

Understanding and supporting employees with learning disabilities

Facts about learning disability

- There are 1.4million people with learning disabilities in the UK
- A learning disability is different from things like Dyslexia and Dyspraxia because it affects intellect whereas these conditions do not
- 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work
- People with learning disabilities have an increased likelihood of developing mental health conditions
- There are a variety of conditions which can cause a person to have a learning disability such as Down's Syndrome, William's Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, and Global Development Delay as well as other disabilities which may, or may not, cause a learning disability such as Cerebral Palsy, and autism
- Learning disability is measured as mild, moderate or severe

How do learning disabilities affect people?

“A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money – which affects someone for their whole life”, Mencap. Each person's learning disability will affect them differently but here are some commons symptoms:

- They will take longer to learn new things and may require support
- They may require support in some areas of their lives but not others, such as: managing money, organisation or building relationships
- They may lack confidence in themselves or working independently but this will get better over time
- Depending on their particular learning disability they may be overly friendly such as those with Williams's Syndrome
- They may struggle with understanding other people's emotions, facial expressions or tone of voice

How to support colleagues with learning disabilities

- Speak clearly and give people time to understand what you have said
- If there will be change to their role or the wider organisation give them time ahead of this change to process the information and support them through the change
- Audit your recruitment process to reduce barriers and have some flexibility in how to get the best out of different candidates
- Carve out job roles which are suitable for people with learning disabilities
- Improve understanding through awareness training
- Provide work experience or job trials as many people with learning disabilities haven't been given the opportunity to get any experience on their CV
- Consider what your performance management system measures to make sure it isn't negatively affecting people with learning disabilities
- Actively promote needs assessments & workplace adjustments
- Make sure the application process is clear and nothing is assumed. You could provide a accompanying guide on 'how to complete an application' with your adverts, this will help people with learning disabilities but also other diverse groups
- Talk to your colleague about how their disability effects them and don't assume anything
- Allow the colleague to have a carer or advocate accompany them to important meetings such a interviews, one to ones and appraisals to make sure they understand what they are being asked
- Consider carefully how you communicate i.e. in a quiet space, ask questions to check understanding, try drawing instructions as well as explaining verbally