

Reasonably adjusted mental health services for people with learning disabilities and people with autism

A guide for provider services

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 autism. 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/major-projects/current/green-light-toolkit-2013/

A database of reasonable adjustments to mental health services is available at: www.ihal.org.uk/mhra/

Why are reasonably adjusted mental health services important?

People with learning disabilities and people with autism have a higher prevalence of mental health needs than the wider population, but may find it difficult to access mental health provision due to perceptions regarding eligibility, historical patterns of provision, diagnostic overshadowing, and lack of reasonable adjustments to make services more accessible.

Although some people may have their needs more appropriately met in specialist learning disability or autism services, this is not always the case, and mental health services need to get better at meeting their needs, as problems with using services are one reason why people with learning disabilities and people with autism experience health inequalities.

What should mental health services do?

Under the Equality Act (2010) ¹, 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’. Reasonable adjustments include making alterations to policies, procedures, staff training and service delivery. This legal duty is anticipatory, meaning that mental health services should consider in advance, the adjustments that people with learning disabilities or autism will need. Healthcare providers should also have systems in place enabling them to regularly assess and monitor the quality of the services provided to ensure they are reasonably adjusted.

The Monitor risk assessment framework ³ expects NHS Foundation Trusts to have a mechanism to identify and flag people with learning disabilities, so that pathways of care can be 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 its practice regarding the above and demonstrate findings in public reports.

How can Reasonably Adjusted and the Green Light Toolkit help providers?

Reasonably Adjusted? includes a number of examples of reasonable adjustments from mental health services. Adjustments range from changes to the environment such as use of muted colours, dimmer switches and ear defenders to reduce sensory input, through to adjusted care pathways. However, while there are pockets of good and imaginative practice, few mental health services have comprehensively audited and redesigned their services to enable fair access and effective interventions for people with learning disabilities or people with autism.

The Green Light Toolkit provides practical assistance to help services do better. There are three Green Light Audit tools, Basic, Better and Best. They can be used flexibly and are designed for self-audit, rather than performance management purposes. Their value 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 tool⁴. 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.

Adjusting mental health services to accommodate people who have autism or learning disabilities will not only meet legal obligations, but is likely to improve service quality for everyone.

Recommendations for providers

- Use the Green Light Toolkit 2013 as suggested in the guide.
- Involve people with learning disabilities, people with autism and family carers in the audit
- Agree an action plan following the audit and monitor progress
- Use the framework for thinking about change in the Green Light Toolkit to ensure you have the right factors in place to achieve the changes required.

References

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