From Dr. Escudé...

Signs of Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) in People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

In addition to the usual signs of GERD, people who have a limited ability to communicate verbally may exhibit behaviors that are not easily recognizable as signs of gastrointestinal upset. Some behaviors that one might see that could indicate discomfort from GERD or other GI conditions are:

- Hand mouthing- people may reach for the pain or may try to stimulate salivation to help wash down the acidic reflux
- Sucking on a sock or other object to stimulate swallowing and salivation
- Pica- eating non-food items in an attempt to wash down the reflux as with hand mouthing
- Food refusal- if a person learns that it will be uncomfortable during or after eating, they may try to avoid it
- Coughing when lying down due to reflux
- Physical or verbal aggression particularly around meal times in an effort to avoid eating
- Distress in the middle of the night due to reflux when lying down

Other considerations that could indicate GERD are:

- Recurrent episodes of pneumonia due to recurrent aspiration of refluxed gastric material
- Asthma diagnosis due to irritation of the respiratory system from stomach contents
- Reactive airway disease or wheezing due to irritation of the respiratory system from stomach contents
- Posterior dental erosions due to acid damage

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