

*From the Desk of High Point Village Social Worker, Natalie Hendrix*



## IDD and Mental Health

May is Mental Health Awareness Month! While the general population might think individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities enjoy simple lives free from complex emotions, those who know and love them know otherwise. Due to factors like a lack of independence, socialization and intimate relationships, and an increase in the likelihood of abuse, at least 35% and possibly upwards up 70% of those with IDD will face a mental health condition at some point in their life. This wide range is partly due to “diagnostic overshadowing” or the tendency for professionals to ascribe behavioral changes to the intellectual disability rather than to a mental health or cognitive condition (such as dementia). While challenging, it is important to advocate for appropriate diagnostic assessments for our loved ones with IDD.

## Things to consider

All humans go through periods of dysregulation and grief. If a traumatic event has occurred or one is going through a period of hormonal change (puberty or menopause, either of which can be early-onset or delayed), we certainly want to be careful not to automatically attribute mental illness. However, if your loved one is showing ongoing symptoms of depression, anxiety, irritability, or signs of psychosis (paranoia, hearing or seeing things, violence), a visit to a professional is warranted. Those professionals should always first rule out any medical diagnosis, since pain can look like behavior in someone who can't express what they are experiencing.

Once outside causes are ruled out, the professional should use appropriate assessment tools to determine the diagnosis. These tools should take into consideration the patient's baseline functioning (For instance, not asking asking about “voices in your head” might result in an affirmative answer from someone with a lot of self-talk or imaginary friends, but isn't a true sign of psychosis). Ensuring that the type of assessment matches your loved one's ability to answer is imperative. Additionally, there are co-occurring mental health conditions that are more common based on the developmental disability:

- **Autism:** depression, anxiety, ADHD, OCD, Mood disorders and epilepsy
- **Down syndrome:** Depression, Anxiety, OCD, Feeding disorders
- **Cerebral Palsy:** Anxiety, Depression

## Is it Mental Health, Dementia, or Regression?

Finally, it is important to note that significant behavioral changes in either young or aging individuals with Down Syndrome could be because of Regression (for those younger than 30) or Dementia (for those older than 35). If caught early, regression is treatable, while dementia can be greatly delayed with lifestyle changes such as sleep, diet and medical care. Establishing a baseline of functioning with tools like the EDSD can be invaluable for practitioners in making an appropriate diagnoses.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME REGRESSION AND DEMENTIA, VISIT: [ADULT DOWN SYNDROME CENTER](#)



## Caregiver Corner: Practical Tips From an IDD Caregiver

Valerie Gregory and Elyssa

Music Therapy and Therapeutic Horseback Riding, while less commonly used for the neurotypical population, can be invaluable for individuals with IDD. Here, Valerie shares just how impactful both therapies have been to Elyssa:

"The therapeutic riding program has helped Elyssa physically, cognitively and socially. It has helped her core muscle strength, hip and leg strength, and balance. It has even helped her bladder and bowel control. Additionally, it has improved her speech fluency, decreased stuttering, improved her language processing and provided a wonderful social connection with both the horses and the therapists.

I also cannot recommend Music Therapy enough! We first met Elyssa's therapist in 2018, and it was pivotal for her mental health. What makes it different is that it's not just 'listening to music'; it's a specialized clinical support where the therapist used things like songwriting to help Elyssa express feelings she normally kept locked inside. She shared things through music that she hadn't shared with anyone else."

## Mental health of Caregivers

Caregivers often experience high levels of chronic stress, anxiety, and depression. This "caregiver burden" can lead to burnout, physical illnesses, and reduced quality of life. Caregivers of those with IDD face the life-long navigation of benefits, resources, inadequate medical expertise, social engagement and financial constraints. BUT, you are not alone! There are thousands of others in your shoes and professionals who can help you.

- Texas Parent2Parent support Group: [TXP2P.org](http://TXP2P.org)
- Family Caregiver Alliance: [Caregiver.org](http://Caregiver.org)
- Search Facebook for support groups specific to your child's age and diagnosis
- HP Respite Nights! See below.
- Keep your eye out for a support group coming to High Point Village this Fall 2026

## Resources

### Equine-Assisted Therapies

Refuge Equine-Assisted Therapies: 806-748-7202; [refugeservices.org](http://refugeservices.org)

TTU Therapeutic Riding Center: 806-792-4683; [ttrc@ttu.edu](mailto:ttrc@ttu.edu)

### Music Therapists:

Amy Andrus: 806-535-1322

Jordan Marshall: 806-662-8225

### Therapists skilled in IDD:

The Springs Therapy Group: 806-705-8833

Rachel Redding: 806-789-5146

### EMDR and Trauma therapy for IDD:

Kristin Lefforge: 806-391-7169

Kelly Johnson Pirtle: 806-583-3706

### Ongoing webinars:

Consolidated Planning Group

<https://adultdownsyndrome.org>

*If your loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis, please call the StarCare Crisis Line at 806-740-1414  
<https://www.starcarelubbock.org/services/mental-health-crisis/mobile-crisis-outreach-team>*

## Upcoming Dates:

- High Point Village Summer Camps for ages 8+: June (ages 8-17) and August (18+); Register Here: [High Point Camps](#)
- High Point Village Respite Nights for ages 8+: 6/12, 7/10, and 8/21 6pm-9pm; Register Here: [Respite Nights](#)
- Camp Marbridge is a week-long camp in Austin for those with IDD ages 16+: [www.Marbridge.org](http://www.Marbridge.org)
- Down Home Ranch Camp (ages 13+) and Family Ranch Camp in Elgin, TX: [www.downhomeranch.org](http://www.downhomeranch.org)
- Texas Parent2Parent Conference July 17-18 in Georgetown, TX: [Texas Parent2Parent Conference](#)
- DFW Autism Conference (date and registration coming soon): <https://www.dfwautismconference.com>
- National Down Syndrome Congress Convention July 23-26 in Orlando: <https://ndscenter.org/convention>