



Massachusetts Department of  
Developmental Services (DDS)



Massachusetts Councils  
on Aging (MCOA)



Center for Developmental Disabilities  
Evaluation and Research

# CONCEPTS OF CHANGE RELATED TO AGING

**Everybody experiences changes as they grow older**, and some degree of change is expected as a normal part of the aging process. Similarly adults with intellectual disabilities will experience changes with age. It's often the caregivers, who know these individuals so well, that are the first to notice changes. It's important that caregivers pay attention to their instincts and note changes that they observe. By pointing out changes, caregivers play an important role in the early stages of understanding what those changes mean.



## TAKE ACTION:

- If you have concerns talk to your Service Coordinator or Area Office Nurse. Locate them through the [local area office](#) or call:
- **MA Department of Developmental Services**  
Phone: **617.727.5608** | TTY **617.727.9842**
- Use the Recognizing Change checklist, at the left, to help you gather information about changes you notice.
- Use a [worksheet](#) to compare and contrast baseline and current functioning.
- Summarize the observations and bring these concerns to a health care provider for further input and discussion.
- The National Task Group on Intellectual Disabilities and Dementia has a [screening tool](#) that you also may find helpful.
- Familiarize yourself with changes associated with aging in individuals with IDD. DDS/CDDER has a [series of webinars on Aging with Intellectual and Developmental Disability](#) with helpful information.

## Recognizing Change: A Checklist

### What looks different?

#### Are there changes in:

- Physical function: How the individual moves or physically performs tasks?
- Memory: Remembering names, recent events or keeping up daily schedules? New confusion?
- Mood: New sadness, tearfulness, giddiness?
- Behavior: Increased agitation, hostility, anger, or acting out?
- Overall Health?

### What looks different compared to baseline?

- Think back and gather information about the skills, abilities and characteristics the individual had throughout their adult life.
- Use this to compare and contrast with current skills and characteristics.

### When did the changes occur?

- Sudden, abrupt changes are not normal or typical of dementia and often require more urgent attention.
- When change occurs gradually, recall when the changes were first noted, and note any pattern over time.

### What are other caregivers noticing?

- Share your observations across settings.
- Are changes being noted in day program? Family visits? Community outings?

### Has anything else changed within the same time period? Has there been any:

- Stressor or transition, such as a move, loss, death or other traumatic event?
- Major illness or injury?
- Medication adjustment, changes, or new prescriptions?