

Recognizing Dual Diagnosis

The following questions are intended to help you explore the *possibility* that someone may have a developmental disability or a mental health problem. If, after you consider the questions, you suspect that the person may have a mental health problem, a developmental disability--or both—talk to a professional about a formal assessment.

Recognizing a developmental disability

Questions to ask about early development

- What grade did you go to in school? How old were you when you left? (*if 21 yrs old when left school, then may be delayed – people with a developmental disability can continue in the school system until they are 21; also many have dropped out early*).
- Did you attend special education classes, behavioural classes, a special school? (*another clue that there may have been developmental issues*) What was the name of the school?
- Did you have an assessment as a child at school? At a hospital? What was the name of the hospital? What did they tell you about the results? (*not likely to get this from person; may need parents to fill in the gaps*).

Questions to ask about current functioning

- Can you tell time on a (analogue) watch (*show the person your watch and ask what time it says; a developmentally delayed person might find this difficult*).
- Do you travel alone on the TTC? Did you come here by yourself today? What route did you take (get them to describe it to you). If you are going to a new place, do you need someone to show you how to get there? (*developmentally delayed persons tend to learn routes by rote – with assistance at first -- but would find it challenging to explain in detail*).
- Can you read the newspaper? What sections do you like the best? (*often they will say comics are favourite part, that they can read only some of newspaper*).
- What is your favourite TV program? (*often they will choose cartoons or children's programming, because of the high visual/low verbal content*).

- Can you fill out a job application or read a menu by yourself? (*This helps you assess literacy skills. You can also ask the person to look at some simple text, such as a menu.*)
- Do you look after your own money? Do you pay the bills? Which bills do you pay? How do you pay them (e.g., by cheque, bank machine, over the phone)
- How much does a pop and a bag of potato chips cost? How much does a car cost? How much does a house cost? (*often they will not be able to estimate well*)
- Do you have a job? Did you ever have a job? What did you do (*competitive employment, sheltered workshop, co-op program through school, no work*)?

*Cognitive indicators**

- Does the person communicate in short sentences?
- Does the person seem, on the surface, able to do things you later discover they really can't?
- Does the person have trouble generalizing (applying general information to more than one specific thing)?
- Does the person seem to learn slowly?
- Does the person have trouble with abstract thinking? (e.g. how two things are similar)?
- Does the person do better on concrete and structured tasks (e.g. when you are very specific and break things down into steps)?
- Does the person have memory problems?
- Does the person have splinter skills that are really actions that have been learned by rote (e.g., bus routes, social skills)?
- Does the person have trouble solving problems?
- Does the person show poor judgment?
- Does the person have trouble understanding why questions?
- Is the person good at picking up non-verbal social cues?

*(Adapted, with permission, from Concerned Parents of Toronto, Inc. (2002). *Supports & Services Resource Handbook*. Toronto: author.)

- Is it difficult to get a true idea of what the person is capable of, what he or she takes in from a conversation?

Recognizing a mental health problem

As with the developmental disability questions, these questions are intended to help you explore the possibility of a mental health problem. Psychologists or psychiatrists make a formal diagnosis of a mental health problem. Diagnosing a mental health problem can be difficult and may require a number of interviews over a period of time. The initial diagnosis may change as the person's circumstances change (e.g., the amount of support and stresses in their lives).

*Mental health needs indicators**

- Is the person overly dependent given his or her abilities?
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- Is change really hard for the person?
- Does the person lack peers and friends
- Is the person impulsive?
- Is the person withdrawn?
- Is the person aggressive, verbally or physically?
- Does the person have trouble with anger?
- Is the person irritable?
- Has the person been in trouble with the law?
- Has the person been socially or sexually inappropriate?
- Does the person that he or she is not intellectually disabled?
- Does the person appear higher functioning than he or she really is?
- Has the person been diagnosed with a mental illness?
- Does the person hurt him- herself?

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- Has the person been sleeping more or less than usual?
- Has there been a change in the person's appetite?
- Does the person seem overactive?
- Is the person overly fearful?
- Is the person extremely confused or disoriented?
- Does the person hear voices even when no one is there? (This is not the same as talking to oneself for company or to reduce anxiety.)
- Has it been difficult to get professionals to agree over the years about a diagnosis for both the person's range of cognitive functioning and his or her mental health?
- Do family problems interfere with the person's functioning?
- Is there a parent with an intellectual disability or a mental health problem?