Providing Accessible Mental Health Care

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have an equal right to good, accessible mental health care. However, mainstream services create significant barriers through diagnostic overshadowing, limited provider training, and inflexible service models (Williams et al., 2026).

Barriers Faced:



Diagnostic Overshadowing

Mental health symptoms may be misinterpreted as "just part of their [IDD]" (Williams et al., 2026).



Limited Provider Training

Mental health professionals receive limited IDD training, contributing to knowledge gaps and under-preparation.



Inflexible Service Models

Rigid referral, eligibility, and therapy processes can lead to systemic exclusion.

Making Health Care More Accessible:

- **Remember that behavior is communication.** Commit to understanding what it communicates (Johnson, 2022).
- **Include people with lived experience** in decision-making. Listen to people with IDD and place *them* at the center of *their* care (Williams et al., 2026).
- **Continue educating yourself** about disabilities, syndromes, mental health diagnoses, and commonly associated diagnoses (Johnson, 2022).
- **Re-think treatment** to make it accessible. Adapt services to meet individual needs rather than labeling someone "unsuitable." Try communication tools, visual aids, or flexible session lengths (Williams et al., 2026).
- **Collaborate** with other providers and specialists rather than signposting people elsewhere to avoid bouncing people between services (Williams et al., 2026).

Through education, outreach, and collaboration among individuals with lived experience, their families, and providers, we can reduce barriers to accessible mental health care.

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