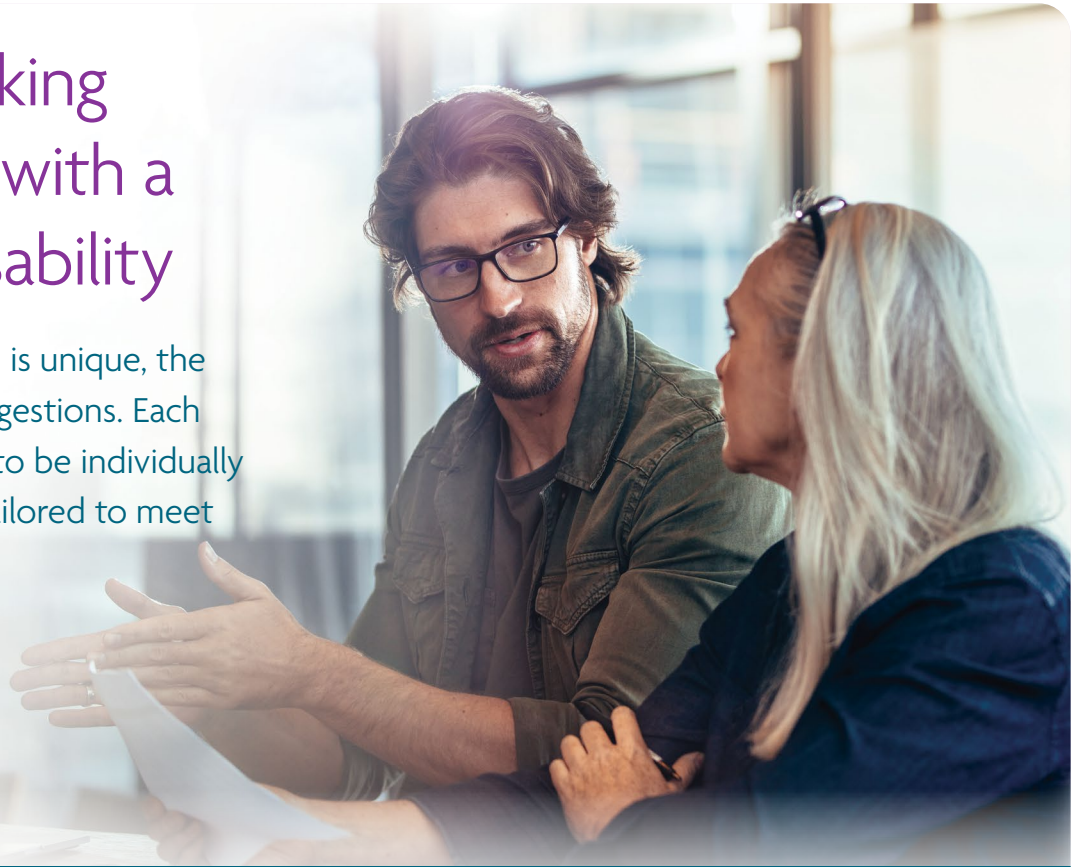


Tips for Working with Parents with a Cognitive Disability

REMEMBER: Each person is unique, the following are general suggestions. Each case or individual needs to be individually assessed, with services tailored to meet their individual needs.



Questions to consider and things to remember:

- We are here to help, free of judgement.
- It is not our role to diagnose but investigate and refer to appropriate services.
- What barriers is this parent facing?
- How do these barriers affect the parent(s) and their ability to engage with DCYF services?
- What specific tasks are problematic because of these barriers?
- What modifications to child welfare policies, practices, or services reduce or eliminate these barriers?
- If you suspect a parent has a cognitive disability, consider connecting to appropriate staff (i.e., Adults with Disabilities Program Manager, ADA Coordinator, Regional Leads).

How to assess the needs of a parent with a disability:

- Determine what the parent already knows about the topic to be discussed (i.e., domestic violence, substance use, safety threats, etc.)
- Explore how the parent learns best; with words, pictures, and/or modeling, or a combination.
- Once this is known, make a note in the case file so other caseworkers have access to the information.



How information should be provided to a parent with a disability:

- Encourage a partnership approach by letting the parent set the pace.
- Seek to understand the family's perspective and values.
- Strive for cultural humility:
 - The parent is the expert on their culture and family, ask them how their culture and associated values affect their parenting roles.
 - Strive to understand their disability culture, the parent is the expert in their disability. It is ok to ask if they are comfortable talking about this.
- Increase structure, clearly explain the purpose of the meeting and your role.
- Provide continuity across your meetings, identifying what you did in a previous meeting that seemed to help the parent and continue that practice (i.e., utilizing multiple methods of communication, follow-up questions, the room you met in, etc.).
- Work with the parent to prioritize services or topics of discussion:
 - Be mindful of how much information you present, try not to review more than three topics at a meeting.
 - If there are a lot of tasks or topics to discuss consider spreading these across multiple, shorter meetings (meet three times a week for one hour versus meeting once a week for three hours)
 - If this is not possible, offer mini breaks between topics and consider a follow-up or summarizing each topic before going on to the next.
- Communicate using clear and concise language, free of idioms, technical jargon, and acronyms.
- Minimize distractions; avoid people entering or leaving a meeting room, people walking by, or outside noise.

- Break complex tasks into smaller steps, think SMART goals.
 - See this attachment (www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf) from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for additional information on SMART goals.
- Model or demonstrate new skills.
- Be mindful that a parent might have reading difficulties; read written material out loud if needed.
- Use videos, tapes, and/ or visual aids.
- Use repetition, reminders, and cues.
 - If needed, help the parent set up automatic reminders via a calendaring app, cellphone calendar, etc.
- Ensure the parent can access the services required.
 - Outline the steps the parent needs to take to contact a provider, and what questions might be relevant to ask.
 - Or contact the provider with the individual, or family, with the appropriate ROIs in place.

How can I help strengthen the support network of a parent with a disability:

- Identify family and community supports and provide contact information for these supports.
- Does this person have a guardian, conservator, or other protective arrangement (per RCW 11.130, <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=11.130>)?
- Is the client served by DDA? If so, connect with the case manager and Necessary Supplemental Accommodation (NSA) required by DDA.
- Consider the ARC, parent advocacy groups, or community involvement such as church.



How can I help support the organizational skills of a parent with a disability?

- Help the parent arrange their schedule so they can attend appointments.
- Use high-tech and low-tech devices, such as paper calendars, calendar apps, sticky notes, and reminder apps with alarms.
- Help the parent develop a system for documenting their child's medical history (e.g. with a binder or folder), if needed.
- Assist the parent with writing down information to be shared at appointments with different providers (e.g. in-home service providers, school staff).
- Help the parent identify and write down questions they would like to ask providers during the next appointment (e.g. doctors, school staff, in-home service providers).
- Encourage the parent to document information from appointments, such as follow-up appointment dates, medical instructions, skills to practice, etc.

How do I ensure that a parent with a disability, understands the information I am presenting?

- Use either/or questions rather than yes/no questions.
 - Example: The parent's visitation supervisor has indicated the parent is doing well during their visits. During your next meeting, you and the parent discuss this and present the option for the parent to either increase the total number of hours of each visit, from three to four hours per day or increase the time between the visitation supervisor's check-ins, from 15 minutes to 30 minutes.



- Use “First / Then” statements when presenting information, or instructions, that need to be followed in a specific order.
 - Example: a parent has a court-ordered service and needs to contact a provider, you explain to the parent “first we need the contact information for service providers in your area, then you can call them to schedule an appointment.”
- Let the parent practice new skills and/or role-play situations.
- Ask the parent to repeat back in his or her own words.
- Help parents think of examples from their own experience that connects what you are teaching.

NEED MORE ASSISTANCE?

Contact the Division of Partnership, Prevention, and Services, Integrated Health Services Unit, Adults with Disabilities Program Manager, and/or DCYF's ADA Coordinator for more assistance at dcyf.adaaccessibility@dcyf.wa.gov.



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