Reasonably adjusted mental health services for people with learning disabilities and people with autism
A guide for people with autism spectrum conditions (ASC)[1]

Background

This is one of a series of guides written for different audiences following the publication of *Reasonably Adjusted? Mental Health Services and Support for People with Autism and People with Learning Disabilities* and the *Green Light Toolkit 2013*. Both reports were commissioned by the NHS Confederation, and written by the NDTi. *Reasonably Adjusted?* sets out the legal and policy context regarding reasonable adjustments, and describes a number of reasonable adjustments currently in place across mental health services for people with learning disabilities and people with ASC.

The *Green Light Toolkit 2013*, updates the original Green Light Toolkit published in 2004, and consists of an audit framework and guidance for making service improvements. Both reports can be downloaded from: www.ndti.org.uk/majorprojects/ current/green-light-toolkit-2013/

A database of reasonable adjustments to mental health services is available at:
www.ihal.org.uk/mhra/
We would like to thank members of the Autism Programme Board for their help with this guide.

Why are reasonably adjusted mental health services so important?

People with learning disabilities and people with ASC are more likely to have mental health needs than the wider population, but may have problems using mental health services because of the way they are organised and run. Putting reasonable adjustments in place can help make services easier to use.

Although some people may have their needs more appropriately met in specialist learning disability or autism services, this should by no means be standard practice, and mental health services need to get better at meeting people's needs, as problems with using services are one reason why people with learning disabilities and people with ASC experience health inequalities.

What should mental health services do?

NHS Trusts have a legal duty to tackle health inequalities, and put reasonable adjustments in place. The Equality Act (2010) [1] says that public sector organisations should tailor their services so that disabled people are not disadvantaged. In addition, the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2010 [2] says that healthcare providers should 'avoid unlawful discrimination including, where applicable, by providing for the making of reasonable adjustments in service provision to meet the service user's individual needs'. The Autism Act (2009) [3] and associated strategy [4] note the importance of public services being more aware of the needs of people with autism, and the provision of person centred support.

Reasonable adjustments include making changes to communication, the environment, policies, procedures, staff training and service delivery, and should be planned in advance. Health services should not wait until someone with learning disabilities or ASC walks through the door before thinking about what they should do. They should also have systems in place to check if their services are reasonably adjusted. All mental health services will have a patient liaison/advice/complaints service where patients and their families can raise any concerns.

For people with learning disabilities, including those who have ASC, the Monitor risk assessment framework [5] expects NHS Foundation Trusts to have ways of identifying and flagging people with learning disabilities, and protocols that ensure pathways of care are

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[1] 'autism' is used to refer to all diagnoses on the autism spectrum, including Asperger syndrome, high functioning autism, Kanner or classic autism and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.

reasonably adjusted to meet needs, along with accessible information about treatment options, complaints procedures and appointments. They are also expected to have protocols in place to:

- Provide suitable support for family carers supporting patients with learning disabilities;
- Routinely provide training to staff on the provision of healthcare to patients with learning disabilities;
- Encourage representation of people with learning disabilities and their families
- Regularly audit practice regarding the above and demonstrate findings in public reports.

How can Reasonably Adjusted and the Green Light Toolkit help?
Reasonably Adjusted? includes examples of reasonable adjustments mental health services have made such as use of pictures and symbols to label rooms, dimmer switches and ear defenders, additional time for processing information, consideration of how to contact people, staff training and having 'green light' champions on each ward. More information is available in the main report.

The examples are there to show what can be done, and there is lots of good practice but mental health services need to continue to do more to improve all their services so they are accessible for people with learning disabilities or people with ASC. The *Green Light Toolkit* can help services develop.

There are three Green Light Audit tools, Basic, Better and Best. There is an accessible version of the toolkit, so that people with learning disabilities can be involved. Family carers also need to be involved. The value of the tools lies in the conversation, action planning and service improvement that follows their use, rather than the scores on their own.

The toolkit includes a framework for thinking about change, based on the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement tool [6]. Sites who were already putting reasonable adjustments in place were asked what helped using the framework. Clear messages from senior management about the importance of reasonable adjustments, local Green Light Facilitators and Champions, listening to individuals and their families, and partnership working with local learning disability and autism services were some of the factors sites identified.

Some questions people with ASC may want to ask their local mental health services (Note – you can ask Healthwatch to help you).

- How do you know when people with ASC are using your services, so that you can put reasonable adjustments in place?
- What reasonable adjustments have you put in place for people with ASC?
- What training do your staff get on working with people with ASC?
- Are people with ASC involved in the training?
- What do you do to check that your service is accessible for people with ASC?
- Have you checked services using the Green Light Toolkit?
- If yes, were people with ASC involved?
- Is there any information about what local people with ASC think of the service?

References
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