

## Top tips

### Engaging with people with a learning disability

**Mencap defines a learning disability as:**

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 complicated information and interact with other people.

#### 1. Working with people who have lived experience

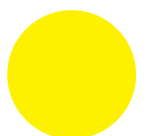
- **Partner with advocacy or provider organisations** who have existing relationships with learning disability communities – they will be able to help you work with people who have lived experience to plan and deliver your engagement work in a meaningful way.
- **Take advice** from people with learning disabilities, family members, carers and advocates about how to work best with participants, and whether they need support to share their views.
- Remember there are **different types of learning disabilities**, ranging from mild to profound and people will have unique needs and preferences.
- **Engaging with people with learning disabilities takes time**, so remember to factor this into your timelines.
- **Consider employing<sup>1</sup> someone with a learning disability** to work alongside you, to help bring insight from their perspective.

#### 2. Engagement methods

- Many people with a learning disability prefer **face to face** and **one to one** engagement, so everyone can see each other's faces. If you are talking to a large group, be aware that some people may find this difficult.
- Where possible, give people **different ways of getting involved** so that they don't feel stigmatised or treated differently.

---

<sup>1</sup> [NHS England » Employing people with a learning disability, autism or both and family carers](#)



- When holding events or including people with lived experience in key meetings:
  - Have a pre-meeting to get ready and check in afterwards.
  - Don't ask too many questions at once.
  - Give people enough time to think about information and to give answers.
  - Take care to get the right balance between the number of professionals and other people who are taking part.
  - Book accessible venues - as well as physical considerations such as ramps and accessible toilets, consider how easy it is to navigate to the correct meeting room once in the building and how easy it is to get to the venue.
  - Have regular breaks - asking people to think about big and complex issues can be tiring, especially if people are discussing negative experiences.
  - Have a break-out room or support worker/carers present - in case people get upset or overwhelmed by talking about emotive subject matter or the environment they are in.

### 3. How to communicate

- Consider working with specialist organisations to create **Easy Read<sup>2</sup> documents**, containing a combination of pictures and short sentences, so that information can be more easily understood.
- When communicating, Mencap<sup>3</sup> recommends:
  - Speaking **slowly and clearly**.
  - Using **bigger text and bullet points**, and keeping writing to a minimum
  - Using **easy to understand** words and words that show people are human beings, not numbers or beds.
  - **Avoiding jargon or long words** that might be hard to understand.
  - **Avoiding using too much colour** as it can make reading harder
  - Being prepared to use **different communication tools** and be creative - drawing, using photos, objects and playing games may be good ways of seeking feedback. [Mencap](#) use a system of coloured cards, held by participants to support communication. Participants:
    - Use a **blue card** if they have something they'd like to share or ask.
    - Use a **green card** if someone has explained something well, or if they agree with what is being said.

---

<sup>2</sup> [What is Easy Read? – Photosymbols](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Communicating with people with a learning disability | Mencap](#)

- Use a **yellow card** if someone is talking too quickly or their volume is not right.
- Use a **red card** if someone is using words or phrases that are difficult to understand or not accessible
- **Following the lead** of the person you're speaking with and going at their pace.
- **Checking that you have understood** what has been said
- Watching and learning from people's **body language and facial expressions** - think also about how you use gestures and facial expressions: if you're asking if someone is happy or unhappy, use your facial expressions to reinforce what you're saying.

#### 4. Asking good questions

- Some people will find it easier to talk about the detail of their experiences. They may find it more difficult to come up with solutions or consider hypothetical situations.
- Ask **open questions** - questions that don't have a simple yes or no answer.

#### **References:**

NHS England (2017) : *Bite-size guide to patient insight: Helping people with a learning disability to give feedback*  
[bitesize-guide-learning-disability.pdf \(england.nhs.uk\)](https://www.england.nhs.uk/learningdisability/bitesize-guide-learning-disability.pdf)

NHS England (2022): *Working with people with a learning disability (Start with people conference slides)*

NHS England (2022): [NHS England » Involving people with a learning disability, autistic people and family carers](https://www.nhs.uk/learningdisability/involving-people-with-a-learning-disability-autistic-people-and-family-carers)

Mencap (2022): <https://www.mencap.org.uk/>

