

The Learning Disabilities and Homelessness Toolkit

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Outline

What are learning disabilities?

How to recognise and screen

Adjustments to support

Accessing statutory services

The learning disabilities toolkit

What can we do?

Please note, we will talk about modern slavery and violence against people with learning disabilities

What are learning disabilities?

Also known as intellectual disabilities.

To be diagnosed somebody must have:

- ☐ Significantly below average IQ (thinking skills)
- ☐ Significantly below average daily living skills
- ☐ Had these difficulties since childhood

NOT:

'Specific learning disabilities' (like dyslexia); Autism; ADHD etc. but may also have those diagnoses.

What are learning disabilities?

‘A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), which started before adulthood’

[Department of Health and Social Care, 2001](#)

What are learning disabilities?

Categorised as:

'mild'	approximate IQ range	50 – 59
'moderate'		35 – 49
'severe'		20 – 34
'profound'		under 20

People with mild learning disabilities are most likely to be in contact with homelessness services. Even when 'mild', likely to function less well than 98% of peers of the same age.

Learning disabilities are not visible!

If you Google image search 'adults with learning disabilities', almost all the pictures are of adults with Down's Syndrome. You do not get images of:

- The 6'3" man who likes to wear a high vis jacket so people 'respect' him
- The father of three who lives with his family
- The 54-year-old hospital porter who lives with his parents and drives
- The alcohol-dependent man who lives on his own
- The woman who takes pride in her appearance and chats with anybody

We might unconsciously rule out 'learning disabilities' due to assumptions



1,130,000 adults
with a learning
disability in **UK**



951,000 adults
with a learning
disability in
England



54,000 adults
with a learning
disability in **Wales**



31,000 adults with
a learning disability
in **Northern Ireland**



People with a learning disability...

are
disadvantaged
in terms of:



educational
attainment



work
opportunities



reliance on
benefits &
public housing



social status &
community
participation^{10,11}

are more
likely to live:



in poverty¹²



with health
inequalities^{10,11}

and have:



lower life expectancy &
greater risk of dying from
avoidable causes¹²

How to recognise learning disabilities:

Thinking skills

Difficulties related to:

- ☐ Understanding information
- ☐ Reasoning skills
- ☐ Working memory (using a small amount of information long enough to complete a task)
- ☐ Needing more time to process information

How to recognise learning disabilities:

Daily living skills

Difficulties related to:

- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Accessing and using the community
- ☐ Day-to-day math and literacy
- ☐ 'Home' living (in whatever circumstance)
- ☐ Health and safety
- ☐ Leisure
- ☐ Self-care
- ☐ Self-direction
- ☐ Social relationships

How to recognise learning disabilities:

Thinking skills

You might notice they:

- ☐ Take a long time to answer questions, or avoid you asking them (e.g., talk at you a lot).
- ☐ Cannot focus their attention
- ☐ Cannot remember what you have said
- ☐ Do not seem to recognise 'social cues', e.g. hints the conversation is coming to an end.
- ☐ Take longer to learn new information.
- ☐ Get frustrated when given a lot of information.
This frustration might turn into aggression.

How to recognise learning disabilities:

Thinking skills

You might find yourself:

- ☐ Having to explain things again and again, or in different ways because 'they don't get it'.
- ☐ Frustrated they don't seem to 'know' what you have already told them.
- ☐ Noticing they struggle to solve problems logically.
- ☐ Giving more reassurance or support than usual, even for basic tasks.

Social vulnerability: 'Mate crime'

Form of disability hate crime.

Describes befriending for exploitation, including:

- ☐ Being defrauded / made to give money
- ☐ Cuckooing (having your home taken over)
- ☐ Being used to commit crimes for other people
- ☐ Sexual exploitation

Can contribute to homelessness, contact with the criminal justice system, mental and physical health problems.

Learning Disabilities and Modern Slavery

A post-event report summary
of the underexplored correlation between
cognitive impairment and exploitation



Human Trafficking Foundation

[https://www.snowdropproject.co.uk/media/docs/HTF%2BPost%2BEvent%2BSummary%2BReport%2Bv2%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.snowdropproject.co.uk/media/docs/HTF%2BPost%2BEvent%2BSummary%2BReport%2Bv2%20(1).pdf)



University of
Nottingham
Rights Lab

Intersections between exploitation and cognitive impairment:

An exploratory study in Nottingham, UK

A Research Report for the
Global Cities Free of Slavery project

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2022/march/intersections-between-exploitation-and-cognitive-impairment.pdf>

UK family found guilty of enslaving homeless and disabled people

Lincolnshire gang forced at least 18 victims to work for little or no pay and live in squalor for up to 26 years



📷 Convicted gang members (top row, L-R): Bridget Rooney, 55, Gerald Rooney, 46, John Rooney, 53, John Rooney, 31, Lawrence Rooney, 47, Martin Rooney, 35; (bottom row, L-R): Martin Rooney Sr, 57, Martin Rooney, 23, Patrick Rooney, 54, Patrick Rooney, 31, and Peter Doran, 36. Photograph: EPA/Lincolnshire police/Handout

Eleven members of a Lincolnshire family have been convicted of a series of modern slavery offences after forcing at least 18 victims - including homeless people and some with learning disabilities - to work for little or no pay and live in squalid conditions for up to 26 years.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/aug/11/uk-family-found-guilty-of-enslaving-homeless-and-disabled-people>
(2017)

Couple beat slave and forced her to sleep in duck pen

🕒 12 December 2015



| Jepson and Pascoe targeted the victim because of her vulnerability, police said

A couple who enslaved a woman with learning difficulties, beating her and forcing her to sleep in a duck pen, have been jailed.

The 24-year-old was "assaulted daily" by Gavin Pascoe and Vicki Jepson at their home in Aspley, Nottingham, where she was kept for five months.

The city's crown court heard on Friday Jepson also stole the woman's benefits.

Pascoe, 37, was jailed for four years and Jepson, 29, for two-and-a-half years.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-35076392#:~:text=A%20couple%20who%20enslaved%20a,was%20kept%20for%20five%20months.> (2015)

How to screen

You cannot diagnose, but you can screen:

- ☐ Think about whether and how to raise it
- ☐ Who is the best person to have the conversation: trusted, reasonable relationship
- ☐ How will you raise it? e.g., does the person prefer very direct communication? Or might you start with *“I was in some training the other day about learning disabilities and I wondered if anybody had ever talked to you about learning disabilities?”*

How to screen

You cannot diagnose, but you can screen:

- ☐ Does the GP have any record of learning disability?
- ☐ What school did they go to? ('special school'?)
- ☐ Do they have any qualifications?
- ☐ Have they ever worked in 'skilled' / 'unskilled' jobs?
- ☐ Have they ever run their own tenancy?
- ☐ Do they refer to themselves as 'thick' etc.?
- ☐ Do they seem isolated or socially vulnerable?

You might use the Learning Disability Screening Questionnaire:

<https://learningdisabilitymatters.co.uk/adult-learning-disability-form/>

Diagnosis

- ❑ **IQ assessment** (psychologist)
- ❑ **Adaptive functioning** (daily living skills)
(psychologist or occupational therapist)
- ❑ **Early developmental history**
(often difficult for people who are street homeless)

Community Learning Disability Teams (CLDTs) within NHS

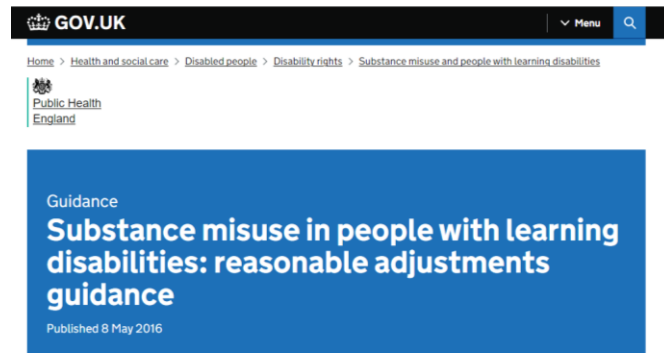
Referrals via GP or sometimes direct – check local services.

CLDTs might not be aware of NICE homelessness guidelines: share them!

Adjustments to support: legal requirements

- Equality Act 2010 and [The public sector Equality Duty](#)
- Reasonable adjustments to the way services operate, so as to remove or minimise disadvantages related to disability.

[Substance misuse in people with learning disabilities: reasonable adjustments guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



Contents
Introduction

The prevalence of substance misuse in people with learning disabilities
Why people with learning disabilities misuse substances
Effects of substance misuse
Services available for substance misuse
Barriers to substance misuse treatment
What do we know about what works
Capacity and consent

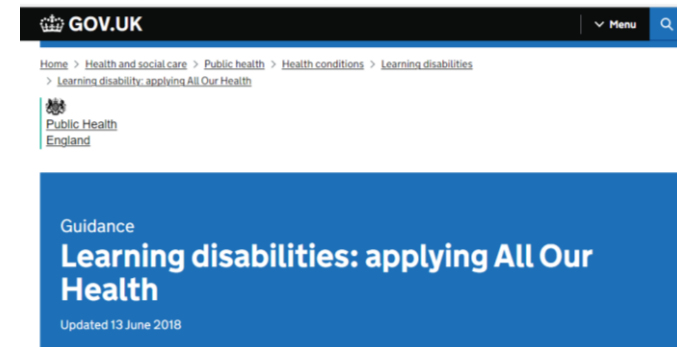
Introduction

This guidance summarises what the research tells us about the particular problems faced by people with learning disabilities who have substance misuse problems. There is information about which approaches work best and resources for those supporting them.

The prevalence of substance misuse in people with learning disabilities

Some people with learning disabilities misuse alcohol or illicit drugs and some misuse prescribed medications. Various studies have looked at the extent of substance misuse

[Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



Contents
Introduction

What is a learning disability?
Prenatal
Perinatal
Postnatal
Facts: health and people with a learning disability
Core principles for health professionals
Interventions
Guidance

Introduction

Individuals regardless of their age, gender or label should receive care that is based on their unique needs, that is appropriate in its design and effective in its delivery.

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability, not to be confused with a learning difficulty such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, is a label given to a group of conditions that are present before the age of 18. This impacts on the way individuals develop in all core areas, and ultimately how they live their lives and access health care.

"A learning disability needs to be viewed as a 'complex way of being'."

Adjustments to support: are you...

- ☐ Using straightforward language, explaining jargon?
- ☐ Using short sentences and giving time to respond?
- ☐ Giving them information in writing too (if safe for them to have it where others might access it)?
- ☐ Adjusting contacts: low stimulus environment; length and frequency of seeing them; breaks?
- ☐ Breaking tasks down into simple steps?
- ☐ Checking their understanding by asking them *“Can you just repeat back what I have said so I can check I’ve been clear?”* (not *“do you understand?”*)

Adjustments to support: has your organisation...

- ☐ implemented the 'Accessible Information Standard?' (2016)
 - <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/accessible-information-standard/>
- ☐ produced 'easy read' information?
- ☐ built questions into assessment paperwork about communication needs?
- ☐ Trained staff in communication awareness? Free courses:
 - <https://communication-access.co.uk/>

Adjustments to support: physical health

- GPs should offer an 'annual health check' to anybody with a learning disability:
 - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities/annual-health-checks/>
- Hospitals often have a 'Learning Disability Liaison Nurse':
 - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities/going-into-hospital/>

Social Care

- *Needs assessments* under The Care Act 2014
- *Housing Act (1996)*: priority need if vulnerable due to learning disability
- *Safeguarding*: duty to those with care and support needs
- *Capacity assessments* relating to specific decisions, where reason to doubt capacity

Police

- Police should only interview someone who has a learning disability when an 'appropriate adult' is present. The appropriate adult should not work for the police and should have experience of people with learning disabilities (unless delay would result in harm to people, property or evidence)



Stephen Downing wrongly served for the murder of Wendy Sewell when he was 17

LEARNING DISABILITIES AND HOMELESSNESS



<https://groundswell.org.uk/wpdm-package/learning-disabilities-and-homelessness/>

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/learning-disabilities-and-homelessness-toolkit/>

Dylan has some suggestions about what he needs workers to do, which are likely to be helpful for other people with a learning disability:

Promoting safety

Dylan often doesn't feel safe. He feels really vulnerable, like people know he's an easy target to exploit for money etc. Workers helping him feel safe and attending to this helps. You can help somebody by looking out for signs that they are vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. Talk to them about your concerns and support them to understand how people should and should not treat them. You might share information on 'mate crime'. Give the person as much choice and control as possible in deciding what action to take to stay as safe as possible.

Showing you really care

Soothing

Help getting involved in activities

People understanding special needs helps

The move to online services is hard

Things to think about when intervening

What is the understanding of other members of the system?

- Do people know what learning disability means?
- Is everybody looking beyond 'personality traits' and understanding there is a (often hidden) disability or neurodevelopmental difference? If not, can you help them?
- Are all professionals adapting approaches in line with guidance?
- Are you all agreed about the 'stance' of treatment, e.g. least restrictive vs. paternalistic, recovery vs. risk focused
- Are care plans integrated / coordinated / aligned?
- Are multidisciplinary reviews taking place?
- Is there an advocate to support the person's involvement?

So what can we all do?

- Read and share the toolkit with relevant services
- Use the resources section to find out more
- Always hold learning disability in mind as a possibility
- Connect with your local learning / intellectual disabilities mental health services and commissioners and promote inclusion of those facing multiple exclusion.
- Inculcate, advocate, escalate...