

PRACTITIONER GUIDE

Impact of Learning Disabilities on Parenting

This information has been summarised from research findings carried out by the University of Bristol, outlined in their co-produced document [‘Getting things Changed - Successful professional practice when working with parents with learning difficulties’ \(2018\)](#).

Positive relationships with parents

An individual’s learning disability does not automatically result in an inability to parent. If neglect is present, it is usually unintentional, and often based on a lack of understanding of the child’s needs.

Parents with learning disabilities may need additional support to overcome, what can be, a wide range of difficulties and to ensure the wellbeing of their children.

The quality of support provided contributes to positive outcomes for children. Parents with learning disabilities may need support recurrently and/or over the long-term.

Professionals need to develop positive relationships with parents, be honest about their concerns and tailor how they work to the individual parents. This requires:

- **Time** - Extra time is needed to get to know parents and communicate appropriately - in easy ways - with them. Parents need more time to take on board information / new skills / knowledge. Parents may need support *through* time, i.e. long-term or recurrent support.
- **Trust** - Parents and practitioners need to trust each other for the support to be effective; time is needed to develop this trust.
- **Tenacity** - Professionals need to keep working on issues with parents over the longer-term, as necessary.
- **Truthfulness** - Practitioners need to be honest with parents and be really clear what the issues are. Parents should be honest with professionals.
- **Transparency** - Practitioners and parents need to be really clear about what is happening and what needs to be done when and by whom.

Real-life case studies of positive practice

[Working Together with Parents Network \(2009\) Supporting parents with learning disabilities and difficulties : Stories of Positive Practice](#)

Key areas of impaired functioning

Areas that may impact on a person’s ability to parent successfully if they have learning disabilities, include:

- Difficulty processing information
- Difficulty learning and applying new skills
- Difficulty communicating
- Impaired social functioning
- Reduced level of independence and ability to meet own needs

Things to consider

Do the parents have support needs under the Care Act i.e. can they be provided with support in their own right?

What does local policy say about referrals and support for parents with learning difficulties?

Is there a specialist team or professional who can provide advice or consultancy about / joint working with these parents?

How will long-term or recurrent support be provided to parents?

How much extra time do you need to allocate to the parent to fully understand their situation and develop their trust? How can parents feel respected and empowered and part of the team around their child?

Have the parents understood what you are telling them? Are you using short questions and concrete terms? Are you avoiding or explaining jargon? Can they tell you in their own words what the ‘problems’ are or what it is you are expecting of them?

Are your letters / reports / agendas in a format the parent understands?

Do the parents need to be shown ‘how to’? Might they need to be shown on a number of occasions, breaking the task down into small steps?

Would video interaction guidance help the parent to see their positive engagement with their child?