

# Asking Why

with

## The CAIS: A Guide to Supporting a Person and Their Cognitive Abilities

By Shelly E. Weaverdyck, PhD

### VOLUME I:

Understanding Why with Concepts, Tips, and CAIS Examples

### VOLUME II:

Addressing Why with the CAIS Questions to Ask and Intervention Strategies

### VOLUME III:

Teaching Why with the CAIS Educational Series



**Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS)**

Introduction to a Manual of Three Volumes

From Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS) Manual: *Asking Why with the CAIS: A Guide to Supporting a Person and Their Cognitive Abilities*. By Shelly E. Weaverdyck, PhD; Edited by Marcia Cameron, MA. 2010. Revised 6/30/20.

All three volumes of the CAIS manual are on the Improving MI Practices website at <https://www.improvingmipractices.org>

Some parts of this three-volume manual *Asking Why with the CAIS: A Guide to Supporting a Person and Their Cognitive Abilities* were originally written in 2002 and 2010. They were most recently revised in 2019-2020 partially supported by funds from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Products paid for with block grant funds may only be sold at cost and not for profit.

The author would like to acknowledge with special thanks the 2020 revision editors. Marcia Cameron, MA was the primary editor of this manual. Gail Brusseau, LMSW and Jacqueline Dobson, BA were also editors for various parts. The 2020 Revision Steering Committee included Alyson Rush, LMSW, Chris Curtin, RN-BC, Marcia Cameron, MA, Gail Brusseau, LMSW, and Jacqueline Dobson, BA. (The author was also on the steering committee.)

This entire three-volume manual is available on the Michigan Improving MI Practices (IMP) website at <https://www.improvingmipractices.org>

Please properly cite when using any part of this three-volume manual, as follows: Weaverdyck, Shelly E. (2020). *Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS) Manual: Asking Why with the CAIS: A Guide to Supporting a Person and Their Cognitive Abilities: Volumes I - III*. Improving MI Practices. <https://www.improvingmipractices.org>

We welcome feedback.

Please comment on the *improvingmipractices.org* website where indicated.

**Disclaimer:**

This CAIS three-volume manual is not sufficient for the understanding, assessment, or intervention regarding any individual person or situation. In each individual case, a health professional must be consulted. This manual simply presents ideas from which to draw and apply as appropriate. The suggestions here will not be appropriate for every person in every situation.

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**INTRODUCTION  
TO  
A MANUAL OF THREE VOLUMES**

**Asking Why with the CAIS:  
A Guide to Supporting a Person and Their Cognitive Abilities**

This three-volume manual presents the “**Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS)**”. The CAIS is a set of **questions** and **ideas** of **intervention strategies** that suggest ways to understand and support a person and their cognitive abilities.

**Volume I** is “Understanding Why with **Concepts, Tips, and CAIS Examples**”. **Volume II** is “Addressing Why with the **CAIS Questions to Ask and Intervention Strategies**”. **Volume III** is “Teaching Why with the **CAIS Educational Series**”.

**Online Course**: All three of these volumes provide in-depth **background information** for an online course called “**Beyond Behavior: The Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS)**”. The online course presents tips and concepts. It also shows the **structure of the CAIS** and **how to use it** to see beyond a person’s behavior to their cognitive abilities, since changes in a person’s cognitive abilities can frequently cause distress and changes in behavior. The online course is described at the end of this introduction.

**On Website**: The CAIS, all three volumes of this CAIS manual, and the online course called “Beyond Behavior: The CAIS” are on the Improving MI Practices website at <https://www.improvingmipractices.org>

**Cognitive abilities** are a person’s ability to think, understand, respond, remember, and imagine among many other skills that help a person perform tasks and interact with other people and their surroundings. Cognitive abilities are closely tied to the brain. When the **brain changes**, specific cognitive abilities usually change.

## Goal

The goal of this manual and the CAIS is to **increase comfort**, enthusiasm, and meaning for you and a person you relate to or assist. It is also to help this person and you **interact** with each other more easily, and to **think, perform tasks**, and **interact** with their **surroundings** more easily. It aims to **reduce distress** and situations that are frustrating, confusing, stressful, and difficult for both this person and for you, and to do all of this by helping you **understand** and **support** this person's **cognitive abilities** by using the **CAIS**. The CAIS assumes distress and distressing situations are more likely to occur when this person's cognitive needs are not met, and their cognitive strengths are unsupported or not used.

This manual with the CAIS provides information, methods, and resources to help you understand and support this person and their **cognitive abilities** (that is, their cognitive **strengths** and **needs**) and to better understand their particular situation.

The CAIS is intended to be a **guide** to help you identify effective support or **intervention strategies** that address specifically some of the **reasons** this person is having difficulty or needs help, that is, that address and support this particular person's specific cognitive abilities.

**GOAL:** The guidance, tips, and concepts in this manual aim for a situation where:

- A person you are relating to and assisting becomes more **comfortable**, content, and enthusiastic
- This person can **think** and **interact** with their **surroundings** more easily
- **Tasks** are completed more easily and successfully
- This person and you **interact** with **each other** more easily
- Everyone feels more **relaxed** and **competent**
- You and this person **enjoy** time together
- **Distress** is **minimal**
- You use the **CAIS Questions** and **Intervention Strategies** to **understand** and **support** this person's **cognitive abilities** (their cognitive **needs** and cognitive **strengths**)
- **Frustration**, stress, and **distressing situations** are **prevented** or **reduced** for both this person and you

## Asking Why

The CAIS presented in this manual involves asking specific questions regarding **WHY** a person is not understanding, or learning more, or able to respond. Or why there is distress, or difficulty communicating, or performing a task. Then it directs you to intervention or support strategies you can try.

There are many books and resources that list various intervention strategies. But how do you decide which intervention to use when? If you do not know why a person has difficulty doing something, is upset, or is engaged in behavior that is distressing or harmful to this person or others, then how to intervene or how BEST to help will be unclear. You may find yourself trying various interventions to see which might work. This trial and error approach can be time consuming and frustrating,

### **Cognitive Abilities as a Focus**

The CAIS focuses on a person's **cognitive abilities** as part of the **reason** for a person's difficulty or need for help. The **whole person** (including their emotional, physical, medical, spiritual, and other aspects) needs to be addressed as well, but the CAIS and this manual focus primarily on cognitive abilities. It considers the role cognitive abilities play in a particular person's ability to think, perform tasks, and to understand and respond to their environment and to you, and in turn, their effects on this person's emotions and behavior.

Changes in the **brain** directly affect a person's cognitive abilities, creating a very specific set of **cognitive strengths** and **needs** that are **unique** to each person.

Understanding a particular person's unique set of abilities regarding how they think, understand what they see or hear, figure out how to do things, and respond to information they receive can greatly increase your ability to be effective when you interact with them or help them do a task.

### **The CAIS**

The Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS) consists of **four parts** that reflect **four factors** to examine and to use to support a person's cognitive strengths and needs: this person's cognitive abilities, this person's environment, your communication with this person, and this person's tasks and daily routines.

#### **FOUR PARTS TO THE CAIS QUESTIONS TO ASK AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Cognitive Abilities
2. Environment
3. Communication
4. Task and Daily Routines

Each part has a set of questions you ask yourself. For each question, there is a list of ideas of intervention strategies. When your answer to a question suggests additional support is needed you are directed to the list of intervention strategies relevant to that question. The questions, your responses, and the intervention suggestions are adapted to a **particular person**.

The **questions** identify a particular person's cognitive strengths and needs. They also identify which aspects of the environment, your communication, and the task can be adapted to improve

support for this person’s cognitive abilities. The **intervention strategies** suggest how to adapt the environment, your communication, and the task to increase support for this person’s cognitive abilities, which can then help this person (and you) feel more comfortable and less distressed.

### **This Manual and the CAIS**

The CAIS and this manual in three volumes helps you **identify** a person’s specific **cognitive abilities** (their cognitive strengths and needs), **analyze a situation** (including how well the environment, the task, and your communication with this person are supporting this person’s cognitive strengths and needs), **get helpful information** and **intervention suggestions**, and then **select** effective **intervention** (support) strategies.

They are a guide to help you ask “why?” to find the reasons or causes of a situation where a person needs help, or of a distressing situation. Suggestions of how to address the causes are offered.

The title of this manual is “**Asking Why with the CAIS: A Guide to Supporting a Person and Their Cognitive Abilities**”.

In the three volumes, the manual presents the following:

#### **Volume I: Understanding Why** with Concepts, Tips, and CAIS Examples

- **Five chapters** that explore the brain, cognitive abilities, the environment, communication, and the task. **Examples** to illustrate the structure of the CAIS are included.
- **CAIS Handouts** with information, suggestions, and details regarding specific topics. These are 43 summary sheets that can be read and distributed to others who want to learn more, such as families, professionals, and a person who needs help.

These chapters and handouts include **tips** for intervention and support strategies. They also provide context, rationale, and in-depth **information** to help you understand issues regarding the four factors and the CAIS.

#### **Volume II: Addressing Why** with the CAIS Questions to Ask and Intervention Strategies

- **The CAIS Questions and Intervention Strategies.**
- Description of the CAIS.
- **Instructions** on how to use the CAIS.

#### **Volume III: Teaching Why** with the CAIS Educational Series

- A **curriculum** of five one-hour sessions so you can **teach** the concepts underpinning the CAIS. This can be used **formally** as a presentation or **informally** while advising or problem solving with others.
- Each session includes a script, objectives, PowerPoint slides, handouts, and evaluation forms.



**TABLE 1: Four Factors:  
Focus of the CAIS, each volume of the Manual, and the Online Course**

	Cognitive Abilities of a Person	Environment	Communication	Task and Daily Routines
<b>Volume I Chapters</b>	1, 2	3	4	5
<b>Volume I CAIS Handouts</b>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43	12, 13, 14, 22, 25, 29, 30, 34, 36, 37, 38	1, 12, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41	1, 5, 9, 11, 12, 16, 22, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34,
<b>Volume II CAIS Questions to Ask</b>	Cognitive Abilities 5 sections	Environment 9 sections	Communication 10 sections	Task and Daily Routines 6 sections
<b>Volume II CAIS Intervention Strategies</b>	Cognitive Abilities 5 sections	Environment 9 sections	Communication 10 sections	Task and Daily Routines 6 sections
<b>Volume III Curriculum Sessions</b>	1, 2	3	4	5
<b>Online Course Modules Beyond Behavior: The CAIS</b>	1, 2	3	4	5

### **Organized Around Four Factors and the Brain**

As stated above, the four factors are a Person and their **cognitive abilities**, their **Environment**, **Communication**, their **Tasks** and Daily routines.

The CAIS and the three volumes of the manual are **organized around these four factors**. The manual also has an additional focus on the **brain**. For example, there are five chapters in Volume I. The chapters each focus on one factor or the brain (that is the brain, cognitive abilities, the environment, communication, and the task respectively). Each session of the curriculum in Volume III and each module of the online course also addresses the brain and each of the four factors, respectively.

**Table 1** above shows which parts of the CAIS, this manual, and the online course address specifically each of the **four factors**. The CAIS Handouts are each numbered. The number of each handout is included in the table.

The **Table of Contents** of this manual also shows this organization.

At the **end of each chapter** in Volume I there is a list of CAIS Handouts especially relevant to the topic of that chapter.

### **Situations for the CAIS and this Manual**

The CAIS and this manual can put you in a better position to know how to help in challenging situations and how to prevent and respond to distressing situations.

Such situations might include:

- Helping a person who needs help but doesn't want help.
- Approaching a person who frequently gets upset and strikes out when you try to help them with a task.
- Helping a person living with dementia (or major neurocognitive disorder) stay in their home.
- Assisting a person with a traumatic brain injury who now has difficulty with memory, judgment, and anger management.
- Helping a family who has a member with a psychiatric diagnosis.
- Making showers easier for an older person who has experienced a stroke.
- Suggesting how to keep a person safe when they frequently leave their home or place of residence.
- Leading a support group for persons who need help and those who relate to them or assist them.
- Presenting an educational session to busy staff.
- Helping a person learn a new skill, a new job, or a new concept in their homework.

The concepts and intervention strategies in this manual **apply to any person, in any setting, and to all tasks**, including leisure activities, activities of daily living, and abstract tasks such as

decision-making. They can be helpful to a person at any level of dependence or independence, because the CAIS is individualized to a specific person, regardless of the setting or situation.

### **Who can Benefit from the CAIS and this Manual**

The CAIS and this manual will most likely be used by families or professional staff who assist a person who needs help with daily tasks or needs mental health or medical services. But they can be used by **anyone in any setting**. This is because the concepts and the CAIS as a guide can be **adapted** to each person, setting, and situation, and to you as the user.

This means the manual, the CAIS Questions and Interventions, and the online course can be helpful to you, for example:

- Regardless of how much or how little **help** this person needs.
- Whatever your **relationship** to this person is.
- If you are with this person multiple hours a day helping them with **many tasks** or see this person only **once** for a specific interaction or task.
- If you are a **family** member, **friend**, acquaintance, someone who directly assists this person with showers, a **consultant** or **supervisor** who rarely interacts with this person or helps them with a task, a worker in a fast food restaurant, a lawyer, mental health or health care professional, psychologist, nurse, social worker, physician, supervisor, or educator.
- Regardless of the type and amount of skill, knowledge, or experience you have. While the CAIS questions and intervention strategies are based on complex aspects of brain functioning and cognition, you do not need to be familiar with or have knowledge about the brain and cognition to use it. Both the manual and CAIS use **minimal technical language**.
- **Where you are**. They can be used at home or the office or anywhere else, as well as in **unusual** situations or in **everyday** situations and daily tasks.

They can help you **generate** intervention strategies, **educate** yourself, and educate others informally or formally as an instructor, supervisor, or a consultant.

They can be used in your own **interactions**, and when **advising**, **planning** interventions, **problem solving** with family or staff, or addressing an **immediate** or **on-going** issue.

**Health professionals** may find the CAIS, manual, educational curriculum, and online course useful while communicating with families or with others in interdisciplinary health situations, because they avoid technical terms and are easily understood. The content, language, and everyday concepts and structure can be used to **convey technical information in a nontechnical way**.

Since the CAIS is simple and intuitive, and can be adapted to your own situation, you will likely find it **easy** to learn and use even when you are busy or in a hurry.

Some comments from others who have used the CAIS and content in this manual and online course are included at the end of this introduction.

### **What Makes This Three-Volume Manual Unique**

- It focuses on finding out **WHY** a person needs help or why there is distress or frustration. The focus is on identifying triggers and causes.
- It identifies and supports specific **cognitive abilities**, rather than focusing primarily on behavior or emotions.
- It identifies and relies on cognitive abilities a person does **well**, and not primarily on what this person doesn't do well.
- Strategies focus on adapting the **environment**, the **task**, and **communication** to accommodate and support a particular person's specific cognitive abilities.
- The content is based on the **brain** and cognitive abilities, but you don't have to know anything about the brain or cognition to use it.
- It presents the CAIS.
- Concepts and the CAIS relate to any **person** in any **situation** and can be used by **anyone** at any level of expertise.
- It offers **practical, specific, and concrete everyday** strategies that are easily adopted and implemented.
- The CAIS can be **adapted** to the user and situation.
- The CAIS and intervention strategies are highly **individualized** to a particular person and situation.
- The content can be presented or shared **informally** or more **formally** in classes or presentations. A **curriculum** is provided.
- The CAIS **avoids trial and error** in intervention planning because intervention strategies are specific to a particular person's identified cognitive needs and desires. So, the intervention suggestions are more likely to be effective.

### **Messages to Remember from this Manual**

Here is a summary of messages important to remember from this manual.

1. This person has a **unique brain** and a unique set of **cognitive abilities** (that is, cognitive strengths and needs). These cognitive abilities continue to fluctuate and change over time. So, **individualize** and **adapt** to this particular person at all times.
2. There are **many** specific discrete **cognitive abilities**. Cognition is not a single number or concept. It is important to identify a variety of **specific** cognitive strengths and needs.
3. Identify and help this person use their **cognitive strengths**. Don't focus primarily on their cognitive needs.
4. Try to **make** the **conditions** (the environment, tasks, and your interactions) **match** this person's **cognitive strengths** and **needs**. When there is a mismatch, where the conditions overestimate or underestimate a person's cognitive abilities, this person can become fatigued, withdrawn, irritable, anxious, angry, or distressed in some way.

5. This person **may not** be able to **easily control** their responses to you or their behavior due to changes in their brain and cognitive abilities.
6. Focus on the role of **cognitive** abilities in your **intervention strategies**, in addition to the emotional, physical, spiritual, and medical aspects.
7. Help a person **relax** so their brain can work better.
8. **Ask yourself “why?”**. You will more likely know how to help when you discover why they are having difficulty performing a task or communicating or are distressed.
9. Address with your interventions the **causes** or triggers of the difficulty or distress.
10. **Observe** this person closely in everyday tasks, to better understand their desires, needs, and abilities, and to increase your ability to view or experience a situation from their perspective.
11. Look carefully at the **four factors** to see how the conditions around a person are making it easier or harder for them to communicate, perform a task, or to feel comfortable. These four factors are: the person, environment, your interactions with this person, the task.
12. **Make** every **interaction** and **task** as **easy** as possible for a person. This person may be working very hard to perform the simplest of tasks, even if they don’t show how much energy they are using.
13. Help a person **conserve** their **energy** so they can have more energy for more difficult tasks or more enjoyable tasks and experiences, such as visiting with a friend.
14. **Modify** the **environment**, your **communication** with this person, and the **task** to make it easier for this person to communicate, perform a task, or to feel comfortable.
15. Observe and **adapt** your intervention strategies frequently to **accommodate changes** in a person’s situation and in their cognitive abilities over time. There may be moment to moment fluctuations in their abilities, desires, and needs as well.
16. **Use** the **CAIS** and this **manual** to help you understand why a person is having difficulty and how to modify the conditions to help them feel more comfortable and competent. This manual and CAIS can help by giving you specific ways to note the four factors, as well as concrete, practical suggestions of support or intervention strategies you can use in a way that emphasizes the role of the brain and this person’s cognitive abilities.
17. Use the manual and CAIS to help **reduce** reliance on **medication** as a means of preventing or responding to distressing situations.

### **CAIS Online Course**

As stated in the beginning of this introduction, all three of these volumes in the CAIS manual provide in-depth background information for an **online course** called “**Beyond Behavior: The Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS)**”. This online course shows the **structure of the CAIS** and **how to use it** to see beyond a person’s behavior to their **cognitive abilities**, since changes in a person’s cognitive abilities can frequently cause distress and changes in behavior.

The online course consists of **five one-hour modules**. The modules explore **concepts** and give **examples** and **tips** from the CAIS. They also show **how to use** each of the **four parts** of the CAIS. Each of the five modules address the brain and cognition, cognitive abilities, the

environment, communication, and the task and daily routines, respectively. As indicated in Table I in this introduction of the manual, the **title** and **content** of each **module** in the online course **correspond** to the title and content of each **chapter** in Volume I, each part of the **CAIS** in Volume II, and each **session** of the curriculum in Volume III. The content and context in each of the three volumes and online course, while similar, **treat the topics differently**, because they each have a different focus and **purpose**. Each of the three volumes of the manual provide **additional content** and **tips** that can help you better **understand** and more easily **apply** the information in the modules of the online course.

This online course focuses on relating to a person living with cognitive challenges or distressing behavior. It is for **anyone** who interacts with a person, assists with a task, or advises (or supervises) someone who does. You do not need specialized expertise or training to use the CAIS or to take the online course. The entire online course is available **for you** to view or take on the Michigan **website Improving MI Practices** at this link:

**<https://www.improvingmipractices.org>**

### **Website with This Three-Volume Manual**

The Michigan **Improving MI Practices website** at **<https://www.improvingmipractices.org>**

This website has this entire three-volume manual, the entire CAIS, and the CAIS **online course**. The CAIS is available in an **interactive format** and as pdf documents on this website. Many other resources regarding the brain, mental health, and cognition are on this website.

### **Comments from Others about the CAIS and Content in the Manual**

*“The content is **amazing**. I expect our staff member to use the materials . . . especially when she does **problem solving** sessions at nursing homes.”* Program Coordinator, **Adult Day Care Center**

*“This Cognitive Assessment approach that we have used for many years was ahead of its time because it is objective and the goal is to keep us happy, reduce stress, and strengthen relationships.”* *“I did **nursing home trainings** using the information and materials and I can assure you that many of the **direct care staff** have commented to me over the years that they have used the information, strategies, techniques and skills that they learned about assessing the person, task, environment, and themselves to care for persons with dementia.”* **Social Worker**, Caregiver Education & Support, Human Development Commission

*“These Questions to Ask about Cognitive abilities are amazing! My husband had a **head injury** and I thought he was just being stubborn! Now I’ve got ideas I can use to help him understand.”* **Family Member**

*“This information helped me **understand** my older resident with **Down Syndrome**.”* **Manager**, Nursing Home

Workshop attendees about the CAIS and content from the manual:

Introduction to a Manual of Three Volumes

From Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS) Manual: *Asking Why with the CAIS: A Guide to Supporting a Person and Their Cognitive Abilities*. By Shelly E. Weaverdyck, PhD; Edited by Marcia Cameron, MA. 2010. Revised 6/30/20.

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*“The interventions were very **practical** and **do-able**.”*

*“Down to earth. **Easy to understand**.”*

*“Wonderful **resources** and handouts.”*

*“Thank you for these **great handouts**. I will make sure they become part of our ongoing **training** programs.”*

*“Always interesting to learn about the **brain**.”*

*“Lots of **new information** about how the brain affects us in all our responses and ability to figure things out.”*

*“Takes a complex subject and makes it understandable.”*