



PENNSYLVANIA PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS MENTALLY RETARDED?

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Children who are mentally retarded, even mildly so, are thinking and usually using language at a level much lower than would be expected for their age. There are so many areas of thought, including reasoning, memory, and flexibility, that it takes a psychologist to diagnose mental retardation. Still, a valid clue would be that the child is talking, acting, and, based on the child's responses, consistently thinking like a younger child, despite not having been seriously overprotected.

Mistakenly assuming a child is "retarded" may occur when an adult judges from a child's lack of communication that the child does not understand. The child just may be stubborn, shy, or have trouble with language expression specifically. School performance is also not necessarily indicative of a cognitive problem. For example, a child's low grades may be due to inattention in class, which may or may not be a symptom of emotional distress. Furthermore, while thinking slowly is a characteristic of the mentally retarded, it may also be true of the non-retarded. The difference is that the non-retarded child learns and understands more complicated ideas.

Talk to someone who can help. If you would like the name of a qualified psychologist in your area, please call the Pennsylvania Psychological Association, 717-232-3817, or visit www.papsy.org.