

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS IN INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

A.J. McConnell, Psy.D., NADD-CC

Michael Mayo, M.S.

Educational Tools and Strategies

- **Visual Supports and Social Stories**
 - Use picture-based stories or comic strips to explain concepts like peer pressure, safe choices, and the effects of substances.
 - Tools like Boardmaker or Storyboard That can help create customized visuals.
- **Interactive Curricula**
 - Programs like “Understanding Addiction and Developmental Disabilities” offer structured lessons designed specifically for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD).
- **Simplified Language Materials**
 - Use plain language brochures, videos, and handouts that avoid jargon and explain substance use in clear, concrete terms.
 - SAMHSA provides accessible guides for people with cognitive disabilities and substance use disorders.
- **Role-Playing and Scenario-Based Learning**
 - Practice real-life situations (e.g., being offered a drink) to build refusal skills and decision-making confidence.
- **Peer Support and Mentorship**
 - Programs that include peer educators or mentors with similar lived experiences can be especially impactful.
- **Digital Tools and Apps**
 - Apps with gamified learning or visual prompts can reinforce healthy behaviors and provide reminders or coping strategies.
- **Caregiver and Support Staff Training**
 - Educating families and support workers ensures consistent messaging and reinforcement across environments.

Tailored Education Programs

- **SAMHSA Advisory on Disabilities and SUDs**
 - Offers guidance on how treatment programs can better serve people with physical and cognitive disabilities who have substance use disorders (SUDs).
 - Includes strategies for accessible education and support.
 - View the advisory
 - <https://library.samhsa.gov/product/advisory-mental-and-substance-use-disorder-treatment-people-physical-and-cognitive>

- **E-Based Academy: Substance Use Disorders in Individuals with IDD**
 - A one-hour training course that covers how substance abuse affects the IDD population.
 - Teaches evidence-based principles for recognizing and treating SUDs in this group.
 - Explore the course: <https://www.ebasedacademy.org/learn/courses/242/substance-use-disorders-in-individuals-with-intellectual-disabilities>

- **DisabilityInfo.org Fact Sheet**
 - Provides insights into the risks, challenges, and treatment gaps for people with IDD and substance use.
 - Highlights the need for tailored screening and education.
 - Read the fact sheet: <https://disabilityinfo.org/fact-sheet-library/health/intellectual-and-developmental-disabilities-idd-and-substance-use/>

- **Disability Resources: Prevention and Treatment**
 - Offers a collection of resources for professionals and caregivers to support individuals with disabilities facing substance abuse.
 - Includes prevention strategies and treatment options.
 - Browse resources: <https://www.disabilityresources.org/substance-abuse.html>

- **The Recovery Village**

- Discusses the intersection of substance use and intellectual disabilities.
- Emphasizes the importance of customized treatment plans and education.
- Learn more: <https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/drug-addiction/substance-use-intellectual-disabilities/>