

5 minute Practitioners guide to safeguarding children and adults with a learning disability/difficulty November 2020

1. A Newcastle joint serious case review into the sexual exploitation of children, young people and young adults published in 2018 identified in one of the cases that “no record of any assessment of learning disability during childhood was evident but as part of the safeguarding adult’s processes she was assessed as having a significant learning disability, sufficient to support an application to the Court of protection for authority to deprive her of her liberty” (Spicer 2018)

And that “Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board and Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board should arrange for guidance to be issued to practitioners on the differences between learning disability and learning difficulties and the relevance for safeguarding judgments and services”.

2a. Learning disability spectrum. (based on information from BILD, 2011 cited in Burke et al 2019)

Level	Mild	Moderate	Severe & Profound
Description	<p>Able to mix well with others.</p> <p>Able to cope with most everyday tasks.</p> <p>May need additional support for specific tasks (e.g. forms, managing their money etc).</p> <p>IQ likely to be around 50-70.</p>	<p>Will need more care and support depending on their individual needs.</p> <p>IQ likely to be around 35-50.</p>	<p>Will need more care and support with areas such as mobility, personal care and communication depending on individual needs.</p> <p>IQ for those with severe learning disabilities likely to be around 20-35, and those with profound learning disabilities under 20.</p>

2b. Learning difficulty: The phrase may be used to describe children who learn at a slower pace than their peers, even with appropriate differentiation. In education, learning difficulties are not seen as fixed but can vary according to environment, teaching methods, and social and emotional factors, they can cover a wide range of needs, including specific learning difficulties (such as Dyslexia and Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia which may not affect intellect), moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties.

5. What this means for the practitioner;

- Do not make assumptions about cognitive impairment and in safeguarding processes appropriate assessments should always be considered
 - There is a need for timely recognition by practitioners of potential victims who may lack capacity, and acknowledgement that the learning disability can have an impact on their capacity to make safe decisions
 - Where there are indicators a person has a reduced intellectual ability, they are struggling to manage money, unable to manage household tasks, have difficulties with social functioning which is impacting on their day to day life, it is essential to consider whether they have a learning disability-have it on your radar, ask the question could this person have a difficulty/disability
 - Young people and adults are groomed and exploited in many different ways, the common theme in all cases is the imbalance of power and control exerted on victims - think, is their evidence of this?
- People of all ages can be vulnerable to a range of abusive situations. It is the vulnerability of the alleged victim not just their age. Boys and men are just as likely to be targeted as victims of exploitation by perpetrators

3. Factors to consider:

- Perpetrators will target those with additional vulnerabilities
- You are 3 times more likely to suffer abuse if you have a learning disability
- Although many definitions of a learning disability requires an IQ of lower than 70, this does not reflect the individuals social, medical, educational and personal situation, nor what help and support they may need
- Controlling and coercive behaviour will impact on a persons’ ability to make capacitated and safe decisions which could place them at an increased risk of significant harm and abuse
- Although an adult may be assessed as having a severe learning disability, there may not have been a cognitive assessment during childhood

4. Early intervention: Remember where there are concerns about a child’s learning and development:

- Early identification is important, consider with parental consent a referral to early help
- Speak to the parents/carers and child
- Speak to colleagues such as the GP, health visitor, school nurse, education, as access to early support is vital
- Consider level of interaction and stimulation child is receiving in the home environment, is this good enough, think of safeguarding and possible neglect and refer appropriately
- Do not assume that attainment in line with chronological age means there is no learning difficulty/disability as these can occur across the range of cognitive ability and if unaddressed can lead to frustration which may manifest itself as disaffection, emotional and behavioural difficulties-so if a child/young person is displaying challenging behaviours there may be an underlying LD