An IDD conversation guide for nurse anesthesia educators and program administrators

How prepared are your residents to adapt their communication, collaborate with caregivers, and individualize anesthesia care for patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)?

An October 2026 *AANA Journal* study explored how 11 nurse anesthesia faculty members prepare for and experience caring for patients with IDD. Participants described gaps in formal instruction and a reliance on experiential learning. Their perspectives offer a starting point for examining how your program prepares residents to care for patients with IDD.

Set aside 15 minutes at your next faculty meeting to discuss the following questions and identify one actionable next step.

1. **Where is IDD care taught?**
   Participants described limited IDD-specific content in coursework and educational resources.
   a. Where does our curriculum address IDD care, including communication, sensory needs, patient autonomy, and caregiver collaboration?
   b. Do all residents receive this preparation, or does it depend on their clinical assignments?

Identify: One area where existing content could be strengthened or made more visible.

2. **Where do residents practice adapting their approach?**
   Participants emphasized individualized communication and suggested simulation, role-playing, and case-based learning to strengthen preparation.
   a. How do residents practice communicating directly with patients while incorporating input from caregivers?
   b. How do residents learn to recognize behavioral cues and adapt to patients' communication and sensory needs?

Discuss this teaching scenario:
An adult patient with IDD arrives with a caregiver who answers most questions. The patient appears increasingly uncomfortable in the busy preoperative area. How would we coach a resident to communicate directly with the patient, identify their needs, and collaborate with the caregiver?

3. **What support do faculty and preceptors need?**
   Participants reported limited access to formal training and profession-specific resources. The study highlights faculty development as an opportunity to strengthen educational preparation.
   a. How consistently do faculty and clinical preceptors teach communication and care strategies for patients with IDD?
   b. What shared case, discussion activity, or faculty development opportunity could help address an identified gap?

Choose: One feasible step to explore with faculty and clinical partners.

Leave with one next step

Complete this statement together:

Before our next curriculum discussion, _____ will review _____ and recommend _____.

Starting points include mapping existing IDD content, reviewing a simulation scenario, or gathering preceptor feedback on resident preparation.

Continue the conversation

Read "Barriers and Opportunities in Anesthesia Care for Patients With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Qualitative Study" in the October 2026 *AANA Journal* to explore participant perspectives, four major themes, and recommendations for education and professional development.

These discussion prompts and the teaching scenario were developed from the article's findings. The study explored participant experiences but did not evaluate the effectiveness of the suggested educational approaches.