



FACT SHEET: Parents / Carers with Learning Disabilities

Where a parent has a learning disability it will be important not to generalise or make assumptions about their parenting capacity. Learning disabled parents may need support to develop the understanding, resources, skills and experience to meet the needs of their children. Such support is particularly needed where parents experience additional stressors such as having a disabled child, Domestic Abuse, poor physical and mental ill health, substance misuse, social isolation, poor housing, poverty or a history of growing up in care. It is these stressors when combined with a learning disability that are most likely to lead to concerns about the care a child or children may receive.

The risks to children

- The child might not have their basic needs met unless the parents have significant support services
- The child might be in the position of becoming the 'carer' in the household
- The parent might be vulnerable to being targeted by risky adults, which would place the child at risk
- The parents might be vulnerable to becoming the targets for antisocial behaviour or hate crimes in the local area, which would impact on the child's safety
- The child might not be supported to gain a good outcome from education and might suffer social isolation
- When services respond on a 'one off' basis and no long term consideration is given to the outcomes for the child, the long term impact may be to put the child at risk

National Guidance can be found in 'Parental Learning Disability and Children's Needs: Family Experiences and Effective Practice. DCSF 2007.

The initiative 'Think child, Think parent, Think family' by SCIE can also assist in considering the issues for children where the parents may be receiving adult services.

Action to be taken

Children and young people are children first and foremost and any concerns should be referred in accordance with the main referral process set out in the 'Making a Referral following the identification of Child Safety and Welfare Concerns' procedure in the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Inter Agency Child Protection Procedures.

All professionals in Adult services when dealing with adults, who are also parents must think about the needs of the children and consider the impact of the parent's condition on the child.

Assessments

All assessments must be on a multi agency and collaborative basis and keep the focus on the child's best interests and safeguarding in mind.

Specialist assessments to determine the parent's capacity to care for the child in the short and long term and the impact on the child, as well as the likely outcomes for the child of different services, should be considered, whether the child is judged to be a Child in need or a Child at risk of harm.

For further details see **chapter 3.16** in Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Procedures.