

# What causes a learning disability?

**A learning disability is caused by the way the brain develops - before, during or soon after birth.**

- **Before birth**, things can happen to the central nervous system (the brain and the spinal cord) that can cause a learning disability. A child can be born with a learning disability if the mother has an accident or illness while she is pregnant, or if the unborn baby develops certain genes. Genes are chemicals in our bodies that contain information about us - like how we look.
- A person can be born with a learning disability if he or she does not get enough oxygen **during childbirth** or is born too early.
- **After birth**, a learning disability can be caused by early childhood illnesses or physical accidents
- A child can also be born with a learning disability if certain genes are passed on by a parent. This is called inherited learning disability. The two most common causes of inherited learning disability are **Fragile X syndrome** and **Down's syndrome**. Fragile X syndrome and Down's syndrome are not learning disabilities, but people who have either condition are likely to have a learning disability too.
- **Fragile X syndrome** is the most common cause of inherited learning disability, but not all people with Fragile X syndrome have a learning disability.
- **Down's syndrome** is a genetic condition caused by an extra chromosome in a person's cells - all living things are made up of 'cells'. Chromosomes are parts of cells. All people who have Down's syndrome have some kind of learning disability. It is important to remember that often it is not possible to say why someone has a learning disability.