

Peer information sheet: intellectual disability

All students are unique. We all have strengths, and we all have areas where we are still learning. We are all born with our own unique combination of hair, eyes, personality, and our own very unique fingerprints.

Some students have intellectual disability. Just like hair, eyes or fingerprints, this is a part of them, but not who they are. When you take the time to get to know them, you'll find there are lots of things you have in common.

About intellectual disability

Students with intellectual disability may enjoy learning with visual information, or may be very social and friendly. They might find learning, solving problems, or doing 'every day' things like telling the time challenging. It doesn't mean they can't learn these things - it just might take them a bit longer or they may need extra support.

Talking

Students with intellectual disability may communicate in different ways to you and your friends. Some might talk lots and use lots of words. Some might not use any words, or only a few words. If they don't use words, they might have learned other ways of communicating – like picture cards or gestures. Sometimes they might not answer you. It might be that you don't have their attention. You can try getting their attention again if that happens.

Emotions

Some students with intellectual disability get tired easily. Some may find it hard to manage their emotions – they might feel anger or distress intensely and some might not find it easy to manage their expression of these emotions or their behaviours. If you see them upset and you're not sure what to do, seek help from a teacher. You can also help them by showing them that you care.

School Learning Support Officer (SLSO)

Some students with intellectual disability might work with an SLSO in the classroom. You can still talk and work with them when the SLSO is there – the SLSO is there to support their learning, but they cannot replace the value of working and interacting with other students of the same age.

Friendship tips

Being a teenager is often a time when friendships become really important to us. We often want to spend more time with others our age who share similar interests. We might worry more about what other students think, because we want to fit in.

Feeling part of a group and feeling like you belong, is important for all students. This includes students with intellectual disability. Some students with intellectual disability might not know how to join in, or how to talk to others. It isn't that they don't want to – they might just have a different way of communicating, or they might need your help to join in. Sometimes students with intellectual disability might not have yet learned about "appropriate" social behaviour. They might stand too close, or say or do things that other students might not do. It is okay to let them know nicely what to do instead – you can say "That's a little bit close, can you please stand one step back while we talk?", or "Let's talk about something else".





Stop bullying

Bullying and exclusion can have a negative impact on a student's life. This can be particularly difficult for a student with disability if they are excluded, picked on, laughed at and bullied because of their disability. If you see a student with disability being excluded or bullied, you can make a big difference in that moment. In fact, your help and support may make a difference or be remembered long after **you** have forgotten all about it!

If you see a student being bullied at school, and it is safe for you to speak out, speak up and tell those who are bullying to stop. Tell them that it isn't okay and it isn't cool. Standing up for someone else stops bullying more than half of the time. If you are still worried about exclusion or bullying, ask a teacher or an adult you trust for help, or help the student seek help and support. Speaking up and reaching out can help keep them safe, and can have a lasting impact on their life.

Just like you

Students with intellectual disability have lots of ways in which they're just like you. They have their own interests, preferences and hopes and dreams, just like you do. They want to feel like their ideas, views and input is valued, just like you do. And they want to feel connected – like they belong – through having friends, going to parties, hanging out, and being included... just like you do.

So remember, you probably have more things in common than you have differences.

