



National Disability Coordination Officer Program  
AN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

# Working effectively with people with intellectual disability

## What is intellectual disability?

- A disability affecting cognition
- People with intellectual disability may have difficulties with learning, communication, adaptive functioning, information processing, social functioning and problem solving
- Around 3% of Australians have an intellectual disability
- Around 1.8% of Australians have an intellectual disability which leads to severe or profound activity limitations
- Intellectual disabilities are life-long, and must be identified before the age of 18
- Examples of intellectual disabilities include Down Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, Prader-Willi Syndrome, Angelman Syndrome

## Affects of intellectual disability in the workplace

- An employee with intellectual disability may have difficulties with:
  - Learning and remembering new or complex tasks
  - Understanding abstract concepts
  - Generalising skills from one situation to another
  - Expressing themselves through spoken or written language
  - Decision making and problem solving
  - Adapting to changed circumstances and unfamiliar environments
  - Travelling independently
  - Time management and organisation

## Reasonable adjustments for intellectual disability

- Reasonable adjustments need to be individualised to meet employees' specific needs.
- It is important to **ask** the employee what would be most helpful for them.

- Some examples of reasonable adjustments that may help employees with intellectual disability include:
  - Breaking down tasks into smaller steps
  - Using clear and simple language to provide instructions
  - Developing a consistent work routine
  - Providing information in multiple formats, including pictures or diagrams
  - Additional on-the-job training and ongoing support
  - Job restructuring or exchanging jobs among employees
  - Formal or informal mentoring or buddy program
  - Providing daily to-do lists

### **Sources**

NSW Council for Intellectual Disability

[www.nswcid.org.au](http://www.nswcid.org.au)

JobAccess

[http://jobaccess.gov.au/ServiceProviders/Assisting\\_job\\_seekers/Supporting\\_jobseekers\\_with\\_different\\_types\\_of\\_disability/Pages/home.aspx](http://jobaccess.gov.au/ServiceProviders/Assisting_job_seekers/Supporting_jobseekers_with_different_types_of_disability/Pages/home.aspx)

Bruyere, S.M., & Golden, T.P. (2000). Working effectively with persons who have cognitive disabilities. Employment and Disability Institute: Cornell University.

[http://works.bepress.com/susanne\\_bruyere/16/](http://works.bepress.com/susanne_bruyere/16/)