

What Does Research Tell Us About Mental Health Therapy for Adults with Intellectual Disability (ID)?



**Therapists can use a range of supports to test and treat
the mental health of clients with ID.
Adults with ID should control their mental health therapy.**

ORIGINAL ARTICLES:

Witwer, A. N., Rosencrans, M. E., Held, M. K., Cobranchi, C., Crane, J., Chapman, R., Havercamp, S. M. & The Ohio State University Nisonger RRTC on Health and Function (2022). Psychotherapy Treatment Outcome Research in Adults With ID: Where Do We Go From Here? *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cps0000053>

Witwer, A. N., Walton, K., Held, M. K., Rosencrans, M., Cobranchi, C., Fletcher, R., Crane, J. M., Chapman, R., & Havercamp, S. (2022). A scoping review of psychological interventions, accommodations, and assessments for adults with intellectual disability. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000474>

Introduction

The results of many studies support the use of mental health therapy to treat adults with intellectual disability.

The most common treatment is CBT, which stands for *cognitive behavior therapy*.

- CBT is a type of treatment that can help clients change bad thoughts, which have a poor impact on their feelings and behaviors
- Helpful treatment activities include role-play and tracking feelings in a journal



Other treatments, used with accommodations or supports, include:

- A type of therapy that helps clients make a plan to do healthy activities, which mental health professionals call *behavioral activation* (BA)
- Exercises for the mind, like closing your eyes and taking deep breaths

More research is needed to understand the best treatment for different mental health symptoms.



Key Findings for Clinicians and Mental Health Professionals

Most studies described the use of accommodations or supports to test and treat the mental health of adults with intellectual disability (ID).

Key examples include:

- Using plain or clear language to make information easier to understand
- Using visual supports to present the information in different ways
- Asking caregivers or support persons to help with communication & follow-up
- Teaching clients basic therapy skills and treatment activities



Other supports include mental health tests, or surveys, made for adults with ID:

- Do they have anxiety? Do they feel worried or fearful a lot of the time?
- Do they have depression? Do they feel sad a lot of the time?

Professionals should try to use these tests, but they are not being used often.

Assessment Resources: <https://www.aaid.org/publications/bookstore-home/assessment>

Table 1. Treatment Accommodations, Examples, and Resources

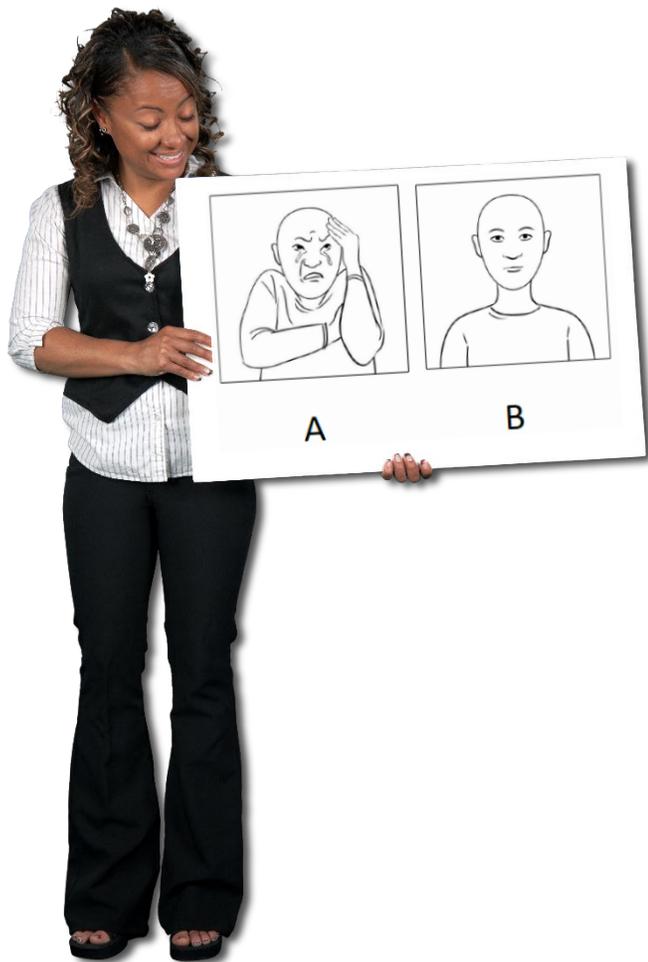
Plain Language or Clear Communication

- Use a test, survey, or script to understand the client's communication needs
- Match the client's communication needs to therapy and treatment activities
- Use short words and simple sentences to reduce the reading level of text
- Define words that are hard to understand (e.g., make a glossary of key words)
- Use real-life *and* relatable examples



Visual Supports

- Show pictures to talk about different feelings
- Use pictures from magazines, online photos, or simple black & white faces
- Show videos to teach basic therapy skills and treatment activities
- Use worksheets with large font, bullet points, and pictures that add meaning
- Give clients reminder cards with helpful tips to practice their skills



Caregiver, Provider, Support Person, or Therapy Partner Involvement

- Ask the client if they would like to include a therapy partner or not
- Include therapy partners during sessions to support communication
- Ask partners for support to make sure clients understand the therapy process
- Ask for help if you do not understand what clients are trying to tell you
- Give partners information on basic therapy skills (e.g., how to label feelings)
- Teach partners how to help clients practice treatment activities after sessions
- Tell them about research support for therapy and treatment types on different mental health issues



Teaching Basic Skills

- Use clear communication, visual supports, and real examples to teach skills
- Ask to include therapy partners to support communication and practice
- Allow extra time (more sessions, as needed) to show and teach activities (e.g., labeling feelings, setting treatment goals, reviewing progress)
- Break skills down into steps *and* use supports to help clients practice each step (e.g., the connection between thoughts, mood, and behavior)



A helpful website is thenadd.org, which includes training & certification.

Therapist Quick Check:

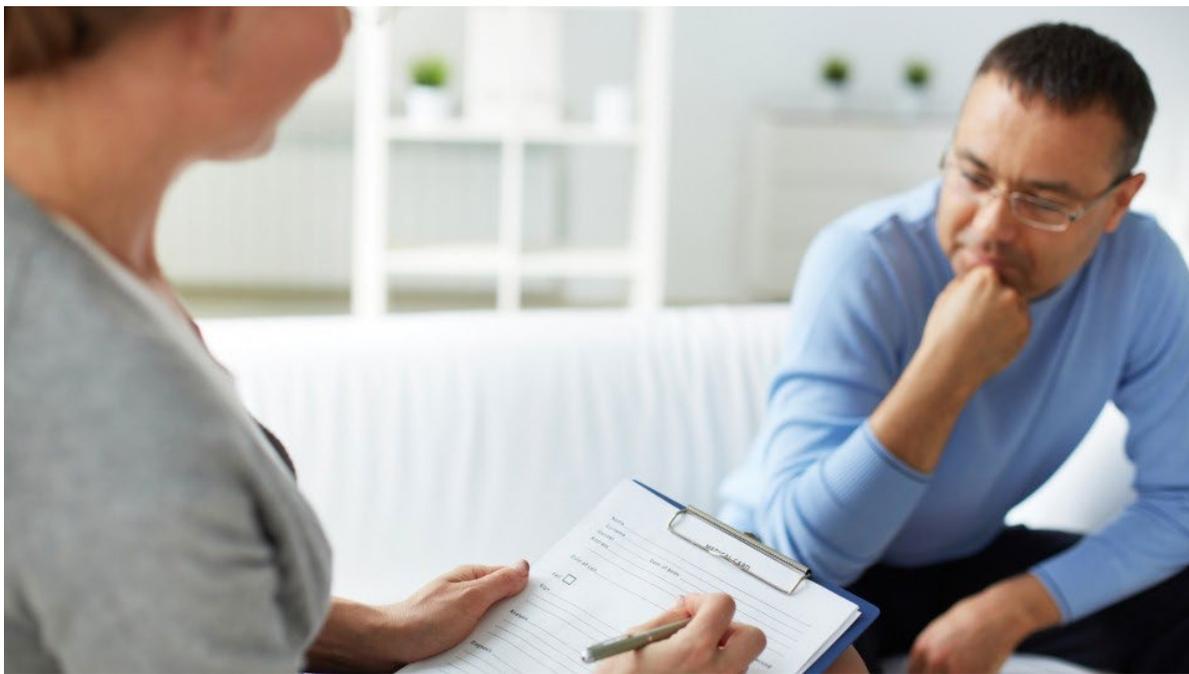
- Do I know how my client likes to communicate? Do I need help from a partner?
- Did my client tell me it is okay to ask a support person for help?
- Did I use a test made for adults with ID? Do I know what research says about it?
- Am I using plain language and supports to provide therapy and teach skills?

Key Findings for Clients with ID Who Get Mental Health Therapy

Clients with intellectual disability (ID) need to have control throughout the therapy process, starting with the choice to participate in treatment.

Having control means being a self-advocate and making choices:

- You have the right to ask for mental health therapy or to refuse services
- You can tell your therapist how to support your communication needs
- You need to help make your treatment goals and review your progress



A helpful website is self-determination.org, which includes more info & tools.

Client Quick Check:

- Did I tell someone that I want or need mental health therapy?
- Did I choose who to include as a partner to help me?
- Did I learn about the therapy? Do I know if studies support the treatment?
- Am I setting goals, doing my treatment, and following up with my therapist?

Why Is This Important?

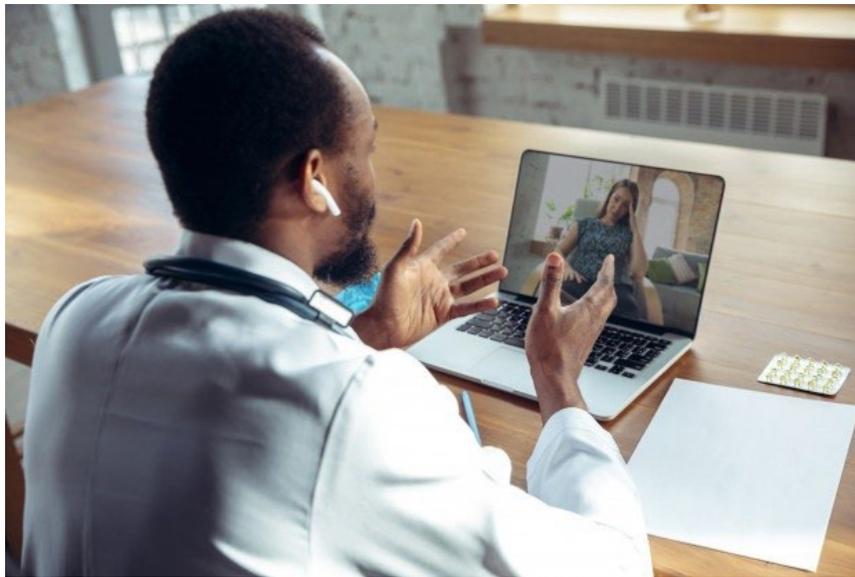
Therapists can use supports and common treatments to provide mental health therapy for clients with intellectual disability (ID).

- Therapists may need more training and resources.
- Clients may need more time and support.

Therapists get training to support the individual differences of their clients.

They can use:

- Tests made for clients with ID that are supported by research
- Accommodations to provide types of therapy that are used with other clients
- Supports (plain language, pictures, videos) to teach basic therapy skills
- Therapy partners to help clients learn and practice treatment activities



Clients need to control their mental health therapy and treatment.

They should choose:

- Whether they want mental health therapy or not
- Who will provide their treatment *and* who they will include as a support person
- What types of supports are needed to communicate and learn basic skills
- How to work with their therapist to develop goals and review progress

Stay up-to-date!

Learn what new studies say about testing & treating mental health conditions.



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<https://go.osu.edu/RRTC>