



INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY · INCLUDING GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY

# Learning Disability

A learning disability (called intellectual disability internationally) is a reduced ability to learn new skills and understand complex information, alongside difficulty with everyday, independent living. It begins in childhood and is lifelong.

**i** A learning disability is **not** the same as a specific learning difference such as dyslexia, and it ranges from mild to profound. For under-5s, 'global developmental delay' (GDD) is used. Person-first language ('a person with a learning disability') is the UK norm.

## **👁️** How it can present

- Taking longer to learn and master new skills
- Understanding complex, new or abstract information
- Everyday tasks, self-care and independent living
- Communication – understanding and being understood
- Memory and processing information
- Needing differing levels of support, from a little to full-time

## **✅** What helps – supportive approaches

- ✓ Accessible, easy-read information and communication support
- ✓ Extra time and breaking tasks into small, manageable steps
- ✓ Clear, consistent routines and predictability
- ✓ Person-centred, strengths-based support
- ✓ Reasonable adjustments – a legal right under the Equality Act
- ✓ Health support – annual GP health checks (from 14) and a hospital passport

## **📍** UK CONTEXT

~1.5m

About 1.5 million people in the UK have a learning disability, including around 351,000 children (roughly 2–2.5% of people).

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## **✦** Strengths often seen

- ✦ Every person has their own strengths, interests and personality
- ✦ With the right support, many people work, study and form relationships
- ✦ Strengths often shine in practical, hands-on activities
- ✦ Determination and resilience in learning over time
- ✦ Warmth, genuine relationships and a valued place in community

## **🕒** Finding assessment & support in the UK

- 1 GP and health visitor – first point of contact and referral
- 2 NHS community paediatrics / child development team for assessment
- 3 School SENCo / SEN Support; EHC needs assessment / EHCP where needed
- 4 NHS community learning disability team; annual GP health check (14+)
- 5 Local authority social care; the Mencap helpline for advice

**Please note** – this sheet provides general information only. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for individual assessment or professional advice. Every person is unique; if you have concerns about yourself or a child, please speak with a suitably qualified professional.

**Sources & further information:** Mencap · NHS · NICE · Royal College of Psychiatrists · BILD