

Information for Parents/Guardians of Children and Young People with General Learning Disabilities (GLD)

(including borderline mild, mild, moderate and severe/
profound general learning disabilities)

The aim of this pamphlet is to inform parents and guardians
of supports and services available for children and young people
with General Learning Disabilities and their families.



What is a General Learning Disability?

A general learning disability can range from borderline mild, mild, moderate, to severe/profound. Children with general learning disabilities find it more difficult to learn, understand and do things than other children of the same age. They can continue to learn and to make progress all through their lives but at a slower pace than other children. A child with borderline mild or mild general learning disability has very different learning abilities and needs than a child with a moderate or a severe/profound learning disability.

Children with disabilities are children first and have much in common with other children of the same age. Every child has different strengths, personality and experiences so a general learning disability will impact differently on individual children.

How do I find out if my child has a general learning disability?

A psychologist is the professional who assesses a child's learning ability. When doing this, they take a number of different matters into account. These include the child's age and his/her ability to:

- use and understand language
- cope with ordinary everyday tasks at school and at home
- make friends and to take part in games and other activities
- perform on tests of intelligence, reading, numeracy.

Children with mild general learning disabilities mature and develop certain skills at a slower rate than other children. They may have difficulties with speech and language, developing concepts, and later have difficulty with reading, writing, numeracy and comprehension. They may find it difficult to adapt to school life and may show signs of inappropriate or what might be considered immature behaviour. Sometimes it is the class teacher who may be the first to notice these things.

Children with moderate general learning disabilities show significant delays in reaching developmental milestones, such as walking, talking, reading, writing and so on.

The school curriculum will need to be adapted to meet their learning needs.

Children with severe/profound general learning disabilities show very significant delays in reaching developmental milestones. Their basic awareness and understanding of themselves and the world around them is limited by their level of disability. Children with this level of difficulty may depend on others throughout their lives to help them with basic needs such as mobility, communication, feeding and toileting.

Additional Disabilities

Children with general learning disabilities can sometimes have additional disabilities or conditions (multiple disabilities) such as autism spectrum disorders, medical conditions, physical and/or sensory disabilities and emotional/behavioural difficulties.

Assessed Syndromes

Children with an assessed syndrome may also have a general learning disability.

A wide range of syndromes that can have associated learning disabilities include: Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Rett syndrome, Turner syndrome and Williams syndrome.

The Early Days

Children can be referred to HSE early intervention teams or community based therapy services by GPs, public health nurses or parents. In these cases, the children's needs are assessed as part of this service.

Assessment of Need

Parents of any child born after 1st June 2002 may apply to the HSE for an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act, if they think that their child may have a disability. Following the assessment, parents receive an Assessment Report stating their child's needs and the services required to meet those needs. More information about the Assessment of Need is available on the HSE website at: www.hse.ie.

Getting Support

If you are worried about your child's development you should seek help as soon as possible - from your public health nurse or pre-school leader. It is very important for young children with learning disabilities to receive support as early as possible in life to assist their development.

People nowadays often use the Internet as a source of information. Please bear in mind that sometimes information on the internet can be exaggerated, misleading or wrong. In matters concerning your child's health and education, you should seek information and advice from the appropriate professional sources.

If your child is at school, you may wish to raise your concerns with your child's teacher or school principal.

The school may be able to support you and/or reassure you about your child's learning. If needed, your child's teacher/school will develop a plan with you to support your child's learning and development.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

NEPS psychologists work with parents, teachers and children to help all children develop to their potential. In some individual cases teachers and parents will agree to seek support from the NEPS psychologist to address difficulties which are affecting the pupil's learning and socialisation in school.

A parent leaflet about the NEPS service is available on the NEPS website at: www.education.ie.

Your Child's Education

Pre-school Age

The State funds a free pre-school place for all eligible children in the year prior to starting school through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, more details are available on www.dcy.gov.ie. Children with general learning disabilities, who have additional needs, may also be eligible to attend other HSE funded crèche or pre-school settings.

School Going Age

Department of Education and Skills: Policy

The Department's policy is focused on ensuring that all children, including those with general learning disabilities can have access to an education appropriate to meeting their needs and abilities. The policy is to provide for children with special educational needs, including those with general learning disabilities, to be included in mainstream schools unless such a placement would not be in their best interests or the interests of the children with whom they are to be educated. Some children with more complex special educational needs may be supported in a special class in a mainstream school. These children have the option, where appropriate, of full or part-time inclusion and interaction with other children. Other children may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

Primary and Post Primary School

The vast majority of children with mild and many children with moderate general learning disability attend their local mainstream primary and post-primary schools, with support. The majority of children with severe and/or profound general learning disabilities attend a special school or special class. The mainstream education system supports children and young people with general learning disabilities in the following ways:

- The classroom teacher supports students with special educational needs and may adapt lessons or tasks to suit the individual, as necessary.
- Resource and learning support teachers are available to provide additional teaching, if it is required.
- Students who have significant care needs arising from a diagnosed general learning disability may have access to support from special needs assistants (SNAs). SNAs look after the care needs of children while the teacher is responsible for teaching the child. The circumstances in which SNAs are allocated for pupils with special educational needs are detailed in Circular 0030/2014, which is available on the DES website at www.education.ie.

- Additional supports, such as assistive technology (see DES Circular 0010/2013) and special school transport arrangements may also be provided where children are eligible. Information about these schemes is available on the DES website at www.education.ie.
- Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations (RACE) may be available for students with permanent or long-term conditions that will significantly impair their performance in the examinations. For more information, see the website of the State Examinations Commission at: www.examinations.ie.

Special classes and special schools may support students with GLD who have complex needs. Special schools and classes have smaller class sizes.

Your SENO can advise you about special schools or classes in your area.

Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs)

SENOs provide information directly to the parents of children/young people with special educational needs and to schools. SENOs approve additional teaching and SNA supports to schools, where necessary, to support students with special educational needs. SENOs also have a role in supporting and advising parents/guardians.

Your SENO can assist you in a number of ways by:

- Providing support and advice
- Identifying possible school placements
- Liaising with the school, the HSE and other services
- Assisting in planning the transition of children to school, between schools and onwards from school.

Further Information

Further information for parents/guardians can be found in the NCSE publications:

- ***Children with Special Educational Needs: Information Booklet for Parents***
- ***Choosing a School: A Guide for Parents and Guardians of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs***
- ***Post-School Education and Training Information on Options for Adults and School Leavers with Disabilities***

These publications are available at www.ncse.ie.

Useful Contacts

Your local **SENO** may be contacted through the school or from the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

Department of Education and Skills: www.education.ie.

Local health centre: www.hse.ie.

Information about other supports to which you may be entitled is available on the website of **Citizens Information** at: www.citizensinformation.ie or from the relevant Government Departments.

The following websites and support organisations may also be of assistance to you:

Acquired Brain Injury: www.abiireland.ie.

Down Syndrome Ireland: www.downsyndrome.ie.

Inclusion Ireland: www.inclusionireland.ie.

National Federation of Voluntary Bodies: www.fedvol.ie.

National Parents Council Primary: www.npc.ie.

National Parents Council Post-Primary: www.npcpp.ie.

Psychological Society of Ireland: www.psihq.ie.

Special Needs Parents Association:
www.specialneedsparents.ie.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and these organisations are listed only for information purposes. The National Council for Special Education may have had no involvement with these organisations and cannot vouch for them or their staff. Parents should always satisfy themselves regarding the appropriateness of providing any information concerning their child to any third-party.



National Council for Special Education

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