



**Learning Disability
Professional Senate**

Role of Professions supporting people with learning disabilities during the Coronavirus pandemic

This leaflet has been put together to describe how the different professions can support families and carers during the current coronavirus crisis. Each local area will have different access routes to these professionals, which may be via their GP or through direct access to their local Learning Disabilities Community Team.

General Practice

Your GP will be working in a different way during the Covid 19 crisis. In order to keep everyone safe, they are trying to avoid seeing patients face to face unless really necessary. If you are unwell with a fever or a cough, you should call 111 for advice. If this is difficult, it is wise to see if someone can do this for you.

Nobody should just attend a GP practice during this crisis. Please phone first and you will be given advice about what to do. You may have other health problems that you would like advice about, or you may need a new supply of medication. If you need medication, the pharmacist may also be able to help.

Most routine work in general practice has stopped for the moment. You will not be invited for your annual health check until after the crisis has improved.

You can get extra advice here <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/getting-medical-help-at-home/>

Learning Disabilities Nurses

During this COVID-19 pandemic there may have to be changes in the way Learning Disability Nurses work. To reduce the spread of the virus individual services will decide, in partnership with families and carers, what are essential contacts that need to be undertaken face to face and what can be undertaken using other technology such as telephone, video conferencing etc.

Nurses will be prioritising those service users who have been identified as vulnerable due to current physical and mental health conditions and people who are struggling to adapt to the changes in their routine as a result of the pandemic.

Learning disability nurses will work with people with learning disabilities and their families to ensure that their health needs are met. The nurse will work with other members of the multidisciplinary team to develop and support the implementation of reasonable adjustments, person centred care plans and risk assessments and provide information in an accessible way so that people are informed and supported to access the treatment they need. They will also work with colleagues in acute care to ensure that a person's human rights are upheld and MCA legislation is followed when making decisions about treatment.

if your relative has to be admitted to hospital, contact the LD liaison nurse for the hospital. This may be either via the LD Community Team or via the hospital. For more information contact <https://www.rcn.org.uk>

Clinical Psychologists

Whilst Clinical Psychologists might not be able to see people face to face at the moment, we can still speak on the phone or try and arrange a video call. Wherever they work, they are involved in offering psychological support to people with learning disabilities, their families and support staff – prioritising people with the greatest needs. Psychologists can:

1. advise on Positive Behaviour Support strategies including how to engage in activities, keeping a routine, making a plan to keep 'mentally healthy'
2. offer psychological and emotional support especially on coping with anxiety, serious illness, death and bereavement to help both the family and the person
3. help people with learning disabilities understand and have realistic expectations of themselves and people who support them
4. develop and share resources for people with learning disabilities, their families and staff
5. advise about assessment of capacity concerning health related decisions
6. ensure that within the restrictions, the least restrictive option is still maintained and to ensure minimum disruption to the person and their family
7. work with the person's network to ensure effective care co-ordination and contact is maintained, and focus where needed on advance care planning and end of life support.

For more information contact the Chair of the Intellectual Disability Faculty of the Division of Clinical Psychology at the British Psychological Society at dcpldlead@bps.org.uk

LD Psychiatrists

During the Covid pandemic LD psychiatrists would:

- Provide assessment, treatment and support for people with LD who were showing signs and symptoms of mental ill health within the limitations of social distancing by using telephone, video or internet based communications with service users, their carers and families often in partnership with other professionals in the local LD team
- Provide advice to GPs and to people with LD, their carers and families with regard to the optimal use of medication especially in circumstances which have led to a curtailment of activities and routines causing a rise in anxiety and agitation and sometimes a relapse of mental illnesses such as depression. This is done ensuring that the principles of STOMP guide prescribing practice and overmedication is avoided
- Provide support to intensive support teams to manage risks posed by people who show a deterioration in mental health which can prove to be problem for carers, families and the police
- Offer in patient support to people who can no longer be safely cared for in the community as well as provide advice to mainstream mental health and secure services
- When sanctioned use the enhanced "Emergency" Mental Health Act to provide treatment that is safe and the least restrictive

For more information contact the Chair of the Psychiatry of the Intellectual Disability Faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists at Faculties@rcpsych-mail.com

Dietitians

Dietitians provide advice relating to diet and health. There are lots of conditions that dietitians treat, some examples are malnutrition, diabetes, IBS, Autism. The British Dietetic Association have a range of Food Fact Sheets available on their website which give advice on these conditions and more: <https://www.bda.uk.com/food-health.html>. If you're concerned that someone has reduced their eating and drinking, you can assess their weight loss using this screening tool (click on objective measurements and add weights and height) <https://www.bapen.org.uk/screening-and-must/must-calculator>. These links will advise you on what you can do at home and when to contact the dietitian. The GP can make a referral to the dietitian for you or you can contact a freelance dietitian via their website <https://freelancedietitians.org/>

Occupational Therapists

Occupational therapists working with people with learning disabilities are interested in how a person's learning disability impacts on their day to day life. Occupational therapists support people with learning disabilities to help them access, develop and continue with life skills, work and leisure activities as independently as possible.

Whilst everyone experiencing severe occupational disruption as a result of COVID-19 and the changes to our day to day lives, people with learning disabilities will be finding this especially difficult in adjusting to those changed routines and roles. Occupational therapists are well placed to support people with learning disabilities, the families and care networks around this.

Occupational therapists are considered key workers so will continue to provide services. These services are likely to be different to what is usually offered. Each service will have their own business continuity plan in place to outline what they will continue to do and why might be on hold at the moment to reduce non-essential contacts and thus reduce spread of the virus.

It is likely that occupational therapists will be prioritising those people for whom COVID-19 is having the most impact on their day to day lives: people living independently; people who are experiencing significant changes to their usual care and support arrangements; people who will struggle to understand the impact of changed roles and routines; people who without current and ongoing occupational therapy will be at risk of deteriorating health and wellbeing; those at risk of hospital admission.

There is information and resources that you may find useful on the Royal College of Occupational Therapists website <https://www.rcot.co.uk/>

Physiotherapists

The ACPPLD recommend that the specialist learning disability physiotherapist's role during the COVID-19 pandemic is to provide support and advice for adults with a learning disability and their network of care to:

1. promote good physical health and mental well-being;
2. monitor for deterioration in health;
3. protect people from infection;
4. reduce demand on primary healthcare, prevent hospital admissions and support safe discharges;
and
5. provide essential physiotherapy intervention based on a risk assessment.

Learning disability physiotherapists need to continue to advocate for adults with a learning disability and their network of care to ensure equity of care based on health need and outcome.

More information will be available on the ACPPLD website

<https://acppld.csp.org.uk/>

Speech and Language Therapists

Speech and Language Therapists can help with communication and eating and drinking. Contact Speech and Language Therapy through the local adult Community Learning Disability Team or your child's school.

They will be able to help with:

1. Ideas and resources to help explain to your relative about what is happening and why
2. Ideas for helping your relative understand their new routine
3. Thinking about what your relative might be communicating with their behaviour
4. Ways to communicate more simply with your relative while things are different and difficult
5. Thinking about what to do if you need to get medical help for your relative
6. Developing/ updating a communication passport for your relative just in case
7. Advice about swallowing difficulties if you need it

They will be able to help you over the phone or possibly by video call at the moment.

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy email : info@rcslt.org or website <https://www.rcslt.org/>

Arts Therapists

In general, during the COVID-19 pandemic the role of an arts therapist is to continue to provide emotional support, to advocate the needs of people with a learning disability and to maintain therapeutic relationships during this difficult time. Local responses are likely to depend on service demand and the resources available which will result in different treatment and support options being available.

Art Therapists can offer individual sessions online or by phone and give clients a choice of which they prefer as this may depend on living circumstances. Artworks can be emailed or shared if this is done safely, using passwords and encryption when sharing and storing images. For further information, please contact info@baat.org

Dance Movement Psychotherapist (DMP) can provide support around mental health, expressing difficult feelings in a safer way, and exploring coping mechanisms. We do this using creative expression through movement, noticing how our body feels when we experience different emotions (like butterflies in our tummies), and talking. Many DMPs are now offering therapy sessions using Zoom, Skype, or another video call platform. You can find a local DMP by searching our register here: <https://admp.org.uk/find-a-dance-movement-psychotherapist/>

Dramatherapists can help with matters like emotional wellbeing and regulation, communication, and coping strategies for understanding changes in routine. Examples of this may be creating stories that are soothing and resourcing to the individual to help them with the current situation. Movement activities and games that encourage positive relationships and divert emotions that can lead to challenging behaviour. People who are referred to Dramatherapy do not need to have previous experience or skill in acting, theatre or drama. Further guidance on Dramatherapy can be found at: <http://www.badth.org.uk>.

Music Therapists can continue to provide support around mental health, communication and self-expression during this difficult time. Music therapists may where possible offer 1:1 sessions using remote technology such as Zoom, Skype or Microsoft teams. Where technology is not available or suitable, telephone sessions may be offered as an alternative or contact may be maintained by letter. Further information about music therapy can be found at : www.bamt.org

Dr Karen Dodd

Co-Chair – LD Professional Senate

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