

THE 411 ON COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS FOR GENERAL EDUCATORS

What is Cognitive Impairment?

Cognitive impairment, also referred to as mental retardation or intellectual disability, is a disability that manifests itself during the developmental period. Individuals with this disability demonstrate all of the following behavioral characteristics:

1. Develop at a rate at or below two standard deviations below the mean determined through an intellectual assessment,
2. Scores approximately within the lowest six percentiles on a standardized test in reading and math,
3. Lack of development primarily in the cognitive domain,
4. Impairment of adaptive behavior,
5. Adversely affects educational performance

A determination of the impairment is determined by a multidisciplinary evaluation in which one member is a psychologist.

Types of Cognitive Impairments

Cognitive impairments are broken down into three categories; mild, moderate, and severe. Eighty five percent of students with cognitive impairments have mild cases. These are the students you will see in your classrooms and it may not even be evident to you or your other students.

How Does This Disability Affect the Student?

Students with a cognitive impairment are affected in a variety of ways. Listed below are a number of areas this disability will impact the student:

1. Academic skills – especially in math and reading/writing
2. Communication
3. Meeting personal needs
4. Social and leisure skills
5. Health and safety skills

Tips to Help a Student with a Cognitive Impairment Succeed

In order to best help a student with a cognitive impairment, focus on two primary areas; academic skills and adaptive behavior.

Academic Skills

1. Reading
2. Handwriting
3. Spelling
4. Written expression
5. Focus on those academic areas that will be most beneficial later in life (keeping a checkbook, filling out a job application, etc.)

Adaptive Behavior

1. Communication
2. Meeting personal needs
3. Health and safety skills
4. Independent living
5. Social skills and reading social cues

Additional Resources

The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation – teachmorelovemore.org

West Virginia University Eberly College of Arts and Sciences – <http://www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/intel.html>

James Cook University – http://www.jcu.edu.au/disability/JCUPRD_051402.html

THE 411 ON VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS FOR GENERAL EDUCATORS

What is Visual Impairment?

Students who have a visual impairment may have a variety of characteristics related to vision. Most students fit in to one of four categories.

1. Partially Sighted – visual loss sufficient to require special education accommodations
2. Low Vision – Reading disability significant enough to prevent a student from reading at a normal distance even with the use of glasses/contact lenses.
3. Legally Blind – Student with vision less than 20/200
4. Totally Blind – Student must use braille or other non-visual media in learning

How Does a Visual Impairment Affect the Student?

The affects a visual impairment may have on a student depend on severity, type of loss, age at which loss appears, and overall functioning level of the student. Students may be affected in the following ways:

1. Little desire to explore his/her environment
2. Unable to read social cues
3. Unable to imitate social behavior
4. Unable to understand non-verbal cues
5. Little desire to participate in group activities

Tips to Help a Student with a Visual Impairment Succeed

Listed below are a number of tips to help students with visual impairments of any level of severity.

1. Use technology – computers (text to speech, dictation to write), low-vision optical and video aids
2. Preferential seating
3. Large print materials
4. Books on tape
5. Braille books
6. Assistance and emphasis on listening skills, communication, orientation and mobility, daily living skills
7. Students may need help learning to use assistive technology, so make sure you know it as well
8. Assist students with low vision to use their residual vision more effectively and efficiently
9. Establish a physical environment that is least restrictive
10. Talk as you move around the room
11. Verbally describe images, charts, graphs, maps
12. Collaborate with vision professionals

Additional Resources

The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation – teachmorelovemore.org

The IRIS Center – iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources

American Foundation for the Blind – afb.org

British Columbia Ministry of Education – bcd.ed.gov.bc.ca/specialed/visimpair/

THE 411 ON HEARING IMPAIRMENTS FOR GENERAL EDUCATORS

What is Hearing Impairment?

An impairment in hearing that adversely affects a student's educational performance. It can be permanent or fluctuate. A hearing impairment is different than deafness. Hearing impairments have been placed into four categories and is thought of as mild, moderate, or severe.

1. Conductive Hearing Loss – all frequencies are affected the same. This is the least severe
2. Sensorineural Hearing Loss – Frequencies can be affected differently. This is mild to severe
3. Mixed Hearing Loss – Combination of conductive and Sensorineural hearing loss
4. Central Hearing Loss – Problem in pathway from inner ear to brain's auditory region

How Does a Hearing Impairment Affect the Student?

Hearing impairments affect students in two primary areas.

1. Expressive – ability to speak
2. Receptive – Understanding the spoken language

Hearing impairments do not directly affect a student's cognitive skills or the ability to learn, however. Hearing impairments may also impact the comprehension of printed language and vocabulary knowledge.

Tips to Help a Student with a Hearing Impairment Succeed

Listed below are a number of tips to help students with hearing impairments of any level of severity.

1. Use technology – closed captioning, voice amplifiers, real time captioning (CART), Sound field systems
2. Preferential seating for students with limited hearing
3. Give directions facing students with hearing impairments to allow lip reading
4. Assistance of a note taker for student with hearing impairment
5. Instruction for classmates in alternate methods of communication
6. Use of interpreter for students that use ASL
7. Collaborate with audiologist

Additional Resources

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities -

<http://www.nichcy.org/disabilities/specific/pages/deafnessandhearingloss.aspx>

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing -

<http://nc.agbell.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=718>

West Virginia University Eberly College of Arts and Sciences – <http://www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/hearing.html>