

Adapting *The Hallway of Doorknobs* for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

A Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed Guide for Caregivers and Professionals

Why This Book Works for the ID Population

The Hallway of Doorknobs uses concrete, sensory metaphors (cactus spikes, lava, ice) to represent abstract emotional states. This visual, tactile approach aligns with how many individuals with ID process information best: through the body and senses rather than abstract language.

Person-Centered Adaptations

- **Follow Their Lead:** Let the individual choose which door/part to explore. Honor "not today" as a valid response.
- **Use Their Words:** If they call anger "my red feeling," use that language. The book's vocabulary is a starting point, not a requirement.
- **Pace to Capacity:** One door per session may be plenty. Repetition builds safety and mastery.
- **Make It Tangible:** Create actual doorknobs they can touch: a pom-pom for Cozy, sandpaper for Cactus, an ice cube for Freeze.
- **Invite, Don't Require:** "Would you like to meet Cactus today?" honors autonomy and builds trust.

Trauma-Informed Principles

- **Safety First:** The book models that all parts are welcome. Reinforce: "Every feeling has a reason. No part is bad."
- **Predictability:** Use the same ritual each time (same opening phrase, same seating, same closing).
- **Choice & Control:** Individuals with ID often have limited control in daily life. This practice restores agency.
- **Co-Regulation:** Stay calm and grounded yourself. Your nervous system models safety for theirs.
- **No Forcing Disclosure:** The goal is connection, not confession. Processing trauma is not required.

The Polyvagal Connection

Each "part" in the book maps to a nervous system state described by polyvagal theory: **Freeze** and **Vanish** reflect dorsal vagal shutdown; **Blazer** and **Bolt** show sympathetic fight/flight; **Cozy** and **Disco** can represent fawn responses. The children's **curiosity and compassion** model ventral vagal safety, the state needed for connection and healing. For individuals with ID who may have experienced repeated boundary violations, this book offers a gentle way to name what happens in their bodies without requiring verbal processing of trauma.

Quick Adaptation Strategies

Simplify Language	"Cactus feels prickly when scared" instead of lengthy explanations
Add Movement	Act out Bolt running, Balloon floating, Freeze being still
Use Visuals	Create a "doorknob board" with pictures they can point to
Extend Processing Time	Pause longer after questions; silence is thinking time
Repeat Key Phrases	"Every part helps. Every part is welcome." becomes an anchor

