

New guidance improves support for parents with learning disabilities

October 6 2016



Credit: University of Bristol

Updated advice on how to work with parents who have learning difficulties has been issued by the Working Together with Parents Network (WPTN), led by the University of Bristol.

Government [guidance](#) on working with [parents](#) with a learning disability had not been updated since its publication in 2007.

Nadine Tilbury, Policy Officer for the WTPN based at the Norah Fry Centre for Disability Studies, said: "There was a clear need for an updated version of the Good Practice Guidance, and to press for compliance with its basic principles, so that the human rights of parents with learning disabilities and those of their children are respected.

"We hope the Department of Health will publish a fuller update in due course, but in the meantime, our interim version will ^{prove} helpful for professionals working in the field, and help to ensure parents with learning difficulties, and their children, can access the correct help and support they are entitled to."

The guidance needed updating for several reasons. Although its essential principles remain as valid today as they were in 2007, over the past few years, the 2007 Guidance appears to have fallen into disuse; professionals working with parents with learning disabilities either have not heard of it, or fail to apply it.

One reason for this may be that some elements are now clearly out of date – for example it refers to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, but not the Equality Act 2010; Working Together to Safeguard Children 2006, but not 2015.

The WTPN team have been running seminars for practitioners on the new guidance, and feedback has been positive. Comments from attendees included:

- "I feel far more equipped to deliver a service to parents." (Family support worker)
- "Gave me food for thought regarding how we may assume and judge parents with LD from the start therefore making me ensure I change my/others' way of thinking." (Adults social worker)

- "I have confidence to be more assertive when funding panels say 'no'." (Social care assessor)
- "I can now pass this guidance on to the social workers and solicitors I work with." (independent advocate for parents with learning disabilities)
- "This will allow me to advocate and explore more with professionals whether we are doing everything possible to reflect parents with learning difficulties accurately. (Child and parent assessment [social worker](#))

The updated guidance can be downloaded from the [WPTN website](#).

The term "learning difficulty/difficulties" is used by the Working Together with Parents Network (WTPN) to include parents with a diagnosed learning disability and those with a milder impairment who struggle with the same issues in everyday life, such as literacy, routine tasks and abstract concepts.

The GPG states: Many people who have the label 'learning disability' have said they prefer to be called 'people with learning difficulties'. One of the objections that people have to the term '[learning disability](#)' is that it can be taken to mean that they are not able to learn. Such an assumption has particular implications for parents who may be facing a situation of having to prove that they can look after their children.

This practice guidance is about helping practitioners to promote good practice in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities in terms of both supporting parents and safeguarding and promoting children's welfare. Therefore it is more appropriate to use the term 'parents with learning disabilities' because this is the term that is used within the legislation and statutory guidance. However, practitioners will want to be sensitive to how people define and describe themselves and to use language that parents are comfortable with in their contact with them.

Provided by University of Bristol

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