

Working with Parents with a Learning Disability 1-Minute Guide

Definition of Learning Disability

A significantly reduced ability to understand new and complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intellectual functioning [IQ < 70]), with;

- A reduced ability to cope independently (impairment of adaptive & social functioning) which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development. This is considered a 'pervasive' definition of learning disability.

NB This should be differentiated from a 'learning difficulty' which describes a range of conditions such as dyslexia which can lead to special educational needs.

Possible Indicators of Learning Disability

- Educational background - did they attend special school? Did they need extra help at school if in mainstream?
- Health background – GP records
- Employment/Unemployment - what did they do after leaving school? Did they obtain an NVQ? Did they attend a day centre? Are they in receipt of any benefits, e.g. DLA?
- Responsiveness - do they respond to written communication? Do they seem to understand requests or comments and follow them through? Are they aware of areas with which they need help? Do they seem to get disproportionately frustrated and/or angry when asked questions?
- Do they see themselves as having a Learning Disability?
- Are they/have they been known to any social care services?

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Learning disabled parents need interventions which are:

- Based on the outcomes of a parenting assessment
- Set up at home where possible to maximise transference of learned skills
- Reduce the discrepancy between parent's ability and the child's essential needs
- Long term
- Broken down into small steps
- Matched to the parent's level of understanding and comprehension
- Visual / accessible - Easy to Read and includes pictorial information
- May include demonstration in addition to verbal instruction

Parents can find the involvement of different professionals and agencies overwhelming and confusing, resulting in a further decline of their functional ability.

It is vital that the professionals who have contact with learning disabled parents use communication pathways that are developed to facilitate a cohesive, co-ordinated service, which is supportive to both parents and professionals alike. This also reduces the need for high numbers of professionals to be directly involved.