



Learning disability

Summary

This factsheet is an introduction to learning disability.

- | What is a learning disability?
- | How many people have a learning disability?
- | How can you tell if someone has a learning disability?
- | What problems can people with a learning disability face?
- | What rights does a person with a learning disability have?

Description

What is a learning disability?

Learning disability is one of the most common forms of disability in the UK. There are lots of different types of learning disability, they can be:

- | mild
- | moderate
- | severe
- | profound

They are all lifelong conditions. A learning disability can affect someone's ability to learn, communicate or do everyday things. It is not an illness or a disease. Learning disability used to be known as 'mental handicap' but this term is not used anymore because some people with a learning disability find it offensive.

Many people with a learning disability find it more difficult to learn and understand than other people. As a result, they may need support with everyday practical tasks like getting dressed or cooking, or with communication skills. People with a more severe learning disability may need 24-hour care, particularly for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

Many people with a learning disability live independent lives. It is important to understand that people with a learning disability are individuals with their own personalities, likes and dislikes goals and ambitions. A learning disability does not prevent someone from learning and achieving a lot in life, given the right support.

How many people have a learning disability?

It is thought that there are about 1.5 million people in the UK who have a learning disability.

This is about 3 in 100 people and this figure is increasing. Around 200 babies are born every week with a learning disability. People with a learning disability are living longer.

How can you tell if someone has a learning

disability?

It is not always possible to tell if someone has a learning disability from their appearance. Some people may have physical features that make it clear that they have a learning disability, such as Down's Syndrome. The way a person communicates could indicate they have a learning disability, such as slower speech. Some people with a learning disability may not have any verbal communication so they might use special signing systems or symbols, such as *Makaton* and *Signalong*, to help them communicate.

What problems can people with a learning disability

face?

There are many problems faced by people with a learning disability. They may not have equal access to basic services such as health, education and housing.

They can often face harassment or bullying and are victims of crime. They can be discriminated against by employers. Their abilities and needs are often not understood by the general public, employers, the media or local or national government.

What rights does a person with a learning disability

have?

A person with a learning disability should have the same rights as a person without a learning disability. Over the past few years, lots of these rights have been preserved in law:

In 1970 the Education Act made the right to education a basic right for every child with a learning disability.

In 1990 the Community Care Act supported new housing choices and gave people with a learning

disability the right to live in the community. (In Northern Ireland the law is different but the beliefs are the same.)

In 1995 the Disability Discrimination Act was the first step towards fully recognising the civil rights of people with a learning disability. It made equal opportunities a right for people with a disability.

In 2001 the Government's White Paper, 'Valuing People' in England, 'Fulfilling the Promises' in Wales and 'Regional Strategy and Priorities for Action' in Northern Ireland, put individual choice at the centre of services for people with a learning disability. It gave people with a learning disability the right to be valued.

In 2005, the Disability Discrimination Act was changed giving public bodies, such as health and education, new duties. These new duties include:

- ┆ making all rail vehicles accessible to people with a disability,
- ┆ including people who use a wheelchair
- ┆ changing the Blue Badge Parking Scheme for people with a
- ┆ disability
- ┆ increasing duties on reasonable arrangements to landlords and
- ┆ others who manage rented premises.

Also in 2005, the Mental Capacity Act was created to provide a legal structure to empower and protect vulnerable people who are not able to make their own decisions.

Although a person with a learning disability should have the same rights as other people, they are sometimes excluded and discriminated against. Without access to the same opportunities as other people, or the services they need, people with a learning disability cannot make real choices about their lives.

Key terms

1. **Learning disability** - a learning disability is a lifelong disability that affects a person's ability to learn.

2. **Down's Syndrome** - a genetic condition that causes learning disabilities. In most cases it is caused by an extra chromosome 21.

3. **Makaton** - Makaton symbols support the written word in the same way

that signs support speech.

4. **Signalong** - Signalong is a sign supporting system based on British Sign Language.

Web Links

Valuing People Support Team - for more information on the Government White Paper and what the Valuing People Support Team do

<http://www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/>

Department of Health - for more information on learning disability and health

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/Home/fs/en>

Disability Rights Commission - for more information on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005

<http://www.drc-gb.org/thelaw/thedda.asp>

Disability Rights Commission - for more information on rights for people with a learning disability

<http://www.drc-gb.org>

Making Decisions Alliance - for more information on capacity

<http://www.makingdecisions.org.uk>

NHS Direct - for more information on health

<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>

Department for Constitutional Affairs - for more information on the Mental Capacity Act 2005

<http://www.dca.gov.uk/menincap/bill-summary.htm>

National Health and Community Care Act 1990 - for the full details of the

<http://www.multikulti.org.uk/en/health/learning-disability/.print.html>

Act

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1990/Ukpga_19900019_en_1.htm

British Institute for Learning Disabilities (BILD) - for more information on learning disabilities

<http://www.bild.org.uk>

Contact a Family (CaF) - for more information on children with a learning disability and specific conditions

<http://www.cafamily.org.uk>

Epilepsy Action - for more information on epilepsy and learning disability

<http://www.epilepsy.org.uk>

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities - for more information on learning disability

<http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk>

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities - for statistics on learning disabilities

<http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/page.cfm?pagecode=ISBISTBI>

Down's Syndrome Association - for more information on Down's Syndrome

<http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk>

Makaton Vocabulary Development Project - for more information on communication and the Makaton project

<http://www.makaton.org>

Signalong - for more information on communication and Signalong

<http://www.multikulti.org.uk/en/health/learning-disability/.print.html>

<http://www.signalong.org.uk>

This document was provided by Mencap, <http://www.mencap.org.uk>

Document Links

www.mencap.org.uk

The Mencap website

<http://www.mencap.org.uk>

www.multikulti.org.uk