



One minute guide



Working with parents who have learning disabilities

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Key points:

Talk with parents about what would be helpful for them. Follow their lead: what has worked for them before? Use the same approaches again.

Involve others: where it is appropriate and you have parents' consent, or a legal cause to do so, involve others in discussions and follow their advice too. This could be an advocate, family member or other person in the family's support network.

The 6 Ts Practice Framework:

The 6 Ts were set out in a Research in Practice briefing (2018) and show in a simple format what staff should aim to do in order to work well with parents with learning disabilities:

- **Time** – this could be as simple as taking extra time to explain things or offering to explain things in different ways, for example talking, sending a text, confirming with a letter.
- **Trust** – Take time to build a relationship, be honest and kind. Also build relationships with the person's support network, advocate, or carers.
- **Tenacity** – Repeat information if needed. Try using different approaches if you feel that someone does not understand. Don't be afraid to go back over earlier advice or guidance to check for understanding and share the information again if not.
- **Truthfulness** – Say what you mean and do what you say you will do.
- **Transparency** – Be honest about why you are asking questions, what is being assessed and why, and what the possible outcomes could be. Make sure you do this at the earliest opportunity.
- **Tailored Response** - Ask the parent how they prefer to learn: use tools, puzzles, videos or photos. Remember, people with learning disabilities can become skilled in masking so check they have understood and change your approach if what you are doing isn't working. Consider whether you need a cognitive assessment to gain further insight.

(Tarleton et al., 2018)

[Further information can be found on the Research in Practice website.](#)

Top tips for accessible conversations:

- Take more time to explain things.
- Be concrete and direct. For example, use the same words repeatedly rather than using different words that mean the same thing.
- Tell parents things more than once if needed, and check their understanding of what has been said.
- Use a strengths-based approach to language: use clear and simple words, no jargon and reduced complexity.
- Break things down: ask one question at a time. Give single instructions and ensure understanding before moving on.

Top tips for meetings and sessions:

- Consider how the parents need to be prepared for meetings and help them get ready. Ask parents what would be helpful for them and involve their advocate in these discussions in advance, giving them chance to have a discussion with their advocate or trusted person before the meeting.
- Offer reminders in their preferred way, for example sending a text message or by a phone call.
- Provide the meeting paperwork in an accessible format by making sure fonts, text sizes and paper colours are suitable.
- Keep meetings short and plan in breaks as needed. Consider whether a long meeting covering multiple issues should be broken down into shorter meetings that cover single issues.
- Check the parents are understanding what is being said. For example, ask parents to summarise what has been said (and check that this is accurate) before moving on.
- Send meeting notes in the way parents prefer, perhaps as a voice note on their phone.

Top tips for written communications:

- Sentences should be short – no more than 15 words. Use clear and everyday language and no jargon. Explain any difficult words.
- Add pictures to explain the text where possible - a photo, icon or illustration.
- Consider creating “easyread” versions of key documents.
If possible, use real photos of the actual workers, places, and tasks being discussed.
- Use consistent formatting: use bullet points, bold headings, and clear spacing.
- Co-Pilot can help with this; it will assess a document’s readability and clarity, then suggest simplified wording or structure. Copilot can be tasked to use inclusive and accessible language.
- The information should always be checked with the parents to ensure they understand it.

Other useful resources

The [Family Rights Group](#) have created a [new film](#) *with and for* parents with learning difficulties and disabilities, on working with child and family social workers. This was made in partnership with advocacy organisation [Speakup Rotherham](#) and explains clearly the role of a child and family social worker.