From Dr. Escudé...

Bio-Psycho-Social Causes for Behavior in People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

Mental Health issues are seldom ONLY limited to one area of human experience. And even if they are predominately in one arena, they will often affect the others. When evaluating behaviors in people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) it’s important to take into account all of the possible causes of that behavior. Don’t just assume a person has some adverse behavior because they have IDD. There usually is a cause for it, be it biologically, psychologically, or socially mediated.

Biological
When we are in pain, we often act differently than when we are not, we may be grumpy, not wanting to participate in activities, more irritable or, at times, verbally or physically aggressive. Looking for biological causes of behaviors in people who have a limited ability to communicate using words is imperative. Ruling out causes of pain, medication adverse effects, and underlying medical conditions should be one’s first line in managing causes for behavior.

Social
When we are asked to do something we do not want to do, we may react negatively. If, for instance, we have a roommate we don’t get along with, we are offered food that we don’t like, we have a set schedule that was not our choice, or we are surrounded by “difficult” people, we may react poorly. After ruling out medical causes for adverse behaviors, we should consider social aspects as a possible cause. Changing roommates, living arrangements, schedules, or support staff may alleviate behaviors without the use of medications, thereby reducing the risk for adverse reactions.

Psychological
Psychological illness does occur in people with IDD, but every effort should be made to look for other causes of untoward behavior before treating “the behavior” with a medication. After biological and social causes are ruled out, a proper psychological evaluation and an accurate diagnosis should be the minimum requirement before starting a medication or adding another. Psychological evaluations are quite complex in people who have limited
verbal abilities and, more often, observations and reports by others are used to help make diagnoses. In whatever manner the diagnosis is made, judicious use of psychotropics is warranted as well as close monitoring for alleviation of the target symptoms. Medications which have not been shown to be effective should be discontinued rather than adding another medication on top of it.

Careful consideration of the WHOLE person is important for determining the best treatment for any condition.

Thanks for your careful attention to helping improve the lives of people we support.

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Dr. Escudé has dedicated his career to providing healthcare for people with IDD and other vulnerable populations and teaches on the subject throughout the country.