

Recommendations

Prevalance

1. There is a need to establish more accurate prevalence rates of parents with learning disability currently living in Scotland to allow for more effective service planning and delivery. This process may include consideration of standardised coding and reporting across the key stakeholders.
2. A better understanding of the different definitions of learning disability in use is needed in order to gain a clearer sense of the population in question. Targeting identification of those individuals most at risk of receiving little or inadequate support (likely to have an IQ of just above 70) is required. This would help to ensure that a model of crisis intervention is avoided, allowing for intervention at an earlier stage.

Support Provision

3. A clear, evidence-based pre and post-natal care pathway, which can measure impact and improvement and has been tested by parents should be established. This will minimise the current complex, geographically variable and ad hoc provision that is available.
4. Longer-term, parent centred support that is reflective of individual child development milestones should be developed. This support is likely to be intensive at times, particularly at points of transition, for example during the transition from baby to toddler when a range of new parenting skills and support requirements will be necessary. The current lack of effective long term postnatal support has the potential to undermine the good practice that has been established prenatally and in the early days following the birth of the child.
5. This support should take a whole family approach that focuses on the needs of both the parent and the child. This support must take account of the broader structural and social factors that impact on a person's ability to parent effectively.
6. The best way to structure and organise whole family support is via the creation of jointly funded multi-disciplinary teams involving social workers, community learning disability nurses, nursery nurses, health visitors, midwives, psychologists and occupational therapists. The teams should work in partnership with experienced third sector providers. Such an approach would help to prevent families affected by parental learning disability from falling between the gaps in service provision and should promote better use of early intervention strategies. Existing models of jointly funded support for families should be explored and lessons for good practice identified and disseminated.
7. It is essential to build on the knowledge and expertise that has been established in this area, particularly by third sector organisations. While it is recognised that parents with learning disabilities should be supported to access mainstream services where appropriate, their very specific support needs as well as the value of working together with parents who are experiencing similar issues must be acknowledged and specific targeted interventions developed.

8. A clear, adequately funded accessible information strategy should be put in place to help better meet the information needs of parents with learning disabilities. This strategy should acknowledge the excellent work that has been carried out by individual practitioners and organisations to translate information but should also recognise the piecemeal way in which this work has developed. The strategy should have a governance framework and utilise evidence based materials, where available.

Awareness raising

9. Greater awareness of the very specific support needs that parents with learning disabilities have is required. This includes the need for specialist tools to assess parenting capacity, accessible information, flexibility, repetition and the modelling of good practice. The good practice identified in this report should be disseminated widely.
10. Specialist training on the needs of parents with learning disabilities and their families should be provided to frontline practitioners, many of whom have limited experience of working with this group. This training should be offered as part of qualifying programmes for social workers, midwives and health visitors but should also be offered as CPD for those professionals wishing to develop additional specialist knowledge.

Further research

11. Further research is required to establish long term outcomes for families affected by parental learning disability. However careful consideration and discussion of the outcomes to be measured will be required beforehand to ensure that indicators of successful are reasonable and realistic.
12. Additional research is required to illicit the views of parents with learning disabilities about the factors that promote or hinder their ability to parent at a national level.