



Common Traits of People with Cognitive Disabilities

■ May not communicate at age level:

- Limited vocabulary
- Difficulty understanding/answering questions
- Mimics answers/responses
- Unable to communicate events clearly in his/her own words
- Unable to understand complicated instructions or abstract concepts

■ May not understand consequences of situations

- Unaware of seriousness of situations
- Easily led or persuaded by others
- Naïve eagerness to confess or please authority figures

■ May not behave appropriately:

- Unaware of social norms and appropriate social behavior
- Acts younger than actual age, may display childlike behavior
- Displays low frustration tolerance and/or poor impulse control
- May “act out”, become emotional, or try to leave if under pressure

■ May have difficulty performing tasks

- Inability to read or write
- Inability to tell time
- Difficulty staying focused and easily distracted
- Awkward/poor motor coordination

■ May be unable to move from abstract to concrete thought. Most people can move from concrete to abstract thinking without effort. For people with mental retardation, this is often difficult, if not impossible. If a word has both a concrete and an abstract meaning, the person will say “yes” they understand (concrete meaning) even when you are using the abstract meaning (wave vs. waive).

- **May deny having a disability.** The hurt and stigma associated with the term mental retardation is so strong that people will deny having the disability even when it is against their self-interest to deny it.
- **May have real memory gaps.** Memory impairment is a basic symptom of brain damage, and people with mental retardation are more likely to have these gaps than others.
- **May have problems with receptive and expressive language.** There is often a large difference between someone's ability to understand and ability to speak. People with mental retardation can mimic expressive language well, but may have minimal understanding of what is being said to them. They may pick the wrong meaning of a word that can be used in different contexts, e.g. "right" could mean
 - right / wrong
 - right / left
 - having rights
 - knowing how to write.
- **May have a short attention span.** Like memory gaps, people with mental retardation are more likely than others to have difficulty staying focused.
- **May be eager to please.** People with mental retardation do not communicate on equal footing and have learned that life is easier if you say "yes" to people who are seen to be authority figures.

SCREENING QUESTIONS FOR COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

1. Did you ever attend special classes in school?
Yes _____ No _____ Comment: _____
2. Have you ever received Mental Health or DD services?
Yes _____ No _____ Comment: _____
3. Do you get any kind of social security check?
(SSI=blue envelope; SSDI = brown envelope)
Yes _____ No _____ Comment: _____
4. Did you ever participate in Special Olympics? Yes _____ No _____
Comment: _____
5. Have you ever had a job? Yes _____ No _____
Where? _____
How many hours per day/week, Comment: _____
6. Do you ever hear voices or see things other people don't see or hear? Yes _____
No _____ Comment: _____
7. Where are you now?
Correct _____ Incorrect _____ Doesn't know _____
Comment: _____
8. What season is this?
Correct _____ Incorrect _____ Doesn't know _____
Comment: _____
9. How many months are there in a year? Correct _____ Incorrect _____
Doesn't know _____
Comment _____
10. What does "Waive your rights" mean? Correct _____
Incorrect _____ Doesn't know _____
Comment _____
11. What is the difference between a plea of "guilty" and a plea of "not guilty"?
Correct _____ Incorrect _____ Doesn't Know _____
Comment: _____
12. What does it mean to "serve time"?
Correct _____ Incorrect _____ Doesn't know _____
Comment: _____

13. How many minutes are there in one and one and a half hours?
 Correct_____ Incorrect_____ Doesn't know_____
- Comment:_____
14. Explain to me what "rights" are. Correct_____ Incorrect_____ Doesn't know_____
15. Explain how a lawyer can help you. Correct_____ Incorrect_____ Doesn't know_____
16. Ask the person to identify the following coins as you put them on the table: Nickel, Quarter, Penny, Dime. Correct: _____ Incorrect_____
17. Ask the person to identify the coin worth the most and the coin worth the least.
 Correct_____ Incorrect_____
18. Ask the person to write the following after you say it: "Call mom at home."
 Correct_____ Incorrect_____
19. Set out two quarters, three dimes, four nickels and seven pennies. Ask the person to count out \$.86. Correct_____ Incorrect_____
20. Ask the person to read the following: "Go to the store and buy bread, milk and sugar. Correct _____ Incorrect _____.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

21. Does the person act or talk in a strange manner? Yes_____ No_____
22. Does the person seem unusually confused or preoccupied? Yes_____ No_____
23. Is the person's speech hard to understand? Yes_____ No_____
24. Does the person's vocabulary seem limited? Yes_____ No_____
25. Does the person have difficulty expressing him/herself?
 Yes_____ No_____
26. Is the person's appearance unkempt or inappropriate for the weather?
 Yes_____ No_____ Other Comments:_____



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