



What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money – which affects someone for their whole life.

People with a learning disability tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complex information and interact with other people. The level of support someone needs depends on individual factors, including the severity of their learning disability. For example, someone with a mild learning disability may only need support with things like getting a job. However, someone with a severe or profound learning disability may need full-time care and support with every aspect of their life – they may also have physical disabilities.

People with certain specific conditions can have a learning disability too. For example, people with Down's syndrome and some people with autism have a learning disability.

Learning disability is often confused with dyslexia and mental health problems. Mencap describes dyslexia as a “learning difficulty” because, unlike learning disability, it does not affect intellect. Mental health problems can affect anyone at any time and may be overcome with treatment, which is not true of learning disability. It's important to remember that with the right support, most people with a learning disability in the UK can lead independent lives.