

Identifying Intellectual Disability

It is important to identify clients who have an intellectual disability so you can respond well to their accessibility needs.

Additionally, people who have an intellectual disability have the right to a 93a interview when reporting sexual violence to police. This interview is easier to do as it is recorded rather than written.

However, many people who have an intellectual disability may not feel comfortable disclosing their disability due to discrimination and stigma. This document has some ideas of how to approach this topic with a client.

Indicators that someone has an Intellectual Disability

- low concentration/easily distracted or go off-topic
- hard time remembering things
- difficulty in problem-solving or deciding on what's most important
- a gap between words and actions (for example, they say they understand but demonstrate otherwise)
- showing difficulty with abstract thinking and reasoning
- difficulty in understanding questions
- difficulty in responding to questions or explaining things
- difficulty in making themselves understood
- difficulty in following instructions
- not following social norms

Social Indicators

- they receive a disability pension or Centrelink's Disability Support Pension (DSP)
- they have attended special school or a special class at school

- they attend a work training program
- they attend some kind of respite or activity group during the day
- they are involved with multiple service systems
- they live in supported accommodation
- they have support staff/hours

Asking about Disability

- If you think that someone has an intellectual disability, it is best to ask the person directly
- Explain why you are asking – how does it benefit them for you to know about their disability?
 - In the groups we ran at WWILD, women with intellectual disabilities said they would be more likely to tell workers about their disability if they knew the worker wanted to know so they could work better with them
 - Women with intellectual disabilities have said they would be more open to telling police about their disability if they knew they could get extra support, like 93A interviews and special witness provisions.
- We can sometimes feel uncomfortable to ask directly about a person's disability or support needs - this hesitation can be because of ableism (seeing disability as a bad thing rather than a normal part of life)

Some examples of how to ask:

- I want to make sure I am talking with you in a way that works for you. Is there anything I should know that would help? Like do you have any kind of disability?
- We ask everyone whether they have a disability. If you have a disability that makes reading and writing hard, we can do a special kind of interview that makes it easier for you. Do you have any kind of disability?

People may not answer 'I have an intellectual disability'. Very few people use this wording. They may say things like:

- I have trouble with reading and writing
- I am a slow learner
- I have a disability (and won't be able to say what type)

Regardless of how they answer, it's important to find out how their disability works for them. You could say:

- You said you have a disability. Can you tell me more about it?
- What kind of things are you good at?
- What kinds of things do you find hard?
- What things can I do to make myself more understandable?
- Is there anyone I can talk to about your disability to find out more about it?

Screening Questions

Sometimes you won't get a direct answer when you ask about disability. In these situations, it may be best to use screening questions. You could ask:

- Do you have trouble with reading and writing?
- Just to make sure we have the same understanding, can you explain it back to me in your own words?
- Do you mind me asking if you get Centrelink? What kind of payment?
- Where did you go to school?
- Who do you talk to when you need help?
- Do you get help from any services or workers? What do they help with?

Observe people's body language, not just what they are saying.

We have also created a video that features women who have an intellectual disability describing their disability in their own words and offering advice around how to discuss their disability with them.

Please go to <https://andyouthinkyouretheexpert.com.au/> to access the video.