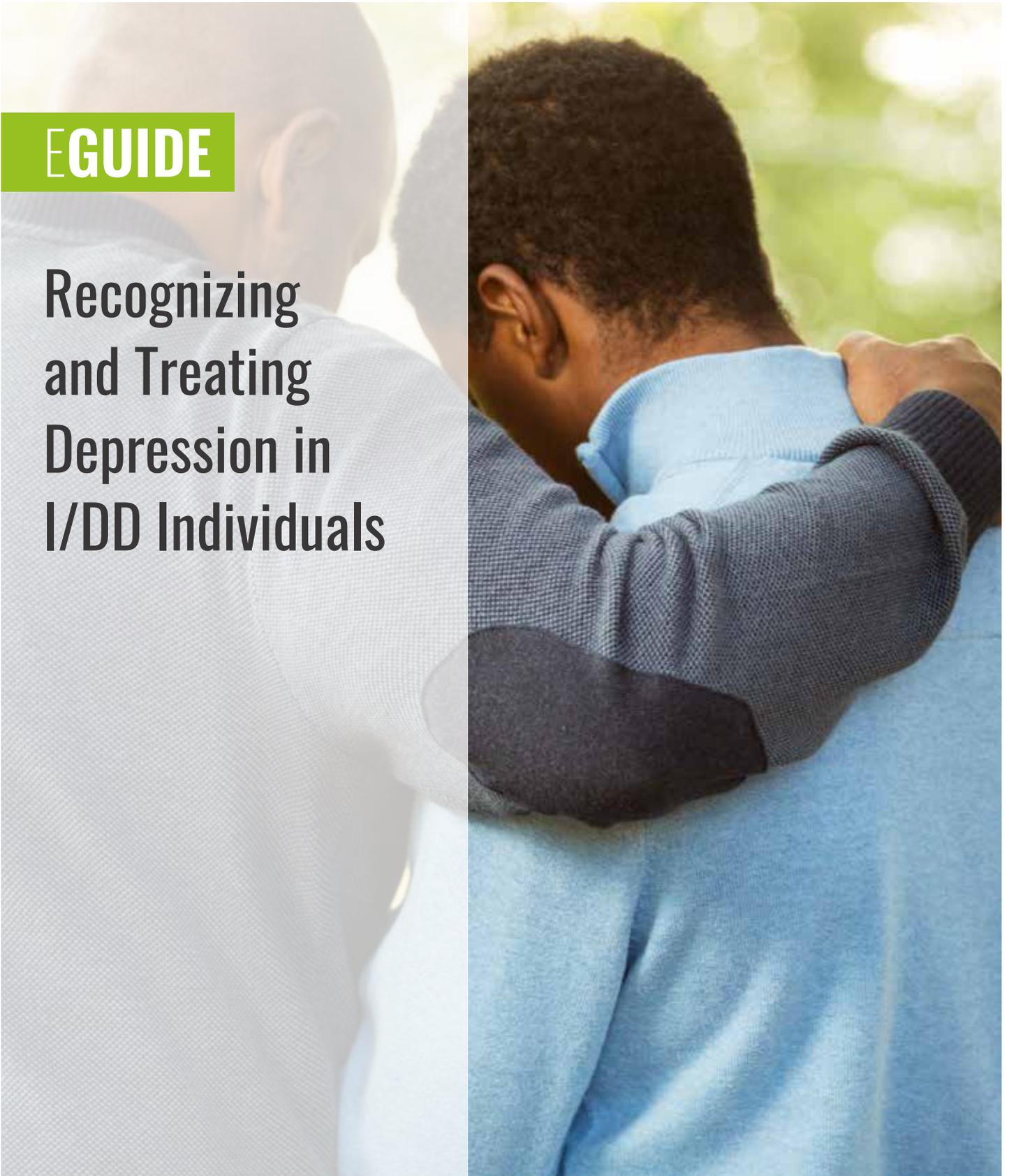


EGUIDE

**Recognizing
and Treating
Depression in
I/DD Individuals**



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What You'll Learn

Learning how to cope with depression can greatly improve quality of life. This is especially true for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

As recently as the 1980s, the general belief was that people with disabilities did not have the cognitive capacity to experience mental health problems, including depression. Today, it is understood that these individuals are at a 1.5 to 2 x higher risk of depression than the general population. Even though depression is a common problem for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, it is often missed due to challenges unique to the group. There is a lack of formal diagnostic tools and standardized assessment as well as only a limited number of empirical studies. Additionally, difficult behaviors may mask depression. Deficits in communication, social skills, and intellectual functioning further increase the challenge. As a result, many individuals with depression do not get the help they need.

Since proper diagnosis and treatment can make a big difference in their quality of life, recognizing depression in individuals with disabilities is key. To help improve the health and well-being of those you serve, learn to recognize the symptoms of depression and understand techniques to help them improve.

Recognizing Symptoms of Depression in People with I/DD

Due to the relationships your team builds with individuals in the community setting, staff are in a unique position to observe depressive symptoms. To know what to look for to determine if an individual may be suffering from depression, combine your observations with the level of the severity of their disability.

> Mild to Moderate 1

Look for the following symptoms of depression in mild to moderately disabled individuals: sad appearance, depressed mood, irritability, fatigue, hopelessness, guilt, and loss of interest in activities.

> Moderate to Severe 2

Moderate to severely disabled individuals may present the following symptoms of depression: changes in sleep patterns, depressed affect, withdrawal, feelings of worthlessness, and self statements about being “retarded.”



> Severe/Profound 3

More behavioral outbursts can be seen in severely/profoundly affected individuals suffering from depression. These include aggression, tantrums, screaming, crying, self-injurious behavior, and psychomotor agitation.

*Source: Molly Faulkner, PhD, CNP, LISW CoC DDMI
Coordinator Clinical Director of NM Behavioral Health
Workforce Initiative UNM SOM Department of Psychiatry and
Behavioral Sciences.*

In addition, be vigilant about big events in the life of individuals in your community. Life events can be key contributors to depression in those with intellectual or developmental disabilities. In fact, approximately 46% of I/DD individuals diagnosed with depression experienced one or more significant life events in the prior twelve months. An additional 17.4% experienced two or more events over the course of a year.

THE TOP FIVE life events affecting depression in individuals with IDD are:

- 1 > Moving residences
- 2 > Serious illness of close relative or friend
- 3 > Severe problem with close friend or relative
- 4 > Serious illness or injury to self
- 5 > Death of a close friend or relative



“Research has indicated that there is a high correlation with stressful life events and depression for individuals with I/DD.”

– Jill Hinton, PH.D. Center for Start Services, UNH



5 STEPS to Supporting Individuals with Depression

Once staff have identified symptoms of depression among those with IDD, they should engage family members or other caregivers to foster collaboration and communication about the existing programs and supports available to them.

Your community setting can also provide other assistance directly, including:

1 > Psychotherapy

Provide opportunities for individuals to take part in modified therapy that incorporates play, media, art, or drama, or offer on-site group sessions with other individuals with similar cognitive and verbal abilities, focuses on improving self-image, coping skills, and acceptance.

2 > Self-Instruction

Remind individuals to self-monitor their thoughts and mood and use positive self-statements through the use of prompts and reinforcements. These type of statements can change cognitions and behavior.

3 > Problem Solving

Encourage staff to support individuals in problem solving by providing direct instruction combined with practice and role play.

4 > Behavioral Techniques

Teach alternative desired behaviors when individuals act out, then provide positive reinforcement to solidify the new behaviors.

5 > Skills Training

Help individuals cope with depression by teaching them relevant skills, including social skills, relaxation, and anger management.

Through their relationship with individuals with I/DD in your community setting, staff are well positioned to recognize the signs of depression. Sharing those observations with the care team can be an important first step in helping these individuals cope with their depression and lead happier, healthier lives.

Individuals with cognitive, intellectual, and developmental disabilities deserve superior care that helps them live their best lives. As part of our commitment to supporting families, caregivers, and agencies, we offer a library of digital handbooks and resources by Pharmacy Alternatives, sources for clinical, operational and regulatory information.

Join our community to get direct access to all our resources through our Illuminate Thought Leadership Program:
pharmerica.com/pharmerica-content-request/

Pharmacy Alternatives has the most expertise in the I/DD market and has been meeting the needs of individuals and agencies for over 30 years. We share your commitment to making a difference every day with closed-door pharmacy services for specialized populations delivered locally in all 50 states. Learn how our services and hands-on support can help you empower those you support to live life to the fullest.