

4. Developing and maintaining relationships with family and friends.



What we know

Many people with a learning disability say that relationships are important to them - yet only 3% of people with a learning disability live as a couple, compared to 70% of the general adult population. (Mencap 2016)

Several barriers make it difficult for people with a learning disability to have personal and sexual relationships:

- Meeting people is more difficult.
- Social isolation is more common.
- The balance between risk and rights when it comes to people with a learning disability having intimate or sexual relationships is often skewed towards restricting their choices, both in the family home and other living arrangements.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people with a learning disability can face 'double discrimination', with their sexual rights denied on the basis of their learning disability as well as their sexual orientation or gender identity.

It is important for families to maintain positive relationships so that they are able to continue to support where appropriate. Additional support should be available when required in order to help families deal with a crisis situation or to prevent escalation of needs.

What people have said

"Having friends is important"

- "Recognise that for many people, family relationships are especially important, and support is necessary to maintain these."
- "People think it is wrong or harmful for people with a learning disability to get married or have a family, living outside the norm is ok – love is more important"
- "Time from family during the day to do activities in the community is important"
- "Support for families as people move through transition and be introduced to the idea of independent living, so they are not caring for 50 years"

What we are doing

We recognise that there needs to be more opportunities for people to develop and maintain their friendships and relationships.

We also recognise that developing an intimate relationship and potentially having a family can be important for some people.

We are asking social workers at the Council to think about how people can develop and maintain positive relationships, as this will help people stay happy, as well as providing peer support.

We also recognise that relationships with family is important and sometimes that means having space. We offer a carers assessment for families that request one.

What we will do next

Offer and provide carers assessments and be mindful of changes in relationships as people get older.

Explore different ways that we can support people to develop friendship groups, so that they can access the community through pooling personal budgets and direct payments to do joint activities.

Explore ways that technology can help people feel more connected with other people when at home, such as video calling.

Ensure that there is responsive support available for families when in a crisis situation – through the development of a contingency plan.

What difference it could make

- ✓ More people say they are in regular contact with friends and family.
- ✓ Fewer people say that they are lonely.
- ✓ More people say that they have important personal and intimate relationships and are not prevented from doing so including people who are from the LGBT community
- ✓ Parents with a learning disability are supported in their parenting including making reasonable adjustments within parenting programmes.