

Formal Definitions of Learning Disability

A range of terms are often used to refer to learning disability such as 'intellectual disability' and 'global developmental delay'. The Challenging Behaviour Foundation uses the term 'Learning Disability' because it is widely understood and used in many policy documents within the UK.

Three widely used definitions of learning disability are:

1. Valuing People (HM Government, 2001, p. 14):

'Learning disability includes the presence of:

- A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information in learning new skills (impaired intelligence), with:
- A reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning),

Which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development'

2. DSM-V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2013)

The DSM-V is a medical reference book intended for professionals, Its definition of 'Intellectual Disability' refers to limited functioning in three areas:

- Social skills (e.g. communicating with others)
- Conceptual skills (e.g. reading and writing ability)
- Practical ability (e.g. clothing/bathing one's self)

3. ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases, 2018):

The ICD-11 definition refers to intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour with onset occurring during the developmental period:

- Significant limitations in intellectual functioning across various domains such as perceptual reasoning, working memory, processing speed, and verbal comprehension
- The presence of significant limitations in adaptive behaviour, which refers to the set of *conceptual, social, and practical* skills that are learned and performed by people in their everyday lives

For further definitions of 'learning disability', please see factsheets produced by [BILD](#) and the [Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities](#).