

Everything you want to know about learning disability (but were too afraid to ask)





Mencap wants a world where people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included.

We want everyone to have the opportunity to achieve the things they want from life.

Stuff to know

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability starting in early childhood that affects a person's capacity to learn new skills, understand new information and carry out everyday activities. For example, shopping, understanding numbers, using public transport, reading, socialising with friends and writing.

Every person can make their own choices about how they want to live - they just need the right support.

What causes a learning disability?

A learning disability occurs before, during or soon after birth, when the brain is still developing. In some cases a learning disability can develop

in early childhood, and in rare cases, up until the age of 18.

For example, things can happen to the brain when in the womb, if a baby does not get enough oxygen during childbirth or early childhood illnesses, accidents or head traumas in early life.

When is a learning disability diagnosed?

A learning disability can be diagnosed at any time. A child may be diagnosed at birth or a parent or professional may notice a difference in a child's early development.

For some people it may be many years before they receive a diagnosis and some people may never receive a diagnosis at all.

Do people with a learning disability need support?

People with a learning disability find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate. They can need support with everyday things - such as shopping and travelling to new places.

People with profound and multiple learning disabilities need full-time help with every part of their lives - including eating, drinking, washing, dressing and toileting.

Are there different types of learning disability?

Some physical and genetic conditions, such as, Autism, Down's syndrome or Asperger's can mean a person will have a learning disability. Every person's experience of a learning disability is unique to them. We work to ensure

everyone gets the right support to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Can you cure a learning disability?

A learning disability is permanent. It starts before adulthood and is life-long, with lasting effects on the person's development.

Can people with a learning disability have other conditions too?

Some people with a learning disability also have other physical and emotional conditions, and may receive more than one diagnosis. This could have an impact on the kind of support they and their families need in their day-to-day life. For example; Autism, Asperger's, Down's syndrome and Fragile X syndrome.

Is a learning disability a mental illness? **No**

Mental illness is not the same as learning disability. Just like everyone else though, someone with a learning disability can have mental health problems.

Is a learning disability contagious? **No**

A learning disability is not a disease, it is a brain condition. It doesn't mean that someone is ill or unhealthy. It is merely a difference in a person's brain and the way they lead their life.

Is dyslexia a learning disability? **No**

Dyslexia makes it harder for people to do things like read and write, but it is not a disability because it does not affect intellect.

Can people with a learning disability lead normal lives? **Yes**

A learning disability does not affect a person's ability to know what they want to do in life and achieve it. It also doesn't stop a person from having strong emotions, instincts and ambitions.

People with a learning disability can go to school, university, play sport, fall in love, get married, buy houses, have children and lead happy, independent family lives. They have a right to be able to go out on dates, meet partners and have relationships just like everyone else.

Everyone wants to be happy and to be loved and people with a learning disability are no different.

Can people with a learning disability play sports? **Yes**

A learning disability does not stop someone from enjoying an active life. Anyone with a learning disability can run a marathon or go swimming, like Olympic medallist Jessica Jane Applegate. They might not support the same team as you, but they are just as vocal with their support.

Can people with a learning disability work? **Yes**

Like you, someone with a learning disability will know their abilities and strengths. Of course, like with all of us, there are some jobs that are unsuitable, but a person can work in a bank, as a gardener, an office worker or even a lecturer. Actors like Sarah Gordy and world renowned novelists like Agatha Christie all have, or had a learning disability and achieved their dream job.

Whats the R word?

The R word is not a new cooking show, it's a disrespectful term that is sometimes used to describe someone with a learning disability. The word is retard. It's derogatory, de-humanising and hurtful to anyone it is aimed at.

Respectful and inclusive language is essential to changing the way people think about people with a learning disability.

Where do I go for support with my learning disability?

Mencap Direct is the easiest way for you to access advice and information about learning disability and find the right support about Mencap services in your area.

Did you know?



8 out of 10 children with a learning disability have been bullied or a victim of hate crime.

About Mencap

Mencap is the voice of learning disability.

Everything we do is about valuing and supporting people with a learning disability, and their families and carers.

Mencap and our local groups work with people with a learning disability across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. All our services support people to live life as they choose. Our work includes:

- providing high-quality, flexible services in areas such as housing, employment, education and day-to-day support that allow people to live as independently as possible in a place they choose
- providing advice through our helplines and website
- campaigning to improve the lives of people with a learning disability and their families.

We work with people with a learning disability of all ages. All our services are tailored to the individual so we can provide support throughout their life, ranging from support for a child at each stage of their development, through adulthood and into old age.



Did you know?

There are **200**

children born with a learning disability each week

We listen to people with a learning disability.

We work hard every single day to give all people with a learning disability the opportunity to achieve the things they want from life.

That's why we put people with a learning disability at the centre of everything we do and listen when they tell us what they want and need. We involve people with a learning disability in all of our work, so we are working with them, not simply for them.

Empowering people with a learning disability to speak for themselves and to challenge wrong ways of thinking about learning disability will transform the lives of so many people – and not just people with a learning disability, but their families and carers too.

Mencap must be brave to make a difference. We're constantly developing new ideas, so if you have a learning disability – or know someone who does – we are the people to turn to for expert advice and support.

We support people with a learning disability in all parts of their lives.

Our **support and advice services** are tailored to each individual, whether they need daily support with things like dressing and cooking or they want help with renting or buying their own home. We also provide short break services for families.

Our **employment services** support people with a learning disability to find a job or some work experience. We also help employers to include people with a learning disability in their workplaces.

Our **education services** give people with a learning disability the chance to develop new skills.

And our **leisure, sport and community services** support people to do the things they enjoy, discover new and exciting activities, and make friends.

We fight for the changes that people with a learning disability, and their families and supporters, want and need.

Everyone deserves the same rights and chances in life. But too often, people with a learning disability are treated as second-class citizens, and many have no say about the way their life is run. That's why we campaign for equal rights for all people with a learning disability, and their families and supporters.

Mencap is a campaigning organisation. We campaign on all issues affecting children and adults with a learning disability, and their families and carers, at **national** and **local** levels. We lobby politicians and government to make changes to laws and the way services are provided.



Did you know?

Fewer than **1 in 5** people with a learning disability work, compared with 1 in 2 disabled people generally.

Every person with a learning disability can make choices about how they want to live. They just need the right support. That's why Mencap is here.

We are the voice of learning disability.

For information and advice

Call 0808 808 1111

Text 07717 989 029

**To find and pay for Mencap services,
call Mencap Direct on 0300 333 1111**

www.mencap.org.uk