

## Practical Tips for Supporting Individuals with I/DD, BI, Other Disabilities, and Co-occurring Mental Health Conditions

You do not need to be an expert in I/DD, BI, or disabilities to modify how you support a person with co-occurring disabilities and mental health conditions. The tips below are universal practices that, when implemented, can improve outcomes for the people you are serving.

### Audience

Anyone who supports someone with co-occurring conditions in any setting.

### Key Points

- **Individualized Approach:** The strategies listed are general suggestions. It's important to tailor accommodations to the specific needs and preferences of each individual.
- **Collaboration:** Working with the individual, their family, and relevant professionals (e.g., therapists, educators) is crucial for determining the most effective accommodations.
- **Ongoing Evaluation:** Regularly review and adjust accommodations as needed to ensure they continue to meet the individual's evolving needs.



For more information and resources, visit The Link Center website: <https://acl.gov/TheLinkCenter>

Area of Need	Examples	Strategies/Considerations
Language (Social cues and rules)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriate or no eye contact</li> <li>• Does not interpret other's body language</li> <li>• Says too little or too much</li> <li>• Little awareness of missing social cues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be direct – provide concrete feedback</li> <li>• Avoid abstract humor, sarcasm, metaphors, etc.</li> <li>• Allow wait time for the person to process what has been said</li> <li>• Provide instructions/directions slowly one at a time</li> <li>• Ask if it would be helpful to repeat or rephrase</li> <li>• Redirect if off-topic</li> <li>• Provide practice</li> <li>• Role-play conversations</li> <li>• Teach rehearsal</li> <li>• Be patient</li> </ul>
Language (Receptive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Says “huh” frequently</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Struggles with abstract language/sarcasm</li> <li>• May withdraw</li> </ul>	
Language (Expressive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor grammar</li> <li>• Difficulty staying on topic</li> <li>• Navigating social rules</li> </ul>	
Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fidget, squirms in seat, can't sit still</li> <li>• Interrupts conversation</li> <li>• Talks excessively</li> <li>• Off topic</li> <li>• Impulsivity (inability to inhibit)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide structure</li> <li>• Minimize distractions</li> <li>• Use visual aids</li> <li>• Incorporate movement breaks</li> <li>• Offer choices</li> <li>• Teach self-monitoring techniques</li> <li>• Be sure you have someone's attention before giving information</li> </ul>

Area of Need	Examples	Strategies/Considerations
Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't remember more than one thing at a time</li> <li>• Can't remember details</li> <li>• Appears disorganized</li> <li>• Appears to have an "attitude" problem</li> <li>• Appears "manipulative"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use visual cues</li> <li>• Provide written instructions</li> <li>• Break tasks into smaller steps</li> <li>• Establish routines</li> <li>• Utilize memory aids like calendars and apps on a phone</li> <li>• Offer support and strategies with organization</li> <li>• Treat failure to follow through as memory failure rather than lack of motivation</li> <li>• Acknowledge distraction when it occurs and make a direct statement to get things back on track</li> <li>• Ask someone to repeat what you have shared to make sure they understood</li> </ul>
Sensory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appear overwhelmed</li> <li>• Emotional melt down</li> <li>• Irritable, short fused</li> <li>• May appear oppositional</li> <li>• Shuts down</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for movement</li> <li>• Adapt environment based on the need</li> <li>• Offer sensory tools</li> <li>• Consult with occupational and physical therapists</li> <li>• Consider seating and positioning</li> <li>• Allow for breaks</li> </ul>

Area of Need	Examples	Strategies/Considerations
Cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trouble getting started (initiation)</li> <li>• Sticking to one thing too long (perseveration)</li> <li>• Trouble with goal setting</li> <li>• Difficulty applying old skills to new situations</li> <li>• Getting part of a message</li> <li>• Delayed responding</li> <li>• Looking confused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help clients to create daily routines</li> <li>• Provide external reminders or alerts</li> <li>• Help with long-term planning and consequences of decisions</li> <li>• Engage environmental supports</li> <li>• Present one concept at a time</li> <li>• Allow time for a response</li> <li>• Provide cues for responses</li> </ul>
Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical, psychological, and/or emotional fatigue</li> <li>• Decreased awareness</li> <li>• Decreased attention performance</li> <li>• Irritability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the signs of fatigue, and support someone to see patterns in their own behavior</li> <li>• Provide quiet rest areas</li> <li>• Build in rest periods after mental and physical activity</li> <li>• Pace activities, and schedule the most challenging activities for when a person is at their best</li> <li>• Regular exercise may help to prevent fatigue</li> </ul>