Why does this matter?

• Higher rates of emotional & behavioural disorders in children & young people (CYP) with LD (Emerson & Hatton 2007)
• However, research shows they have lower referral and access to mental and physical health care. Barriers include - lack of skills and knowledge, unhelpful, inaccurate attitudes and beliefs, resource issues (Emerson & Baines 2011)
• Equality Act 2010 – public duty; protected characteristics; reasonable adjustments

What could work?

Using a natural setting to deliver intervention to maximise attendance, learning & generalisation e.g. schools

Look for existing evidence-based intervention: FRIENDS for Life, a 10 week, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy based programme with 2 parent sessions. WHO recommended. Research demonstrates that participating in F4L:

- Reduces anxiety; increases self-esteem; joint health/education delivery is associated with more change than education-only delivery
- Similar results in Irish schools with high levels of social deprivation and children with some SEN; children with literacy difficulties/ SEN with some adaptations to increase accessibility; 3 special schools with children with autistic spectrum conditions and other SEN

Look for evidence of related interventions e.g. CYP with severe learning disabilities participated in a similar group when activities are simplified, visualised, other creative approaches used, such as sensory stories; after participation in adapted CBT groups, anger/aggression in people with LD reduced

F4L-LD adaptation & development project:

We aimed to:

• adapt F4L to be accessible and appropriate for CYP-LD
• gather feedback on deliverability & acceptability from the children and young people, parents/carers and staff

What did we do?

Our collaborative reviewed existing FRIENDS intervention activities/materials & collated relevant evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence. The adaptations were based on relevant research, expert opinion and our combined experience (70+ years!)

• The adapted activities, sessions, resources included feelings identification/naming, body signs, relaxation/chill activities, helpful green thoughts/unhelpful red thoughts, roleplays, coping plans with high structure, symbols, photos, puppets and props/less words.
• Each session, we collected & used feedback from the 7 children/young people with “SLD” & the group leaders/staff. This was used to enhance the adaptations and engagement.

What did we learn?

CYP-LD could engage with the adapted activities & develop skills; relaxation/chill activities were very successful

• Flexibility, slow pace, creativity needed in sessions along with planned practice opportunities outside sessions
• Different activities liked/not liked by different people, and may change over time
• Need systematic evaluation/ research, but research funds are really difficult to get. Our Research Team, including Professors Stallard & Murphy & Dr Nicky Wood, has had our 3rd rejection.

What now/what next?

• Share/develop practice: 1st training with Special FRIENDS-ASC, October 2015; 2 NHS England funded training days & 1st Community of Practice meeting, March 2016
• will then update web guidance with additional practice tips, activities & resources; plan more parent/carer involvement; share evaluations; reapply for research funds.

More information at: http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/content/assets/pdf/publications/friends-for-life-guide.pdf or from r.rossiter@kent.ac.uk (Reference list available)