

# Students with dual diagnosis

- have an intellectual/developmental disability (IDD) and a co-occurring mental health condition.
- often have compounded cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral challenges.
- can excel with integrated and intensive academic and behavior supports.



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Educating Students with  
**DUAL  
DIAGNOSIS**  
Information for Teachers



# Mental Health Needs

Mental health conditions may interfere with the student's thinking, mood, and behavior.

## What does it look like?

You may observe some students to be withdrawn, irritable, unmotivated, restless, uncomfortable, unable to concentrate, etc.

## What may help?

- Work with your school counselor/psychologist to learn coping strategies.
- Help the student replace their negative thinking with positive thoughts/statements.
- Use social stories to practice coping skills.
- Utilize muscle tension and relaxation techniques.
- Practice breathing exercises and mindfulness activities.

# Cognitive Needs

Impaired cognitive functioning will likely require modified instruction.

## What does it look like?

The student's academic ability may be substantially below grade level. They can quickly become frustrated and overwhelmed with information.

## What may help?

- Use visual supports for tasks and routines.
- Break tasks into smaller steps.
- Reinforce task compliance.
- Use assistive technology to support instruction.
- Decrease the amount of information presented at one time.
- Reduce task demands.

# Communication Needs

Students with IDD may have limited ability to communicate their needs and feelings.

## What does it look like?

You may see an increase in behavior challenges as a response to unmet needs or distress. Observing the behavior may assist in identifying the need.

## What may help?

- Teach functional communication skills to express wants, needs, and feelings.
- Create opportunities for the student to use new communication skills.
- Use pictures, iPad, or sign language to communicate.
- Reinforce the use of appropriate communication by immediately responding to the student's requests.