An introduction to Mencap and learning disability
Mencap wants a world where people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included. We want everyone to have the opportunity to achieve the things they want out of life.
Mencap and learning disability
Most people do not understand what a learning disability is or what it is caused by. Therefore, people with a learning disability – including people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) – are among the most excluded and disadvantaged people in today’s society.

All people with a learning disability are individuals with their own personalities, likes and dislikes, goals and ambitions. It just isn’t possible to say that all people with a learning disability will develop, act or learn in the same way.

Unfortunately, many people with a learning disability don’t get the chance to have their choices fulfilled because they don’t always get the support they need from government and because other people and institutions don’t try to understand their wants, their needs or their abilities.

Too often, people with a learning disability are ignored.

That’s why Mencap is here.
Did you know? Over 6 in 10 people with a learning disability in residential care or supported living have no choice about where they live and with whom.
About learning disability

A learning disability is caused by the way the brain develops. There are many different types and most develop before a baby is born, during birth or because of a serious illness in early childhood. A learning disability is lifelong and usually has a significant impact on a person’s life.

Learning disability is not mental illness or dyslexia.

People with a learning disability find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate. People with profound and multiple learning disabilities need full-time help with every aspect of their lives – including eating, drinking, washing, dressing and toileting.

There are 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK. Like all of us, they are individuals who want different things in life and need different levels of support.
Many things can cause a learning disability

Often it is not possible to say exactly why someone has a learning disability. We do know, however, that all learning disabilities are caused by the way the brain develops – before, during or after birth.

Before birth, a learning disability can be caused when:
•  things happen to the central nervous system (the brain and the spinal cord)
•  the pregnant mother has an accident or illness
•  a parent passes on certain genes (chemicals in our bodies that contain information about us – like how we look). The most common examples of this type of cause are Down’s syndrome and Fragile X syndrome. These are not learning disabilities themselves – but someone with one of these conditions will always have some level of learning disability.

During birth, a learning disability can be caused when a baby does not get enough oxygen or is born too early.

After birth, a learning disability can be caused when someone gets a serious illness during early childhood.
There are many types of learning disability

Learning disabilities can be mild, moderate or severe. Some people with a mild disability may only need a bit of support in their lives. Others may need more support with everyday things like getting dressed or cooking, or with social skills like holding a conversation. People with a more severe learning disability may need extensive support – even 24-hour care – particularly if they have other physical disabilities or sensory disabilities (like being blind or deaf).

It can be hard to tell if someone has a learning disability

Some people have physical characteristics that make it clear they have a learning disability, like people with Down’s syndrome for example. Others do not have any physical characteristics, but the way they speak might give you a clue – for example, their speech might be slower. Some people with a learning disability may not have any verbal communication so they might use special signing systems or symbols to communicate.
Did you know?
8 out of 10 children with a learning disability are bullied.
About Mencap
Mencap is the leading voice of learning disability. Everything we do is about valuing and supporting people with a learning disability, and their families and carers.

Mencap and our local groups work with people with a learning disability across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. All our services support people to live life as they choose. Our work includes:

• providing high-quality, flexible services in things like housing, employment, education and personal support that allow people to live as independently as possible in a place they choose

• providing advice through our helplines and website

• campaigning for the changes that people with a learning disability want and need.

We work with people with a learning disability of all ages. All our services are tailored to the individual so we can provide support throughout their life, ranging from support for a child at each stage of their development as they grow up, through adulthood and into old age.

To promote a world where people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included, there are many things Mencap will do...
We work hard every single day to give all people with a learning disability the opportunity to achieve the things they want out of life.

That’s why we put people with a learning disability at the centre of everything we do and listen when they tell us what their wants and needs are – we involve people with a learning disability in all of our work so we are working with them, not simply for them.

Empowering people with a learning disability to speak for themselves and to challenge wrong ways of thinking about learning disability will transform the lives of so many people – and not just people with a learning disability, but their families and carers too.

Mencap must be brave to make a difference. We’re constantly developing new ideas, so if you have a learning disability – or know someone who does – we are the people to turn to for expert advice and support.
We will support all people living with a learning disability in all parts of their lives

All people with a learning disability deserve the opportunity to have a decent place to live, an enjoyable job and the chance to learn and develop, just like every other member of our society.

Our **personal support and housing services** support people with a learning disability wherever they live. We can also help them rent or buy their own home and provide short break services for their families.

[Mencap’s employment services](#) support people with a learning disability to find a job or some work experience. We also help employers to include people with a learning disability in their workplaces.

Our **education services** give people with a learning disability the chance to develop new skills – during daytime activities or at our Mencap National College.

And the **leisure, sport and community services** we provide support people with a learning disability to do the things they enjoy, discover new and exciting activities and make friends.
We will give excellent information and advice

Up-to-date, accurate and reliable information and advice can make a massive difference to the daily lives of people with a learning disability, and their families and supporters. People need to know about things like what their rights are, what benefits they can claim or what services there are in their local areas.

**Our website** – www.mencap.org.uk – is one of the easiest ways to get loads of information about anything to do with learning disability and Mencap.

**Mencap’s helplines** are free, confidential services. They are for anyone who wants information or advice on anything to do with learning disability.

In **England**, call the Learning Disability Helpline for free on 0808 808 1111 or email help@mencap.org.uk

In **Northern Ireland**, call Mencap’s Information Service on 0845 7636 227 or email mencapni@mencap.org.uk

In **Wales**, call the Wales Learning Disability Helpline for free on 0808 8000 300 or email helpline.wales@mencap.org.uk
We will fight for the changes that people with a learning disability, and their families and supporters, want and need.

Did you know?
Only 1 in 3 people with a learning disability work, compared with 1 in 2 disabled people generally.
Every person with a learning disability deserves the same rights as everyone else. But too often, they are treated as second class citizens and many have no say about the way their life is run. That’s why we campaign hard for equal rights for all people with a learning disability, and their families and supporters.

Mencap is a campaigning organisation. We campaign on all issues affecting children and adults with a learning disability and their families and carers at a national level and a local level. We lobby MPs and government to make changes to laws and to the way services are provided.

We have written a manifesto to make rights a reality for all people with a learning disability. It sets out our demands for the future and what we will campaign for. You can read our manifesto at www.mencap.org.uk/manifesto

If you’d like to campaign for Mencap or find out more:
• call 020 7696 6952
• email campaigns@mencap.org.uk
• or go to  www.mencap.org.uk/campaigns
We will work with people and groups that want the same things we do

There are so many different ways you can get involved with Mencap, whether it’s simply offering your support, your time or your money to help us raise vital funds.

You can sign up to Be Mencap and receive our monthly enewsletter about Mencap and the learning disability community. To join go to www.mencap.org.uk/be

You can volunteer for us across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. To find out more call 0845 123 3000 or got to www.mencap.org.uk/volunteer

You can join Mencap’s membership scheme. Just email membership@mencap.org.uk call 01923 776 700 or go to www.mencap.org.uk/membership

You can give some money, either as a one-off donation, every month, or even in your will. To find out more call 020 7696 5549 or go to www.mencap.org.uk/donate

You can also:
• take part in one of our exciting events
• buy gifts from our online shop
• or get a Mencap MBNA Visa credit card

To find out more visit www.mencap.org.uk/fundraising
Want to find out more? Visit our website at www.mencap.org.uk

If you want to find out more about anything you have read in this booklet, just go to our website.

We couldn’t fit everything about learning disability and the work we do on these pages, but www.mencap.org.uk has much more detailed information about anything to do with learning disability and Mencap. It also includes links to other websites and organisations that can help you too.

Log on to www.mencap.org.uk to see and hear the stories of many people with a learning disability and their families. You will find loads of other useful information too, whoever you are.

It doesn’t matter whether you’re someone with a learning disability, a family member, a carer, a professional or simply someone who wants to support us and our work.

www.mencap.org.uk has something for everyone.
Every person with a learning disability – no matter how severe their disability – can make choices about how they want to live. They just need the right support. That’s why Mencap is here.

We are the voice of learning disability.
Learning Disability Helpline

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