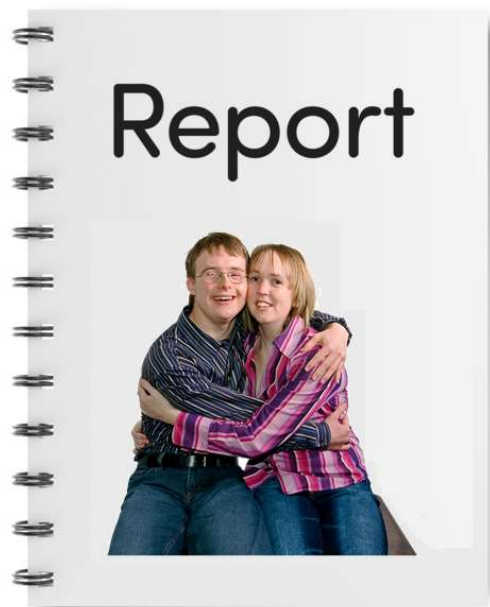


The Right to a Relationship





Who we are:



The National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) is a not for profit organisation.



As a social change organisation we work with personal experts, families, carers, governments and professionals to help people who might be excluded to live the life they choose.



My Life My Choice (MLMC) is a self-advocacy organisation for people with learning disabilities.



We raise the self-esteem, confidence and quality of life for people with learning disabilities by providing training, employment, volunteering and social opportunities.



Why we did this research:



We wanted to learn how families, services, and commissioners support people with learning disabilities to have intimate and sexual relationships.



We did the research because we want to make sure that everybody who wants it can have a relationship.



What we did in this research:



We interviewed:

- 7 people with learning disabilities,
- 3 local authority managers,
- 2 service providers



We held 8 focus groups with 53 people with learning disabilities.



We ran an online survey. 87 people filled this in:

- 40 people with learning disabilities;
- 17 family carers;
- 22 support staff; and
- 8 local authority commissioners.



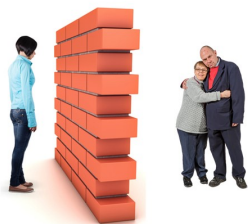
What we found out:



People with learning disabilities want to have relationships and enjoy having them.



Having different relationships is an important part of their lives.



But there are many barriers:

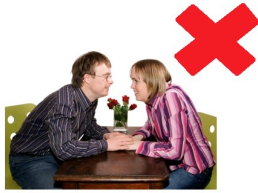


– Many people are isolated and do not have opportunities to meet others.



– Rules of what is allowed and not allowed in a service.

Rules are usually not written with people with learning disabilities.



– Some people do not get support to go out, go on dates, or visit friends.



– Some people do not have the money or transport to go out, go on dates, or visit friends.



– Some staff and family do not treat all people with learning disabilities as adults.



– Some staff and family do not know how to support people to have a relationship.



– Some people with learning disabilities do not know about sexuality and keeping safe.



– Some families do not want people with learning disabilities to have a relationship.



- There are some accessible resources and services, but they are not always easy to find and make sense of them.



- Sometimes friends and housemates can be difficult and make it harder to be in a relationship.



- Services think more about risks and safeguarding than supporting people to have good relationships.



We found things that helped people to form and be in an intimate relationship:



- Being recognised and respected as adults with rights the same as everyone else.



– Having helpful family, staff, advocate, and friends.



– Having knowledge and confidence.



– Having a life where you have opportunities to meet people and form relationships.



We found that sometimes commissioners and services struggle with supporting people because:



– Spending cuts mean that people often do not get the support they need.



– They worry about getting capacity wrong and instead, they tell people that they are not allowed to have a relationship.



After our research we recommend that:



1. Relationships should be part of people's support plans



2. Teenagers and young people should learn and get support with relationships from early on.



3. Couples should have more flexible support.



4. Staff should have regular training in supporting people with relationships. This training should developed and delivered by people with learning disabilities.



TRAINING

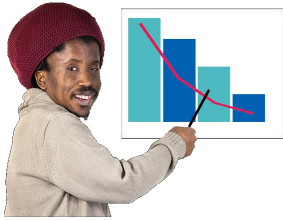


5. Adults with learning disabilities of any age should have access to sex education, relationship training, sexual health, and family planning services.

6. People with learning disabilities should be supported to understand and defend their right to relationship.

7. People with learning disabilities, families, and services should have information about social events, activities, and services, for example clubs and dating agencies.

8. Services and staff need to take the time to get to know people and offer them the support they need with relationships.



Our research had some limits:



- Many people with learning disabilities we spoke to go to our groups. They might know more about their rights than others.



- We only spoke to a few young people with learning disabilities.

By young we mean 18 to 25 year-olds. Most of our participants were a bit older.



- We were impressed how many people responded to our survey. But many of them were not from Oxfordshire.



- We were disappointed that so few commissioners and service providers were willing to speak to us. This shows what they think about the importance of this question.



We learnt from doing research together that:



- It is important to listen to people's stories. We need to talk to a lot of people because people have different experiences.



- It is good to work in a team because we all have different skills and strengths, and we can support each other.



- Communication and knowing each other is very important.



- We need to ask questions in a way people can understand.



To find out more about the research, visit the NDTi website at www.ndti.org.uk



DRILL UK gave us a grant to do this work.



DRILL is funded by the National Lottery Fund.