



PREVENTION & WELLNESS SLEEP & MENTAL HEALTH

California Department of Developmental Services



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A healthy lifestyle involves making choices that improve health. This means thinking about how to be healthy in all areas of life, including food, exercise, sleep, and handling stress. It also means being proactive, like visiting the doctor and dentist. It is important to make healthy choices in all these areas of life and understand how they may prevent or reduce serious health problems.

Source: [Health Affairs](#)

Helpful Tips to Improve Sleep

Encourage setting and maintaining the same bedtime and pre-bedtime routine.

Avoid stressful or stimulating activities an hour or so before bed.

Pre-bedtime routine activities include taking a bath, reading a book, or practicing relaxation exercises.

Help the individual make their bedroom a sleep-inducing environment.

A quiet, dark, and cool (between 60-75 degrees) place can help with sound sleep.

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine four to six hours before bed.

Finish dinner several hours before bedtime.

If the individual gets hungry after dinner, offer a light snack but avoid foods that may cause indigestion such as dairy, carbohydrates, or sugar.

Some medications may affect sleep so consult with the prescribing physician about taking medication earlier in the evening if this might be a factor.

Exercise can help individuals to fall asleep faster and sleep more soundly.

Finish exercising at least three hours before bedtime.

Source: [Harvard](#)



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Statistics



PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND/OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES (IDD) COMMONLY REPORT PROBLEMS WITH SLEEP AND TEND TO EXPERIENCE MORE PROBLEMS WITH SLEEP THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION.

Source: [Richdale & Baker \(2014\)](#)

Helpful Tips to Improve Mental Health

Become familiar with the individuals you serve and recognize when their behavior is different than usual.

Mental health needs of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) can be overlooked and can manifest differently.

Individuals with IDD may show stress and mental health needs differently, such as by displaying challenging behaviors or aggression.

If you observe that the individual is behaving in ways not usual for them, bring this to the attention of your supervisor or the appropriate member of your team.

If the individual served already has a Behavioral Support Plan, familiarize yourself with it because it may include tips for providers about how best to support the individual when stressed.

Identify activities the individual likes to engage in and offer those in times of distress.

Familiarize yourself with the individual's menu of preferred activities and either prompt the person to engage in the activity or offer them the opportunity to engage in a preferred activity they select.

Help the individuals that you serve unwind and take breaks when they seem or tell you that they are stressed or upset.

Discuss the importance of taking care of mental health with the individual.

Teach individuals to take deep breaths when they are stressed or anxious.

Four-square or box breathing: Inhale to a count of four, hold the air in for a count of four, exhale to a count of four, hold your lungs empty for a count of four, repeat.

Visualization Breathing: Breathe in and imagine the air is filled with a sense of peace and calm; Breathe out and imagine breathing out stress and tension.



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Helpful Tips to Improve Mental Health (continued)

Assist individuals to stay connected with others, including friends and family.

Support them to make a phone call, arrange for visits, or help write a letter, text, or email.

Watch for changes in an individual's behavior, appetite, or energy as these could indicate that the individual is trying to communicate a need or that something is wrong.

Report observed changes to a Service Coordinator or members of the individual's team to get attention from a healthcare professional. First, rule out any medical causes of behavior change.

Source: [Health Care for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)

Additional Resources

[Understand how Disability Impacts California](#)

To Download PDF: [CA Disability and Health State Profile FINAL \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Health Care for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)



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