

Supporting Parents with Learning Disabilities -

# Good Practice Guidance

easy read



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# Foreword



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**(National Directors: Learning Disabilities)**



**We are delighted to be writing the foreword to this very important document.**

**People with Learning Disabilities are full and equal citizens.**



**This means that they have the same rights as everyone else. This includes the right to be parents.**



**They also have the same responsibilities as everyone else and sometimes they need extra support to fulfil those responsibilities.**



**Being a parent is a huge responsibility, and this guidance is about supporting people with learning disabilities to care for their children so that they are safe and secure.**



**This guidance has been written to help commissioners and staff in children's and adults' services to support parents with a learning disability. It tells them how they should work together to make this happen.**



**We are hopeful that this document will send out a strong message to the services that support people with learning disabilities. The message is that people with learning disabilities have the right to be parents, just as their children have the right to live in a safe and supportive environment.**

**Rob Greig and Nicola Smith  
(National Directors: Learning  
Disabilities)**

# Part 1

## Supporting Parents with Learning Disabilities





The general aim of good practice is to enable children of parents with a learning disability to:

- Be healthy

- Stay safe

- Enjoy and do well



- Do good things in their community



- Have enough money to live on



By giving families the right support children can do all these things while living with their parents.



The Guidance to all services says that:

- They must make the well being of children the most important thing



- Supporting parents to look after their children is the best way



- **Parents have a right to find out what support they need to do daily tasks and to be good parents. Support should be put in place to help parents keep their children safe and well**



- **Parents with learning disabilities should have equal access to all services**

Services



- Everyone must work together to make sure people with learning disabilities are treated equally



The Guidance says that professionals should look at how to change poor housing and information that is hard to understand, as well as making sure people get the right support.



There are 5 key points of good practice in working with parents with learning disabilities:

**1. Communicating in a way that is easy to understand**



**2. All services working together to make sure parents with learning disabilities get good support**



**3. Good support based on what people can do, and where they need support to do things**



**4. Giving long term support where needed**



**5. Access to independent advocacy for parents with learning disabilities**

# 1. Communicating in a way that is easy to understand



All services should make sure that people with learning disabilities who become parents know how to get support, and know about their responsibilities as parents, that is, the welfare and safety of their children should come first.



All services should make their information accessible by:

- Using easy words and pictures in all leaflets



- Using audio tape, CD or DVD



- **Having accessible websites**



- **Telling people with learning disabilities about services for parents and parents-to-be**



**Parents with learning disabilities need to know that it is not unusual to need support to be a parent.**



**Good communication with schools is very important. Parents need to understand that they have to make sure their children go to school regularly, and that they are expected to be involved in their children's education.**



**Teachers and schools should make their information accessible so that parents with learning disabilities can do these things.**



**Information and communication should also be accessible to children.**



**Adult Learning Disability Services can supply accessible information to be used in GP surgeries and other places for parents and parents-to-be with learning disabilities.**



**Learning Disability Services should give accessible information showing parents they can be assessed to find out what support they need and where they can get it.**



**Parents should be able to get information that is easy to understand about why an assessment is being done. It should tell them how it will be done and what will happen afterwards.**



The information should have no jargon in it and parents should be able to get someone to support them to get ready for the assessment or for a meeting about the assessment.



Parents with learning disabilities told us that social workers who are good at communication:



- Are respectful



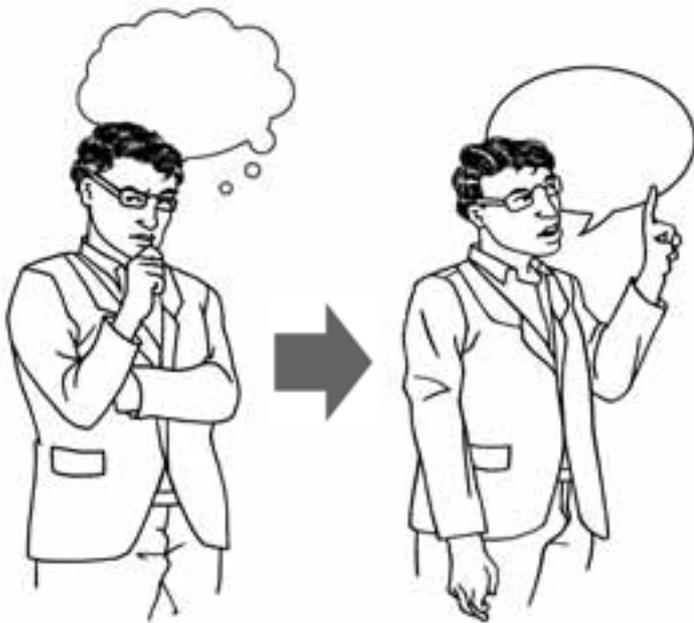
- Turn up on time



- Speak directly to parents with learning disabilities



- Don't use jargon



- **Think before they talk to you**



- **Listen and hear you**



- **Explain what is happening**



- **Do what they say they will do**



- **Be honest if they cannot help you**



- **Are patient**



- **Make enough time to communicate with you**

**(Quotes collected by CHANGE)**

## 2. Care Teams and other Services working together to get good support



**Finding out what support people need at the start of being a parent, and being ready to give support to the family as the children grow up, will help the wellbeing of the children and stop a lot of difficulties for the parents.**



It is important that all services involved with children and parents work together and understand what each other does.



When services are working together it is very important that they understand:



- Young parents and parents-to-be with learning disabilities may be between children's and adults' services



- Parents with learning difficulties may have a lot of needs, including:



- **physical or sensory impairment**



- **a long term health condition**



- **mental health problems**



- substance abuse problems



- Some parents with learning disabilities have a lot of housing problems, including:



- homelessness

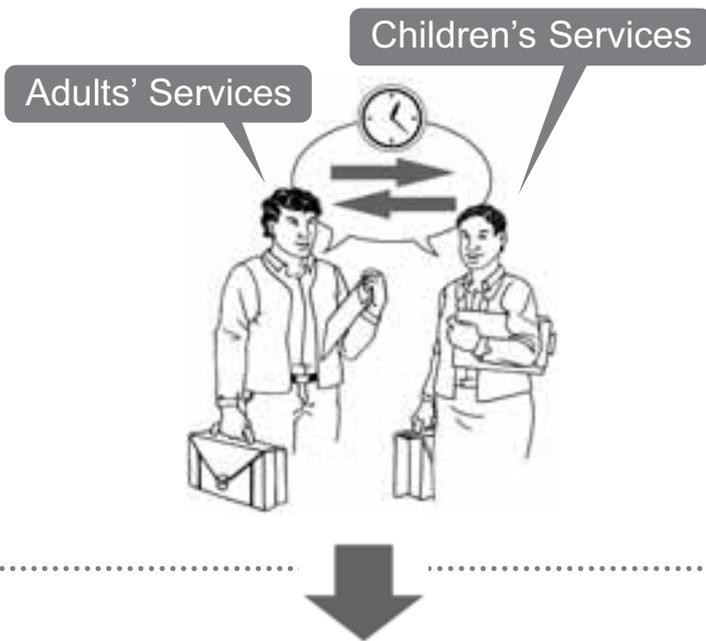


- harassment from neighbours



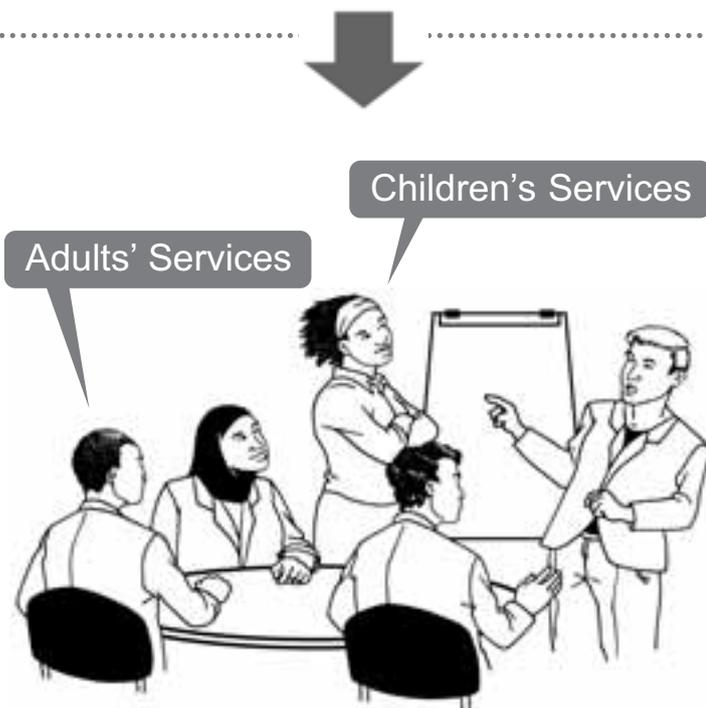
- difficulties in keeping up with paying bills

Services involved in care and support need to help parents with these issues.



All of the services involved with the parents should spend a lot of time making sure there is good communication between them.

This could involve:



- Services doing training together



- **Children's services having a contact person to link with Adults' services**
- **Adults' services having a contact person to link with Children's services**

### 3. Good Support based on what people can do



**Support for parents with learning disabilities must be based on the needs of the parents and the parents' situation, as well as the needs of their children.**



**The main things which help parents with learning disabilities learn parenting skills are:**



- **Good communication, making sure parents understand what they have been told.**



- **Watching and practising doing things with a professional, like sterilising a bottle.**



- **Pictures showing how to do things as a parent like changing a baby's nappy.**



- Finding out about practical tools which can help a parent. An example of a tool is a container which holds the right amount of milk to give a child so that the parent does not have to measure the milk.



- Getting support for all the family, including fathers



Parents who have learning disabilities should be able to get help from the following types of services:





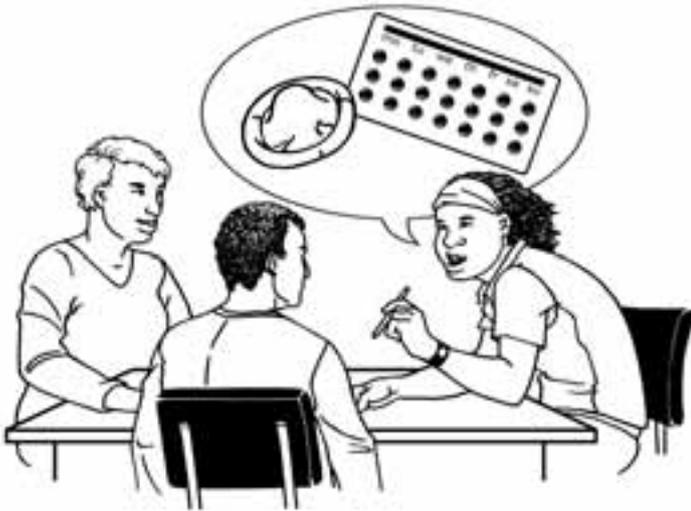
- **Parents' groups**



- **Courses in parenting skills**



- **Practical support in the home**



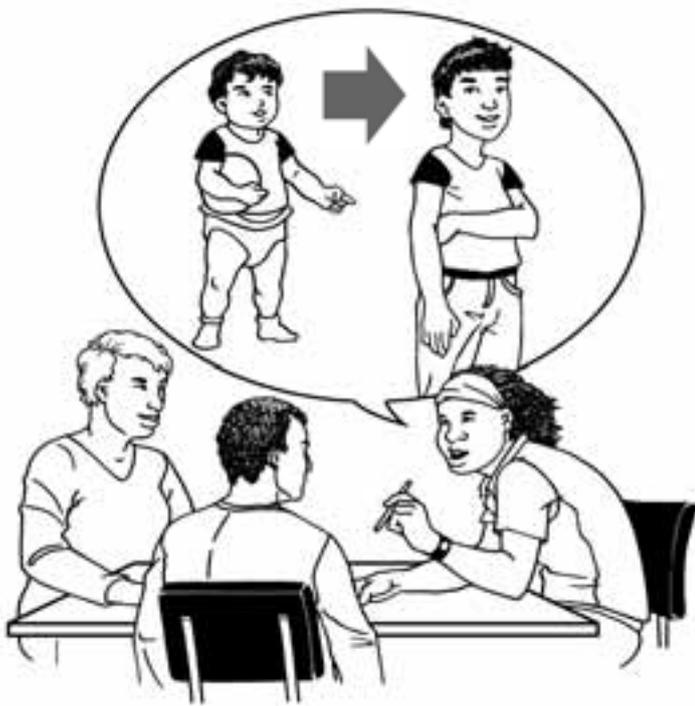
- **Family planning services**



- **Information and advice to children**



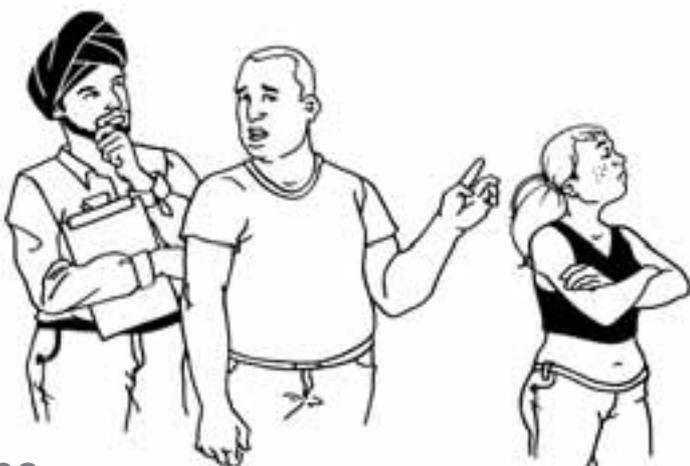
- **Services supporting children to have links to other children and help with their school work**



- **One to one support in finding out what children need as they grow up**



- **Support around foster care and shared care**



- **Behaviour support services**



- **Groups and courses aimed at fathers**



- **Counselling**



- **Advocacy services**



- **Help to get direct payments**



- **Short breaks services**



- **Support to use services available to all families before and after a baby is born.**



- **The support that parents with learning disabilities get must change and develop as a child gets older.**



- **Parents may need help with parenting adolescents. Services must make sure they understand the needs of parents with learning disabilities when their children are teenagers and can offer them support.**



- **Support should be available for parents if their child is experiencing bullying.**



- **Children should be provided with support in their own right, as well as the parents getting support.**



Parents may need emotional support as they might lack confidence because of things that have happened to them before.



They may also be frightened and stressed if children's social care are involved and there are concerns about their children's welfare.

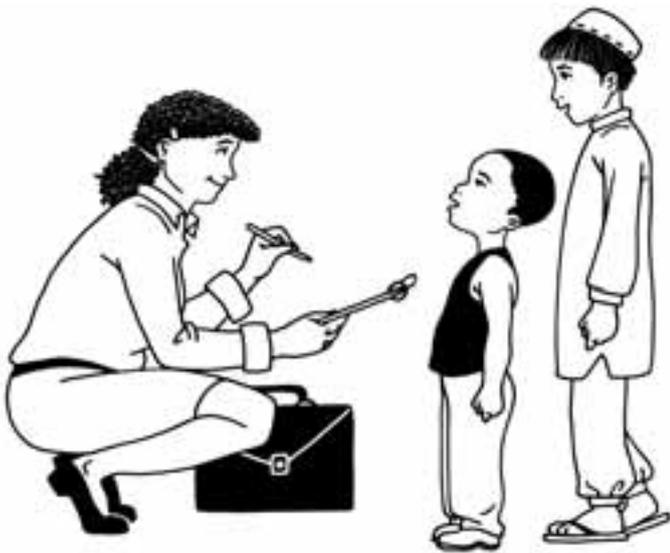
Good support in this situation is often provided by adult learning disability services or by voluntary sector services.

Adult learning disability services



Parents have said these things help:





- Listen to children and help them to say what they want to say



- Don't behave like you are judging us when you're talking to us



- Don't patronise us



- See what we are doing – not just what we are struggling with



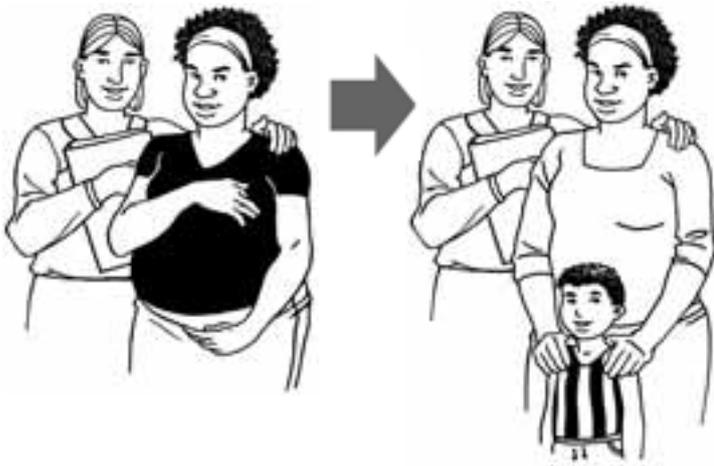
- Believe that we can change



- Build up trust so that we feel okay about letting you into our house and sharing information with you

(From a meeting with parents with learning disabilities in Bristol)

## 4. Giving long term support where needed



**Parents may need long term support to help them meet the changing needs of their child or children.**



**If parents know that services are able to give them long term support, they, their children and the whole family will benefit.**



## 5. Access to independent advocacy for parents with learning disabilities



**Parents with learning disabilities should be able to access advocacy and self advocacy. This can help with self confidence.**



**Parents with learning disabilities should be given information about their rights and responsibilities, especially when there are concerns over a child's welfare.**



**Parents should be given support and information about ways to deal with bullying and harassment.**



**Parents should be able to find out how to get access to services.**

# Part 2

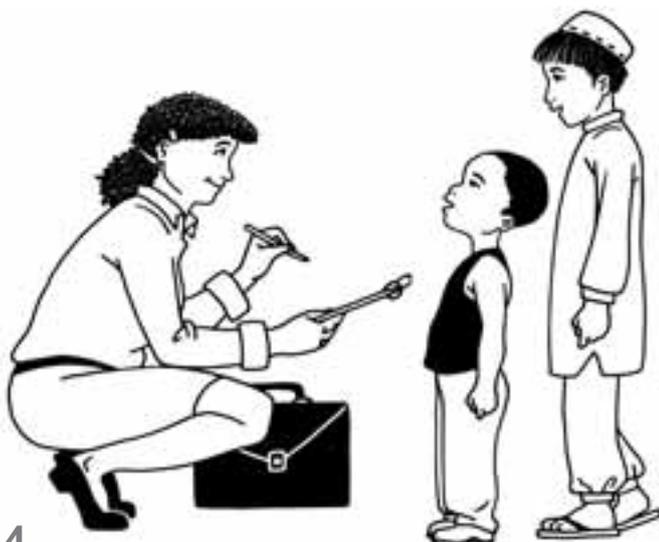
Good practice to keep the children of parents with learning disabilities safe from harm, and to get fair treatment for the parents and the whole family.



## 6. Meeting the needs of the child: Good Practice



**Children should stay living with their parents if possible and get the support to do this.**



**Professionals and services should find out what the children want when they make decisions about their lives.**



**Children have a right to be involved in things that affect them, including meetings. They have a right to get accessible information about what is happening to them.**



**If professionals and services decide that a child is not being harmed, or likely to be harmed, they must make sure that the child will continue to be safe. This means they should support the parents to keep the child safe from harm in the future.**



The law says that when children's social care give children a place to stay away from their parents, they have the right to an independent advocate if they have a complaint to make. The advocate should work for the child.



It is good practice to give the child a key worker who is responsible for the child's welfare. The key worker should know about learning disabilities or be able to get information about what a learning disability is.





**If a child is in care, children's services must help the child to have contact with their family, unless the court says otherwise.**

**It is good for children to have contact with brothers, sisters, grandparents and other members of their family.**



**Services should always think about putting children in the care of family members or friends if this is the best option.**

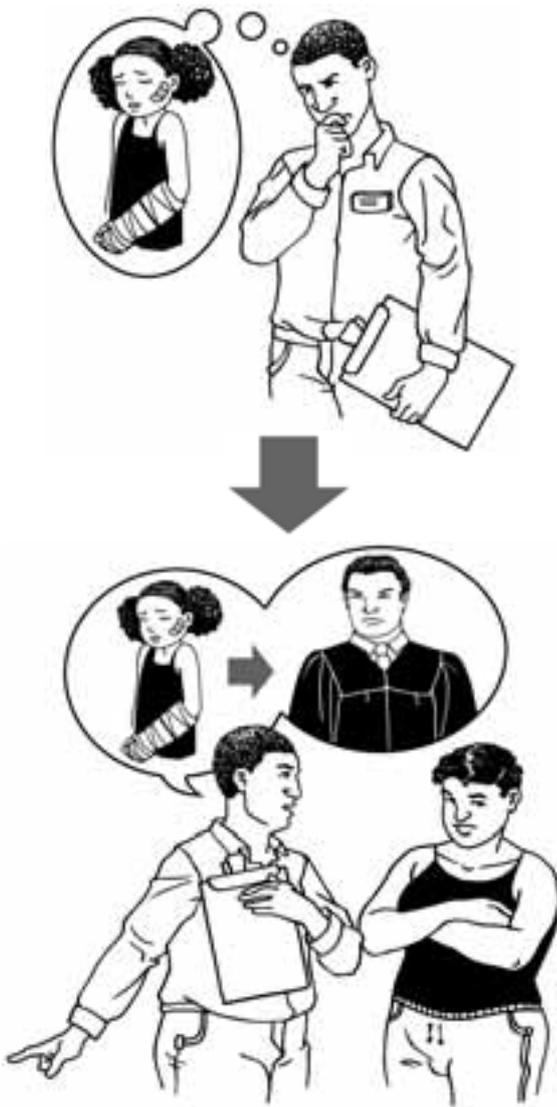


**Services should try to put children with foster parents who know how to work with parents with learning disabilities.**

## 7. The rights of the parent: Good Practice



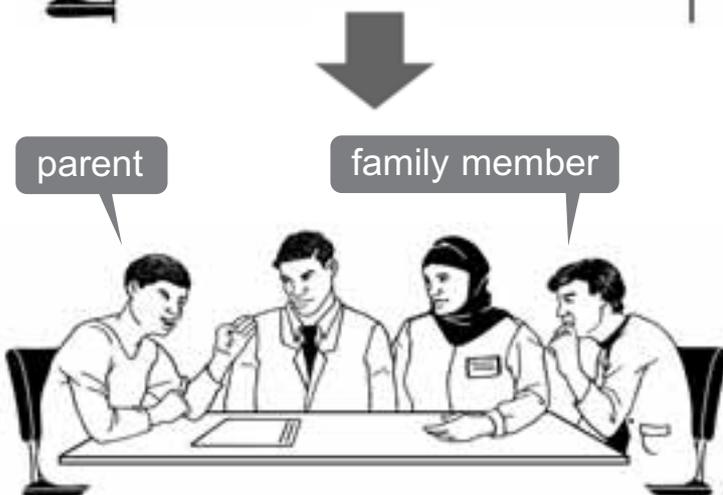
**Parents have the right to a private life and a family life but the welfare of their children comes first.**



If professionals and services decide that a child is being harmed the parents should be informed about everything that is going on, unless this would be dangerous to the child.



Parents should be invited to meetings about their children.



A parent's family can often give good support. If the parent wants it, their family should also be invited to the meeting.

key worker

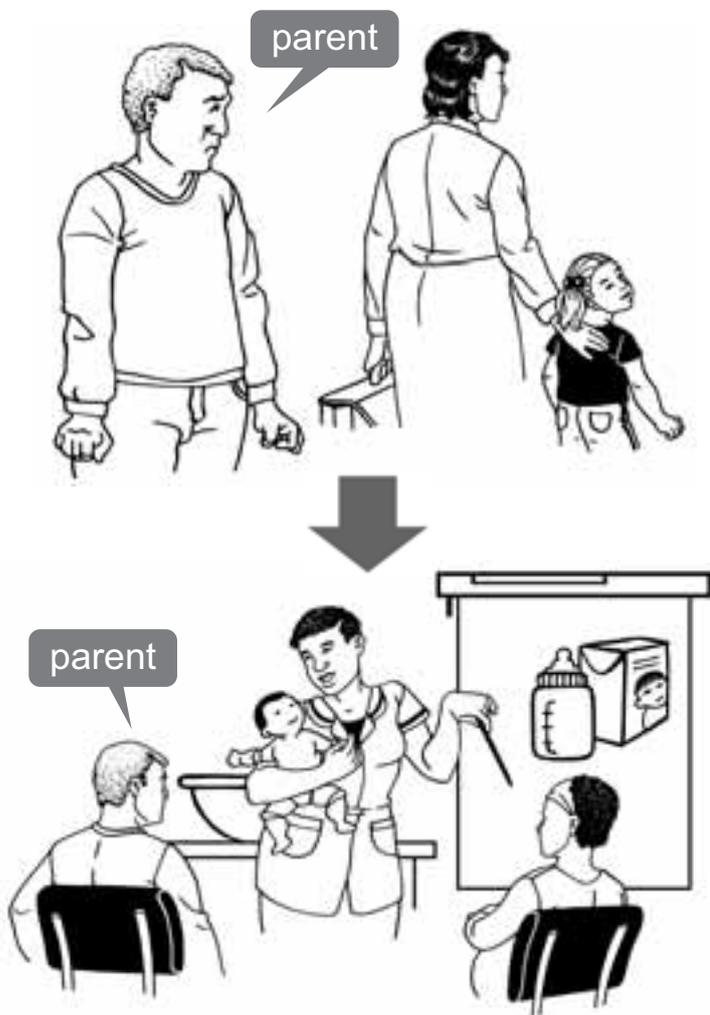


It is good practice to give the parent a key worker. The key worker should know about learning disabilities or be able to get information about what a learning disability is.

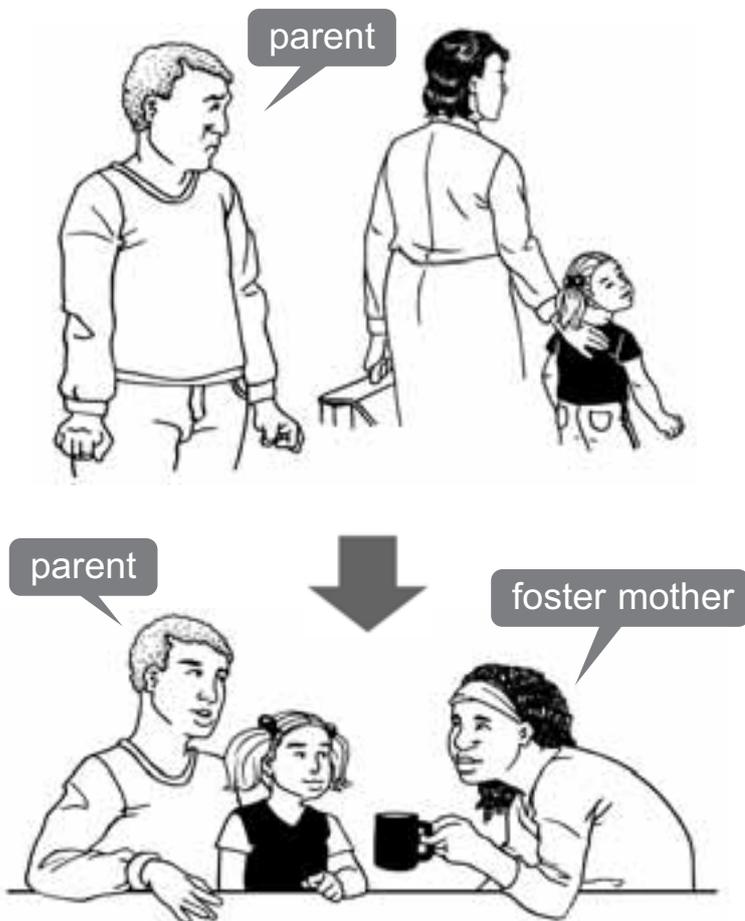


Sometimes a child protection plan is put in place that tells the parents what to do. The parents should only be judged on whether they have done what the plan says, if:

- They were given clear information on what to do
- They were given support to do what the plan says.

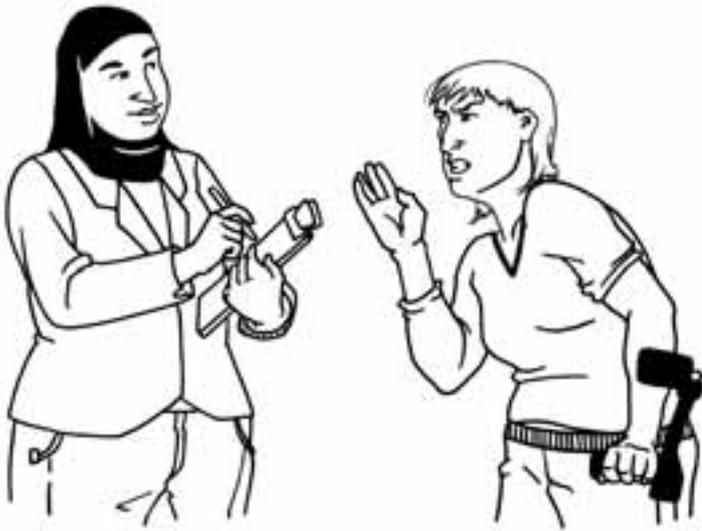


**When children have been placed in foster care, parents should get support to become better parents. Without this support, parents may not be able to learn to care for their children and get them back.**



**As long as it is not harmful to the child, parents should stay in contact with the child even after the child has been placed in foster care.**

**Parents should see their children and take part in making decisions about the child's life.**



**Parents should be told how to make a complaint. The complaints procedure must be accessible to parents with learning disabilities.**

## 8. Assessments: Good Practice



**Assessments should be fully accessible to the parents and the children.**



If a parent with learning disabilities is being assessed there should always be help from a specialist who knows what it means to have a learning disability. If the parent agrees, there could also be help from someone who knows the parent.



Often a parent with learning disabilities whose child is in danger has extra difficulties such as:



- **Mental Health Problems**



- **Drugs or Alcohol**



- **Violence in the home.**



**If an assessment is done there should be help from an expert who knows about these things.**

## 9. Support: Good Practice



**If a parent has a learning disability they are likely to need on-going support.**



**It is good practice for professionals and services to find someone who can support the parent to understand what is happening. This could be an independent advocate.**



If the parents cannot find an advocate they should be supported to contact a friend, family member or someone from the community to help them. The person who supports the parent should be given the right information so they can be a good supporter.



Professionals and services must be aware that parents might also need emotional support. When a child is living with foster parents, parents may be very upset and hurt, especially if difficult or sad things have happened before. In these situations parents can need a lot of support.



Parents should also be supported not to have another baby if they do not want one.



Professionals and services must make sure that:



- Parents can understand the information they are given.



- Parents can say what they think and how they feel.



If no support is given to the parents this could be against their rights and the law.

## 10. Professionals and Services: Good Practice



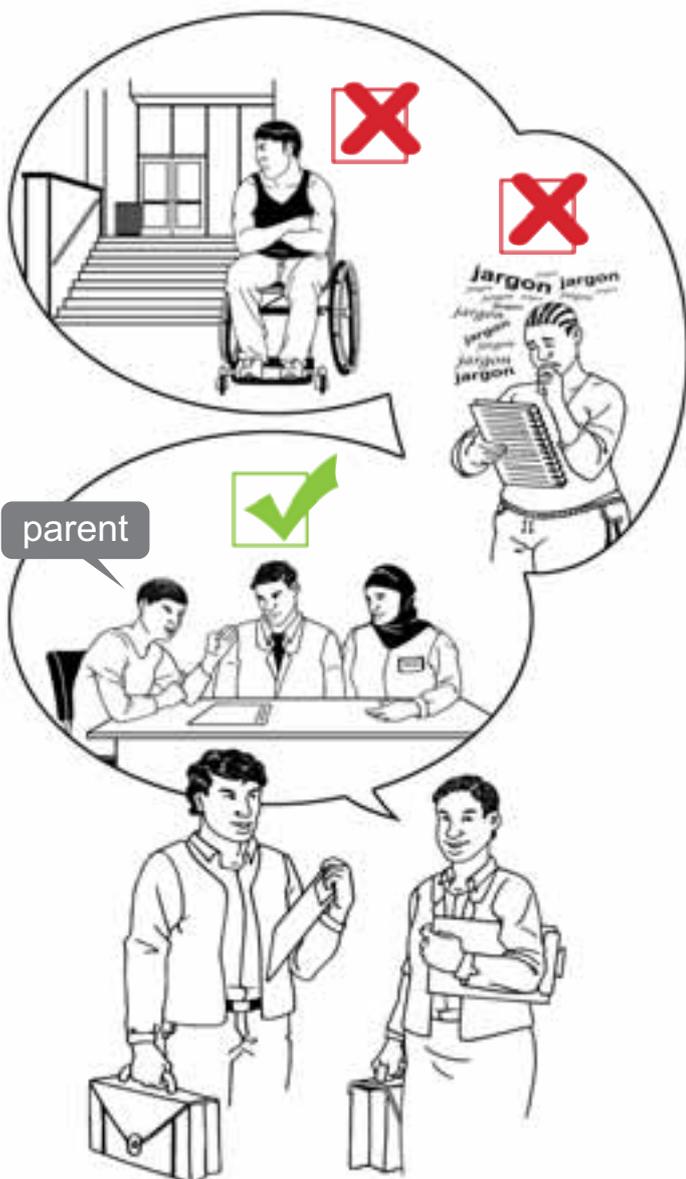
All the professionals and services that work with the parents should share their information with each other.



Everybody should be clear about what job they have to do and how they do it. Everybody should make sure they understand what the law tells them about the rights of parents and their children.



People who work with parents with learning disabilities and their children should understand what a learning disability is. If they do not know what having a learning disability means, they should get help to understand.



Professionals and services should work in a way that is fully accessible to parents with learning disabilities. They should involve parents as much as possible in everything that is going on.



It is important that parents with learning disabilities are given enough time to understand what is going on. They must also be given time to learn how to be better parents.



Children's social care should work in a way that gives parents with learning disabilities the same chance to keep their children as everyone else.



It is important that services and professionals look at the way they work, and change things that could cause problems for parents with learning disabilities. These things should be changed before they become a big problem.

# Part 3

More information:



# 11. Government Guidance to professionals

This chapter should be read in the context of the following guidance:



**“Fair Access to Care Services: Guidance on eligibility criteria for adult social care.”**

**Department of Health, 2002.**

**[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4009653](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4009653)**



**“Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families”.**

**Department of Health and others, 2000.**

**[www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/facn/facn.htm](http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/facn/facn.htm)**



**“Working Together to Safeguard Children”:**

**A guide to inter-agency working to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.**

**<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/workingtogether/>**

## “Protocol on Advice and Advocacy for Parents (Child Protection)”



<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/01/89/00/04018900.pdf>

## National Standards on the Provision of Children’s Advocacy Services.



<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/01/88/93/04018893.pdf>

## 12. Resources



### CHANGE

The Words to Pictures Team: A team of people with learning disabilities who work with an illustrator to produce information in an easy read format. The team also produces CD Rom Picture Banks with custom drawn images for organisation wanting to make their information accessible.



Parents training for Change: Training on how to support parents with learning disabilities.

For more information contact:

**CHANGE**

Units 19/20, Unity Business Centre  
26 Roundhay Road  
Leeds  
LS7 1AB.

Tel: 0113 243 0202

Minicom: 0113 243 2225

Fax: 0113 242 0220.

[info@change-people.co.uk](mailto:info@change-people.co.uk)

[www.changepeople.co.uk](http://www.changepeople.co.uk)



**Valuing People**  
Support Team



## Valuing People

The Valuing People website has a section on parents with learning disabilities and contains a number of resources and useful links:

<http://valuingpeople.gov.uk/dynamic/valuingpeople115.jsp>

Parent Assessment Manual by Sue McGaw, Kerry Keckley, Nicola Connolly and Katherine Ball.



[www.cornwall.nhs.uk/specialparentingservices/patientassessmentmanual.asp](http://www.cornwall.nhs.uk/specialparentingservices/patientassessmentmanual.asp)

## Circles Network

Circles Network also provides a number of resources related to person centred planning:



[http://www.circlesnetwork.org.uk/what\\_is\\_person\\_centred\\_planning.htm](http://www.circlesnetwork.org.uk/what_is_person_centred_planning.htm)

# bild

**BILD** publications:

“I want to be a good parent”

Illustrated cards to help parents carry out a range of essential child care tasks. For use with support from health or child care workers.

“I want to be a good parent“

Five illustrated booklets giving practical advice for parents with learning disabilities.

Both available from:

**BILD Publications**

**BookSource**

**32 Finlas Street**

**Cowlairs Estate**

**Glasgow G22 5DU**





**Tel: 08702 402 182**



**<http://www.bild.org.uk/03books.htm>**

# Notes

Write your notes here:





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[www.changepeople.co.uk](http://www.changepeople.co.uk)

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