

01 Background



Children and young people (hereafter children) with learning disabilities and or autism are amongst the most vulnerable and socially excluded in our society and experience a greater incidence of mental health problems.

Children with special educational needs (SEN) are twice as likely as other children to be bullied regularly. Children with a disability are more likely to live in poverty than those without a disability.

The right support at the right time can make an enormous difference to the lives of children with a learning disability and/or autism.

Why it matters 02



Over one in 3 children (36%) with a learning disability in the UK have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder. Children with Learning disabilities are over six times more likely to have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder than their peers who do not have learning disabilities.

Even though mental illness can be more common for people on the autism spectrum than in the general population, the mental health of children with autism is often overlooked. Anxiety disorders are very common amongst people on the autism spectrum and can sometimes lead to depression.

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Questions

What training gaps are there for our team or service with regard to learning disability and/or autism awareness?

What reasonable adjustments do we need to make within our team or service to ensure that children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autism can have meaningful access and engagement with us?

Within our team do we know where to go to for advice and support in meeting the holistic needs of children with a learning disability and or/autism?

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Information

A learning disability is significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (IQ below 70) with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning) and which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development. (DoH).

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A learning disability will affect how a person learns new skills in not just school but all areas of life, affecting the way a person communicates and how someone understands and processes information. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. Children with autism see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. Autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Mental health problems can affect the way you think, feel and behave. They affect around one in four people in Britain, and range from common mental health problems, such as depression.

Learning Disability/Autistic Spectrum Disorder and mental health concerns

and anxiety, to more rare problems such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. A mental health problem can feel just as bad, or worse, as any other physical illness – only you cannot see it.

What to do

Raise your awareness regarding the barriers that children with learning disabilities and/or autism face in accessing your service (in terms of communication; attitudes and prejudice; inexperienced staff & awareness of services available; diagnostic

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overshadowing; coping with unfamiliar environments/people; limits on appointment times; awareness of their own body, health and emotions; past experiences.)

Try to gain greater insight and understanding of how to communicate with children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autism by accessing awareness training.



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