Health

What I should know about

Mental Health Therapies



Can people with IDD get mental health therapy?

Yes. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) **can have therapy just like anyone else**. Therapy can help with mental health problems (like anxiety, depression, OCD, or trauma) and with behavior problems (like getting very upset, hurting themselves, or hurting others). The therapy might look a little different to match how the person learns and communicates. But it can still work very well.

What kinds of therapy help?

People with IDD may experience improved mental health or behaviors with the following therapies:

Talking therapy (psychotherapy)



CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) is one of the best-known therapies. It helps people change unhelpful thoughts and learn new ways to cope. CBT and other talking therapies can be simplified by:

- Using clear, simple words
- Adding pictures or examples
- Practicing skills many times

This helps people with IDD understand and use new skills in real life.

Behavioral therapy



Behavioral therapies look at **what happens before and after a behavior**. They help teach new, safer behaviors and ways to communicate needs. Examples include:

- **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA):** A structured approach often used with autism and other developmental disabilities. It uses step-by-step teaching and reinforcement to build new skills.
- **Positive Behavior Supports (PBS):** A person-centered approach that emphasizes changing the environment, adding supports, and teaching alternatives to prevent challenging behaviors and improve quality of life.

Trauma-informed therapy



Many people with IDD have also experienced trauma (like being hurt, bullied, or losing someone important).

- A therapist can help you talk about what happened and how you feel.
- They will go at your pace, help you feel safe, and take time to build trust.

Medicine



Sometimes, therapy works best with medicine, like for severe anxiety, OCD, or depression.

- Medicine can help balance brain chemicals.
- It's important that doctors watch closely for side effects, because people with IDD may react differently.

What makes therapy work better for people with IDD?

- Making sure therapy matches how the person communicates and learns
- Using pictures, examples, or role-playing
- Practicing skills many times, in small steps
- Working together with family, staff, or teachers
- Keeping routines and supports in place at home, work, or school



Will it take longer?

Sometimes therapy needs more **time or more practice**. That is okay.

With the right help, people with IDD can **learn new ways to cope, feel better, and have fewer problems.**



References

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