

Health Trends



Advocacy



Advocacy for another person means speaking, writing, or acting on their behalf in order to achieve an outcome that is in their best interest. Advocacy is an important role, especially for those who cannot advocate for themselves (1).

Healthcare Disparity and Inequity

There is a great need for advocacy in acute care settings in order to lower the risk of preventable deaths. Individuals with IDD often receive a substandard level of care due to negative attitudes towards those with disabilities, communication difficulties, inaccessible medical facilities, and a lack of training and experience among healthcare professionals (2).

Advocacy in Acute Care Settings

Sending someone who knows the individual well to the hospital with them is considered best practice. Staff should be prepared to assist with answering questions or presenting helpful documentation such as vital sign logs, bowel movement logs, input/output logs, Medication Administration Record (MAR), and health history, along with be able to describe any symptoms the individual may be having which brought them to the hospital.

A [hospital passport](#) can be beneficial for hospital staff to get a clear picture of the individual's usual health status.

Persons accompanying individuals to the hospital or emergency room should be educated on the Fatal Seven, conditions/disorders which increases fatalities for individuals with IDD. Inform the hospital staff if the individual has a history of any of the following conditions. The Fatal Seven are:

1. Falls.
2. Sepsis.
3. Seizures.
4. Dehydration.
5. Pressure Injuries.
6. Aspiration Pneumonia.
7. Constipation/Bowel Obstructions/Fecal Impactions.



Please direct any questions or concerns regarding the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network "Health Trends" newsletter to communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov

Tips for Advocating in the Hospital and Emergency Room Settings

- As an advocate, support the individual, who may be frightened and uncooperative.
- A thorough assessment with a full set of vital signs should be taken at the ER. This includes:
 - Blood pressure.
 - Heart Rate (pulse).
 - Pulse Oximetry (Oxygen Saturation Level).
 - Temperature.
 - Respiratory rate/Breathing rate.
- The goal is to obtain a diagnosis quickly. ER staff may need assistance with getting the individual to cooperate for tests necessary to confirm a diagnosis.
- Physicians determine what tests should be completed based on signs/symptoms, history, assessment and presentation.
- Advocate for the following tests to help rule out or confirm a Fatal Seven condition:
 - Urinalysis (rule out a urinary tract infection).
 - Chest X-ray (rule out pneumonia).
 - Abdominal x-ray (rule out fecal impaction/bowel obstruction).
 - Complete Blood Count (rule out infection).
 - EKG (assess heart rhythm).
 - EEG (assess for seizures).

This is not an all-inclusive list. Physician may order additional diagnostic tests based on signs/symptoms, history, assessment, and the individual's condition.

COVID-19 and Acute Care Settings

COVID-19 testing will be performed during all acute care visits. Individuals may not refuse a nasal swab for COVID-19 testing. Individual with viral symptoms such as cough, fever, shortness of breath will be isolated immediately.

If an individual is positive for COVID-19, they may be treated at the triage location and sent home with orders. Everyone entering the ER is required to wear a mask. If an individual has recovered from COVID-19 inform the ER physician.

Supported Decision Making Advocacy Resource

<https://dbhds.virginia.gov/supported-decision-making-supported-decision-making-agreements/>

Advocacy App



The Patient Safety Movement Foundation's first mobile application, PatientAider, can be a valuable source of medical information for you or your loved one's hospital stay. If you or someone you love is in the hospital or heading to the hospital soon, download PatientAider. Tailor your experience, read articles and watch videos on specific health topics. This App is designed to work on multiple platforms. (App of the Month is not endorsed by DBHDS Office of Integrated Health. User accepts full responsibility for utilization of app).

References

1. Brolan, C. E., Boyle, F. M., Dean, J. H., Gomez, M. T., Ware, R. S., & Lennox, N. G. (2012, November). Health advocacy: a vital step in attaining human rights for adults with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56(11), 1087-1097. Doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2788.2012.01637.x.
2. Burke, M. M., & Heller, T. (2017). Disparities in unmet service needs among adults with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 30(5), 898-910. DOI: 10.1111/jar.12282
3. Hartnett, K., Kite-Powell, A., DeVies, J., Coletta, M., Boehmer, T., Adjemian, J., & Gundlapalli, A. (2020, May) Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on emergency department visits-United States. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly*, 69, 699-704. DOI: 10.15585/mmwr.mm6923e1.

Health Trends



BCBA

April is Stress Awareness Month

Stress Awareness Month has been recognized every April since 1992, however this year it seems particularly important. Learning to cope with our stress and finding healthy ways to deal with stressful situations can go a long way in living a healthy and positive life. Long-term stress can prove to be more than just a mental issue.

We all experience stress, yet we experience it in different ways. For that reason, there is no single definition for stress, but the [American Institute of Stress](#) states the most common explanation is a "physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension" (1).

Common Issues Related to Stress

- Headaches
- Stomach disorders
- Anxiety/Depression
- Stroke
- Heart Disease



Tips for Coping with Stress

- Take care of yourself.
 - Eat healthy
 - Exercise regularly
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Give yourself a break if you feel stressed
- Discuss your problems.
 - Talk with a parent, friend, or another trusted source.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.
 - Brain research now indicates that people exposed to stress are more likely to abuse alcohol or other drugs, or to relapse into drug addiction.
- Recognize when you need more help.
 - Know when to talk to a psychologist, social worker, or counselor if things continue.

Anxiety can affect many aspects of your mental health and well-being.

Useful Links:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/living-with/index.html>
- <https://odphp.health.gov/myhealthfinder/health-conditions/heart-health/manage-stress>
- <https://mentalhealth.cornell.edu/self-care/stress-management-strategies>

References:

1. [The American Institute of Stress \(2026\) What is stress? \[Internet\]](#)
2. [HR News Wire. \(2024, April\). April is stress awareness month \(but no need to stress over it\). Hub at Work, John Hopkins University Communications. \[Internet\]](#)
3. [Khwaja, T. \(2026, March\). Stress awareness month 2026: Kindness for mental wellness. Center for Integrative Psychiatry. \[Internet\]](#)

ABA Snippets ...

Back to Basics: Understanding Behavior Analysis

Over the years, this ABA Snippet has explored a wide variety of topics in behavior analysis, from best practices for collecting behavioral data and ethical considerations to highlighting the use of behavioral principles in unique settings. This month, we'll take a step back and revisit some of the fundamental concepts that form the foundation of behavior science.

Behavior analysis is a broad, practical field dedicated to understanding why behavior happens and using that knowledge to support learning and meaningful, person-centered change. Extending back to the early 20th century, it examines how the environment influences what people do and how those influences can be adjusted to improve quality of life (1).

The principles of behavior derived from behavior science are universal and have been applied across many environments where people live, learn, and work. These same strategies that commonly support individuals with developmental disabilities are also used in classrooms to improve learning, in workplaces to enhance performance and safety, and even in sports to strengthen coaching, motivation, and skill development. The methods used in behavior analysis are flexible and effective across a wide range of human experiences.

Above all, behavior science aims to empower individuals. Interventions must be tailored, collaborative, and guided by both informed consent and assent. The process involves the person, their family, and their support team to ensure that goals reflect what truly matters to the individual.

See the links in the references section to learn more about behavior analysis.

You may contact DBHDS about these efforts via the following: nick.vanderburg@dbhds.virginia.gov

References

1. [Behavior Analyst Certification Board. \(2026\). About behavior analysis.](#)
2. Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2020). *Applied behavior analysis* (3rd ed.). Pearson.
3. [Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. \(2026\). Behavioral services.](#)

Stress Reducing App



Insight Timer is a popular, free meditation and sleep app featuring the world's largest library of over 150,000 guided meditations from thousands of teachers, aimed at reducing anxiety and enhancing sleep. It provides customized timers, music, and community features, catering to various mindfulness techniques, including Vipassana and yoga Nidra. Includes a flexible, free timer for unguided meditation with options for interval bells, ambient sounds, and ending sounds. (App of the Month is not endorsed by DBHDS Office of Integrated Health-Health Supports Network. User accepts full responsibility for utilization of app).