

GROWING OLDER: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES
(An Overview)

People with intellectual disabilities encounter many of the same issues associated with aging as do people who do not have an intellectual disability. Individuals who have lived with the challenges of an intellectual disability will frequently experience further challenges as part of the normal aging process, for a variety of reasons.

Module 1: Growing Older: New Challenges, New Needs

Part I of this training will examine the physical, cognitive and behavioral changes typical of the aging process and explore, as well, how these changes manifest for someone with an intellectual disability.

Discussion will include the syndrome-specific aging issues related to people with Down syndrome, Seizure Disorders, Cerebral Palsy, and Fragile X syndrome.

The effects of long-term medication use – including psychotropics and seizure medications -- will be examined as they contribute to age-related disabilities, including osteoporosis, heart disease, ambulation challenges, and neurological disorders.

Idiosyncratic effects of common medication in aging individuals

Considerations for providing rehabilitation and environmental supports to help individuals age in place: identifying environmental hazards in the home; encouraging cooperation with rehabilitation efforts; teaching and training to use assistive devices such as walkers, elevated toilet seats, etc.

Individuals with cognitive disabilities often struggle with understanding the reasons behind rehabilitation efforts and necessary environmental supports. Practitioners must be sensitive to these issues and develop creative and innovative ways to encourage adaptation and cooperation.

Module 2: Alzheimer's and Other Dementias: Functional and Behavioral Changes

People with intellectual disabilities experience the cognitive impairments associated with dementias in much the same way as the general population. Responses and the development of coping mechanisms, however, become complicated because the person with limited intellectual abilities struggles more profoundly to understand what is happening.

In Part II of this training, curriculum will focus on the following areas:

- The various dementias and how they may manifest in individuals with intellectual disabilities
- The evaluation and assessment tools available for accurately diagnosing the progression of dementia
- Differential diagnosis of behavior changes associated with dementia and the onset of a mental illness

- The various ways individuals will compensate for declining cognitive abilities
- The scope and typical progression of dementia – both physically and cognitively
- Dementia considerations for people with Down syndrome

Module 3: Aging in Place: Developing Appropriate Community-Based Supports

Current research indicates that people who are able to remain in their homes or in another community-based living arrangement experience improved cognitive and physical outcomes over longer periods of time. Federal and state legislation – including Olmstead, the ADA, Waiver Diversions, and the ACA – provide guidelines and supports to facilitate safely supporting a person to age in place.

Part III of this training will examine considerations for developing person-centered supports to enable an individual with both cognitive and age-related disabilities to remain at home.

Curriculum will include:

- Developing a person-centered plan to support the aging individual in his or her home of choice

- Partnering and collaborating with the person, medical professionals, and caretakers to develop a comprehensive system of supports based on the person's physical and cognitive strengths and challenges

- Accessing resources for supports, including Olmstead, the ACA, Medicaid waivers, family members, faith-based communities

- Facilitating assessments and evaluations to identify necessary home-based supports

- Implementing supports within a community-based home-like environment

- Advocacy and person-centered interventions with individuals to help them understand the changes they are experiencing and assisting them to develop effective personal strategies for coping with these changes