

Mental Retardation

What is Mental Retardation?

- Mental retardation is a term used when a person has certain limitations in mental functioning and in skills, such as communicating, taking care of him or herself, and social skills. These limitations will cause a child to learn and develop more slowly than a typical child.

Children with mental retardation may take longer to learn to speak, walk, and take care of their personal needs, such as dressing or eating. They are likely to have trouble learning in school. They will learn, but it will take them longer than other children. There may be some things they cannot learn.

Mental retardation is not a disease. Mental retardation is also not a type of mental illness, like depression. There is no cure for mental retardation. However, most children with mental retardation can learn the skills they need to live, work, and play in their community.



What Causes Mental Retardation?

- Doctors have found many causes of mental retardation. The most common are:

- Genetic conditions. Sometimes mental retardation is caused by abnormal genes inherited from parents, errors when genes combine, or other reasons.
- Problems during pregnancy. Mental retardation can result when the baby does not develop inside the mother properly. A woman who drinks alcohol or gets an infection during pregnancy may also have a baby with mental retardation.
- Problems at birth. If a baby has problems during labor and birth, such as not getting enough oxygen, he or she may have mental retardation.
- Health problems. Diseases like whooping cough, the measles, or meningitis can cause mental retardation. Mental retardation can also be caused by extreme malnutrition (not eating right), not getting enough medical care, or by being exposed to poisons, like lead or mercury.

How is Mental Retardation Diagnosed?

- Mental retardation is diagnosed by looking at two main things:
 - the ability of a person's brain to learn, think, solve problems, and make sense of the world (called IQ or intellectual functioning); and
 - whether the person has the skills he or she needs to live independently (called adaptive behavior, or adaptive functioning).

Intellectual functioning is usually measured by a test called an IQ test. The average score is 100. People scoring below 75 are thought to have mental retardation. To measure adaptive behavior, professionals look at what a child can do in comparison to other children of his or her age. Certain skills are important to adaptive behavior. These are:

- daily living skills, such as getting dressed, going to the bathroom, and feeding one's self.
- communication skills, such as understanding what is said and being able to answer.
- social skills with peers, family members, adults, and others.

Teacher and parents should be aware that children with mental retardation may:

- sit up, crawl, or walk later than other children.
- learn to talk later, or have trouble speaking.
- find it hard to remember things.
- not understand how to pay for things.
- have trouble understanding social rules.
- have trouble seeing the consequences of their actions.
- have trouble solving problems.
- have trouble thinking logically.



Mental Retardation



What is The LEAD Center, Ltd.?

- The LEAD Center, Ltd. is a private therapeutic day school that serves 5 to 21-year-old students with mental and emotional disabilities who live in central Virginia. The mission of The LEAD Center, Ltd. is to provide students in our care with the tools necessary to develop to his or her greatest capacity, to become able to independently take care of him/herself, and to become a reliable member of society. Successful and timely transition to the public school is the ultimate goal of The LEAD Center, Ltd.

How Can The LEAD Center, Ltd. Help Children with Mental Retardation?

- Faculty and staff at The LEAD Center, Ltd. recognize the potential of each student by providing an environment that nurtures the development of positive self-esteem and independence. The LEAD Center, Ltd. focuses on each student's personal strengths and develops individualized academic and behavioral programs to successfully meet long and short-term goals.

In order to achieve success, The LEAD Center, Ltd. uses a team approach based on consistency, predictability, family involvement, therapeutic counseling, alternatives to regular education, and community. Also included in the process are public service providers for continuity during the critical stage of transition back to the community.

For more information about The LEAD Center, Ltd., please visit www.leadctr.com or call (804) 452-3730

Statistics about Mental Retardation

- As many as 3 out of every 100 people in the United States have mental retardation.
- Nearly 613,000 children ages 6 to 21 have some level of mental retardation and need special education in school.
- 1 out of every 10 children who need special education has some form of mental retardation.
- About 87% of people with mental retardation will only be a little slower than average in learning new information and skills.

Tips for Parents and Teachers of Children with Mental Retardation

- Learn about mental retardation. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and the child.
- Encourage independence. Find out what the child's strengths and interests are and emphasize them. Create opportunities for success.
- Give the child tasks. Break down jobs into smaller steps. Be concrete and demonstrate how to do the job.
- Give immediate feedback and praise the child when he or she does well.
- Find opportunities in the school and community for social activities. These will help the child build social skills as well as have fun.
- Talk to other teachers and parents whose children have mental retardation. Experienced parents and teachers can share practical advice and emotional support.
- The parent and teacher should develop an educational plan to address the child's needs.
- Teachers should keep in touch with the child's parent and vice versa. Discuss how parents can support the child's school learning at home.

