

# Common or Commonly Missed Diagnoses for Patients with Developmental Disabilities



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## COMMUNICATION TIPS

- + Sensory hypersensitivity is common. Try to find a quiet room (i.e. isolation room, psych interview room), dim fluorescent lights, and turn off non-essential monitors
- + Some patients may come with their own individual care plan or crisis plan, or with a communication tool such as a health passport.
- + Sit at the level of the patient rather than standing over them.
- + Address the patient directly whenever possible, even if they are non-verbal.
- + Go slow, adjust volume of your voice. Some patients with DD may respond poorly to loud voices, others may be hard of hearing and need you to speak up.
- + People with DD are frequently the victims of all forms of abuse. Remember to practice trauma informed care.
- + If the patient agrees, try to accommodate caregivers to be present during interviews and exams. They are useful for providing collateral information and as a source of comfort.
- + Encourage the use of comforters such as toys or music during exams and procedures.
- + Consider developing a kit of soothing/distracting objects (sunglasses, earphones, squishy balls, weighted blanket) that can be kept in your ED.
- + Be mindful of body language. Non-verbal patients can be especially sensitive to this.
- + Explain exams and procedures using the show-tell-do approach, i.e. show the stethoscope, and explain what you are going to do with it before proceeding.
- + Give ongoing encouragement for even small steps successfully completed.
- + Provide clear verbal discharge instructions and give written instructions for patients to take home, either for themselves or to share with any caregivers who are not present.

## APPROACH TO CONCERNING BEHAVIOUR

- + When looking for the cause of challenging behaviours, remember to **HELP**.
  - + First consider **H**Health related causes such as pain.
  - + Next consider **E**nvironmental triggers (the ED is an unfamiliar and often overstimulating environment that can contribute to these behaviours).
  - + Then ask about **L**iving circumstances (i.e. recent move or change in support staff).
  - + Consider **P**sychiatric causes only after other causes have been eliminated.

- + Stereotypy, repetitive movements or vocalizations colloquially known as stimming, are common among people on the autism spectrum. Traditionally, family and clinicians have interpreted these as inappropriate and have engaged in various methods to attempt to reduce them, however they are increasingly being seen as a self-regulatory mechanism that does not require treatment and allowing your patient to engage in stimming may help them to stay calm in the ED.

### LINK TO CLINICAL RESOURCE:

[https://www.bcemergencynetwork.ca/clinical\\_resource/understanding-and-screening-for-developmental-disabilities](https://www.bcemergencynetwork.ca/clinical_resource/understanding-and-screening-for-developmental-disabilities)