

UNDERSTANDING INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

LEARNING SUPPORT ACTIVITIES • TEACHER RESOURCE

An intellectual disability (ID) is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive skills, such as communication, social skills, self-care, and problem-solving. Students with intellectual disabilities learn at different rates and often benefit from explicit instruction, repetition, and meaningful practice. With appropriate supports and high expectations, students with intellectual disabilities can make meaningful progress in the ASL classroom.

What Is an Intellectual Disability?

An intellectual disability affects how a student learns, reasons, solves problems, and applies new skills in everyday situations. Every student is unique, and strengths, interests, and support needs vary from one individual to another.

What You May Notice in an ASL Classroom

- Learning new signs may require additional repetition.
- Difficulty remembering multi-step directions.
- Slower pace when learning new concepts.
- Need for additional guided practice and feedback.
- Success with structured routines and consistent instruction.

Student Strengths

- Strong desire to participate and learn.
- Growth through repetition and practice.
- Positive responses to encouragement and praise.
- Success with visual instruction and hands-on learning.
- Meaningful progress toward individualized goals.

How Teachers Can Help

- Teach one concept at a time.
- Use clear, concrete language and visual supports.
- Provide frequent opportunities for guided and independent practice.
- Reinforce learning through repetition and positive feedback.
- Celebrate progress and build confidence.

Things to Avoid

- Assuming students cannot learn challenging material.
- Presenting too much information at one time.
- Rushing instruction or practice.
- Focusing only on limitations instead of strengths and growth.

★ Remember

Students with intellectual disabilities can learn and succeed when instruction is individualized, consistent, and supportive. The goal is not to lower expectations, but to provide the pathways and supports needed for students to reach their highest potential.