



Mental health and learning disability

Around
1.2m
people

in England have a
learning disability.

What does mental health have to do with learning disability?

A learning disability is **not** a mental health problem.

A learning disability (sometimes known as intellectual disability) usually develops in the womb, or at birth, or soon after. It results in impaired intellectual functioning, as well as difficulties in learning new skills and coping with everyday activities.

However, for years there has been persistent confusion about what it is, and many have believed learning disability to be a mental health problem.

This confusion was compounded in the past by people with learning disabilities being held in long-stay hospitals or asylums in the same way that mental health patients were detained. With care in the community and the closure of these hospitals, some of this confusion has been reduced, although it persists through lack of understanding or information.

There are two situations where a connection is found between mental health and learning disability:

1. People with learning disabilities can also have mental health issues, in the same way that anyone else can have problems with their mental health. In this circumstance they will have two distinct diagnoses, and require support for their learning disability and treatment for their mental health problem.

2. A person with a learning disability can be held against their will under the Mental Health Act 2007 without a mental health problem. This is a continuation of the historical provision for detention in hospital. The current legal definition of mental disorder is 'any disorder or disability of the mind' and is purposely wide enough to include the continuing inclusion of learning disability. However, there are strict limits to the use of the Mental Health Act in this area. A person with a learning disability can be sectioned without having a mental health problem if it is deemed they behave 'abnormally aggressively or seriously irresponsibly'.

It is important not to confuse the two conditions of mental health and learning disability: the causes, needs, services and support are very different.



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⇒ Helpful links:

To find out more about learning disability:

⇒ www.mentalhealthaccesspack.org/ld-services

A book all about making church friendly for people with disabilities:

⇒ <https://tinyurl.com/making-church-accessible>

Information and advice from the NHS:

⇒ www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities

The leading Christian organisation for people with learning disabilities and their families:

⇒ www.livability.org.uk/join-in/prospects-groups

Information and support through Mencap:

⇒ www.mencap.org.uk