

# Private Places, Open Door



A guide for staff supporting people with learning disabilities to access sexual health and contraceptive services in Hammersmith & Fulham  
by Image in Action

# Private Places Open Door

## Supporting People with Learning Disabilities to Access Sexual Health Services

A resource to help staff who work with people with learning disabilities to have equal access to sexual health and contraceptive services in Hammersmith and Fulham

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With thanks to:  
Staff in sexual health and learning disability services in Hammersmith and Fulham  
Change picture bank for some of the line drawings

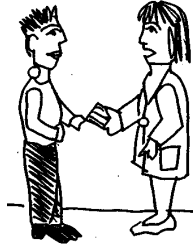
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# Supporting People with Learning Disabilities to Access Sexual Health Services

This pack contains information to support staff who may need to help a person with a learning disability access sexual health or contraceptive services (In this pack we will use the term 'sexual health services' to cover sexual health or GUM clinics and contraceptive or family planning services).

There might be many reasons for accessing sexual health services including:-

- accompanying a woman for a smear test
- helping someone find out about contraceptives
- supporting someone who needs to be tested for sexually transmitted infections



Many sexual health issues can be dealt with through a GP and this may often be the best option as there may be an established relationship and understanding of the persons support needs, however, there may be times when someone needs to attend a contraceptive clinic (also known as the family planning service) or a sexual health clinic (GUM clinic). The information below relates mainly to visits to those services which might be new to you and to the service user.



Charing Cross hospital



Milson Road Clinic

## **These services are for everyone**

People with a learning disability have a right to access mainstream health services and in accordance with the anti-discrimination laws service providers should make reasonable adjustments to ensure the service is accessible and appropriate to meet their needs.

## **Making a start**

### **Who can support someone to access sexual health services?**

Not everyone feels comfortable discussing sexuality. We have a duty to support people but if you feel uncomfortable taking on this role, then it is best to be honest and find someone who can support the person without embarrassment. That might be someone of the same gender but not necessarily. Wherever possible give the choice of support person to the service user themselves.

### **Think about your own values**

We all carry with us a complex range of values about sex and relationships and our culture and back ground will influence our views on sexuality. Be sensitive to how your own views influence your support of a person. Their own views and those of their family and culture might mean they have a very different set of values to your own. Be aware of making assumptions, we cannot assume we know about a person's sexuality or if they are sexually active. Respect their privacy and do not assume they should tell you anything about their sexuality if they wish to keep it private.

### **Recognise your skills**

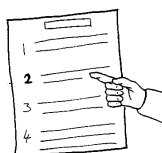
You already have skills that will help you to support someone to access these services. Draw on your experience of working with people with learning disabilities and their needs and abilities. You are likely to be a key advocate for them in the sexual health services where staff may not come into regular contact with people with learning disabilities

## Suggestions to make visits to sexual health services easier and more effective

- Phone up before a first visit and talk to someone at the service about what will happen and discuss what support the person might need. Try to get a double or final appointment slot to allow more time.



- Prepare a list of questions with the service user before you go, support the person to ask them and write down the answers so you can recap later.



- Have a trial visit to find and look at the waiting room. Find the café and make a plan to do something nice after a visit. If the visit will involve invasive procedures such as a smear test, blood test or internal examination then it is sometimes worth considering a first visit to familiarise the person and gather information and then a second appointment for the actual procedure.
- Do make suggestions and translate any complex language (staff might be quite used to using words like *genitals*, *transmission*, *cervix* or *discharge* which a person with a learning disability might not understand, step in and offer an alternative simpler word.)
- Take along communication aids and any visual aids you think might help. Do not presume that any service will have resources to support a person with a learning disability.



- It may be useful to use some educational resources to support the person either before or after a visit. There is a list of resources later in this pack. There are also some excellent websites listed in the resources section which some people may find useful as an aid to understanding about their body and relationships. Make sure you plan any educational work carefully and inform your manager.
- Do collect written information leaflets as even though they might not be appropriate for the service user they may contain useful information for other staff members so they can fully support the service user.



- Build up relationships with medical staff. Find staff who you know are open to working creatively and flexibly and try to get appointments with them for all your clients. Having an established relationship with staff who support people will help enormously in providing a good service.
- Do consult with the Learning Disability Team for advice if you have concerns about supporting people with any sexual health needs.
- Do remember that many people have complex feelings about discussing sexuality and there can still be a stigma attached to using sexual health services. People may feel embarrassment, shame, confusion and many other feelings. You may experience these too as you support someone and you need to be able to acknowledge and manage the service user's feelings as well as your own.



## Be clear about policy

There are a number of legal and policy issues which, may need to be considered. You should be familiar with the policies and procedures of your organisation relating to sexuality, confidentiality, safeguarding of adults and and/or children, capacity to consent, procedures to follow in case of a disclosure and any other relevant documents. It may be particularly important to consider:

### 1. **Confidentiality.**

Who on the staff team needs to know, do parents need to know, do other service users need to know? You may need to support the person to learn about with whom, where and when it is appropriate to discuss issues.

### 2. **Consent.**

Be aware of the issues around consent. A person consents if s/he agrees by choice and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice. The Mental Capacity Act 2005 states that:

- every adult is to be presumed to have capacity unless proven otherwise.
- people should be supported to make their own decisions
- people have the right to make what might be seen as eccentric or unwise decisions
- that intervention should be the least restrictive possible

### 3. **Safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children.**

Make sure you are aware of your responsibilities and the lines of accountability so you can fulfill your duty to protect service users.

## Thinking about the future

Often it is only when there is a problem that people access sexual health services but it is important to be proactive in our approach to sexuality and relationships:

- Has the person had any sex education?
- Does the person have a private space of their own where they can relax and feel safe?
- Maybe some relationships counselling would support a current relationship?
- Does the person need to expand their social opportunities to meet new friends or potential partners?

Sexuality and relationships are a positive and important part of many people's lives and part of our role as staff is to actively support service users to find ways to fulfil their needs and have satisfying, safe and successful relationships.

It may be worth considering if a sex and relationships education group would be useful as a long term support option.

Contact the Learning Disability Team, any day service provider the person may use or Image in Action to find out if there are any groups planned.

Ideally service users need an understanding of a whole range of topics before any sexual health appointments happen. They need to have an understanding of public and private, the language to describe parts of their body, an understanding of consent, relationships and feelings. It may be that there is an urgent need for treatment or preventative action to safeguard a person's health and it is not possible to discuss or teach about all of these but it is important to consider their needs for the future.

Make sure sexuality and relationships are included and discussed in any life planning process.

Sign up to attend relevant training about sexuality, it is an important issue and one that staff can feel ill equipped to deal with if they have not had good support and time to reflect on the issues.



## Useful contacts

### The Pearl Service

[www.chelwest.nhs.uk/hiv-sexual-health/west-london-centre-sexual-health.html](http://www.chelwest.nhs.uk/hiv-sexual-health/west-london-centre-sexual-health.html)

The Pearl Service is a sexual health service provided by the West London Sexual Health clinic at Charing Cross hospital. Phone direct to a sexual health advisor to make an appointment at the clinic; 020 8846 1579. Booking in with the Pearl Service ensures that the person is recognised as potentially needing extra support and needing a longer appointment time.

Accessible information for people with learning disabilities wanting to learn about the service and a leaflet for professionals/carers is available from the service. A storybook about what happens when visiting the clinic is available from The Adults with Learning Disabilities Team 14-16 Stamford Brook, tel 020 8383 6464 or from the sexual health advisors at the West London Sexual Health Clinic 020 8846 1579

**Cont@ct2** Sexual health services for young people. They will see young people with learning disabilities up to the age of 25. Weekly sessions held at Connexions, 181 King St, Hammersmith, 2.30 p.m. – 4.30 p.m. Wednesday afternoons and at the West London Sexual Health clinic at Charing Cross Hospital 2.30 p.m. – 4.30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Thursdays.

### Westside Contraceptive Services

Contraceptive clinics are held at Charing Cross Hospital, Falkland House Health Clinic, Milson Road Health Centre, Parsons Green Centre, Hammersmith Bridge Road and White City Health Centre.

Nearest clinic and advice help line Mon – Fri 9.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m. tel 020 8962 4455

A leaflet listing the clinic times and addresses can be obtained from the service.

**Image in Action** [www.imageinaction.org](http://www.imageinaction.org) tel 01494 481632

Provides sex and relationships education and training for young people with learning disabilities and staff. We work in colleges, day centres, schools, clinics, and other voluntary sector providers in the borough. We run groups and occasionally one to one educational support for adults with learning disabilities about sex and relationships.

### Adults with Learning Disabilities Team

Stamford Brook Centre  
14-16 Stamford Brook Avenue W6 0YD  
tel 020 8383 6464

[www.lbhf.gov.uk/azofservices/l/26241\\_learning\\_disability\\_service.asp](http://www.lbhf.gov.uk/azofservices/l/26241_learning_disability_service.asp)

A multi disciplinary health and social care team, including psychology, speech and language therapists and learning disability nurses that provide services to adults with learning disabilities and their families. The adult social care team have responsibilities relating to the safeguarding of vulnerable adults.

### **Disabled Children's team**

Barclay House

Effie Road, SW6 1EN

Tel 020 8753 5842

[www.lbhf.gov.uk/azofservices/d/28064\\_Disabled\\_children.asp](http://www.lbhf.gov.uk/azofservices/d/28064_Disabled_children.asp)

As above but providing for children and young people with learning disabilities.

### **Teenage Pregnancy Unit**

Room 1 Town hall, King St W4 3JU

Provides advice, leaflets and supports sexual health services for young people

## **Useful Resources**

[www.easyhealth.org.uk](http://www.easyhealth.org.uk)

A site with a wide range of information for people with learning disabilities and advice for professionals. Include sexual health information for men and women, smear tests, menopause, breast examinations, periods, sex and chlamydia.

[www.fairadvice.org.uk/fmindex.htm](http://www.fairadvice.org.uk/fmindex.htm)

Leaflets and CD ROMs about smears, testicular checks, breast examination and periods

*'Talking Together about Growing Up'*

*'Talking Together about Sex and Relationships'*

*'Talking Together about Contraception'*

Three books written by Image in Action. The first two contain information, activities, body outlines and cartoon stories to illustrate topics such as puberty changes, sexual activity and keeping safe. The third book provides detailed picture stories on methods of contraception and information for professionals.

Published by fpa

[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

*'50 and Over Breast Screening is for You'*

*'Having a Smear Test'*

[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk)

Leaflets on health checks for women with learning disabilities.

*'Planning a Baby'*

*'Depo-Provera'*

*'My Pregnancy My Choice'*

Three books produced by Change with simple language and line drawings.

[www.changepeople.co.uk](http://www.changepeople.co.uk)

Photo-stories about gay and lesbian relationships

[www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry/research/completed-projects/jan.pdf](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry/research/completed-projects/jan.pdf)

[www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry/research/completed-projects/phil.pdf](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry/research/completed-projects/phil.pdf)

*'Exploring Sexual and Social Understanding'*

A visual resource to assess capacity to consent by people with learning disabilities. Has a CD of colour images showing a variety of situations and activities.

[www.bild.org.uk](http://www.bild.org.uk)

[www.me-and-us.co.uk](http://www.me-and-us.co.uk)

Site listing teaching packs and 2 very good series of line drawings called 'Picture Yourself' which covers many topics relating to sex and relationships and detailed drawing of genitals.

[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

Fpa produce many excellent teaching resources and leaflets about a wide variety of sexual health issues

Many of the cartoons and drawing used in this document are produced by Change. They are a specialist organisation supporting the production of accessible information for people with learning disabilities. They sell CDs of these drawings and have many useful resources to support the production of easy access information.

<http://www.changepeople.co.uk>

## Help lines

Brook helpline for young people	08088021234
(Mon – Fri 9.00 – 5.00)	(Free calls from all mobiles)
Recorded information lines	020 7950 7700

Sexwise - helpline for young people	0800 28 29 30
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Sexual health direct	0845 122 8690
(9.00 – 6.00)	

Lesbian, gay and bisexual switchboard	020 7837 7324
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## Websites

3 websites for young people. They have pages on relationships, growing up, staying safe, quizzes, help in an emergency and answers to many of the questions young people have about sex. Some materials may also be useful for people over 25 with a learning disability

[www.likeitis.org](http://www.likeitis.org)

[www.ruthinking.co.uk](http://www.ruthinking.co.uk)

[www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)

NHS direct [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

Gives information about sexually transmitted infections, emergency contraception and other health issues. Website and phone line

<http://www.playingsafely.co.uk> Has information and games about sexually transmitted infections and sex.