



**Working Together  
With Parents Network**  
Supporting professionals working with  
parents with learning difficulties

# Top tips - If you think a parent has a learning difficulty or learning disability.....

## Before you start, remember...

- Having a learning difficulty/disability doesn't make someone a bad parent.
- You will need time - learning disability doesn't mean someone can't understand or learn ... but explanation may be harder and learning will take longer.
- Learning difficulties/disability may not be the key factor in assessment of parenting ability – other factors may be much more significant such as social isolation, stress or poverty.
- Early intervention improves outcomes.
- Do as you would for any family; focus on the key things that really matter for the child.
- Ask yourself – what's life like for this family?

## When working with a parent...

- Clear Communication is key:
  - Listen– to the parent and take time to understand how they communicate
  - Use easy , ordinary words and avoid ambiguity and jargon
  - Write – a note of any advice or next meeting (even when the person can't read they will most likely ask someone they trust to read it for them)
  - Big – write everything in at least pt 14 type.
- Take time to build trust – remember the parent may have had bad experiences before and may be reluctant to tell of problems because s/he doesn't want to be judged and is afraid of having their children removed.
- Give information in small amounts.
- Break down complex tasks or information into simpler parts.
- Prepare them as much as possible for important meetings - case conferences, reviews or court hearings. Try to ensure they have someone of their choice to accompany and support them, preferably an independent advocate.
- Parents should be taught skills in their own home where possible. If learning has to take place away from home, it should be related specifically to their own experience, and reinforced at their home if possible. Regular reinforcement is important.

## Working with others....

- Make sure you know about local services which can help you and the parent.
- Liaise with any other professionals involved in the family's life. Families can have many professionals involved with them. Share information with colleagues who may have a different perspective or other skills. Work together so that the parent receives consistent messages.
- Suggest advocacy ... independent is usually best. This will be a help to you as well as the parent since you will be able to communicate more effectively and will get a better understanding of the person's view.

The Good Practice Guidance on Working with Parents with a Learning Disability (DoH and DOE 2007) can be found at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/wtpn/policyessentials/>. Parents with learning difficulties often struggle with similar issue to parents with a diagnosed learning disability.

Find out more at the Working Together with Parents Network website [www.wtpn.co.uk](http://www.wtpn.co.uk).

