

Plain Facts

Being a parent

People with learning difficulties can have children like anyone else. Wendy Booth and Tim Booth talked to people with learning difficulties who **are** parents. They also talked to some grown-up children whose mum or dad had learning difficulties.

This Plain Facts tells you what Wendy and Tim found out. It is also about what happened when Wendy and 3 other people became advocates for the parents.

- When people got good support, it made it easier to be a good parent.
- Parents liked having an advocate to help them. An advocate speaks up for people in important meetings and helps them to sort out problems.
- Parents and advocates found it hard to get the support they needed from social workers and other paid workers.
- Sometimes grandparents and other family members helped parents look after their children. They often did this better than paid workers.
- Parents liked going to support groups.

Good things about being a parent

With the right kind of support parents with learning difficulties can bring up their children themselves (see Fact Sheet A).

Choosing to be a parent means watching your baby grow up and doing things together.

Being a parent can bring real happiness.

Upsetting things about being a parent

When you have a child, there are a lot more people telling you what to do.

Sometimes people might tell you to have an abortion. An abortion is an operation to end the pregnancy before a baby is born.

A lot of children whose parents have learning difficulties are taken into care. This means the children are taken away and looked after by other people.

Even when parents are managing OK they are still watched closely by social workers.

What the children said about growing up with parents who had learning difficulties

Nearly all the people who had a mum or dad with learning difficulties loved their parents and felt close to them.

As the children grew older, some of them helped their parents with different things. Some children read for their parents, wrote letters for them, and sorted out the bills.

Most of the children said they were happy at home. But some children were bullied at school. Sometimes, neighbours were nasty to the family.

Some children had lived in children's homes for a few years. These children were unhappy living away from their parents.

Parents and their grown-up children say:

Being a parent means loving your children and being loved in return.

Things to do:

Are you a parent with learning difficulties? Do you want more help? You can ask your Health Visitor about getting help from a Community Support Team.

Are you pregnant, or thinking about having a baby? Talk to someone you trust. They can help you decide what to do.

If you're not happy with the help you get, you can:

1. Talk to your health visitor, social worker or community nurse.
2. Ask for an advocate.
3. Make a complaint (see *Plain Facts* 3 on "Making Complaints").

Finding out more:

If you want to find out more about being a parent, you can talk to:

- Your family or friends
- Your health visitor, social worker, or community nurse
- Your Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Values into Action - Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2 6HG. Tel: 0171 729 5436

More about the project:

Wendy Booth and Tim Booth work at the University of Sheffield. Tel: 0114 222 6424. They have written some books. One book is about parents with learning difficulties. Another book is about grown-up children whose parents have learning difficulties.

Fact Sheet A

Help with being a parent

Getting an advocate

Parents liked having an advocate to help them with things. The advocate:

- explained things in easy words
- helped parents with their money
- read for them and wrote letters for them
- listened to parents and treated them with respect
- went with them to important meetings
- spoke up for parents
- was easy to get hold of
- helped parents find a safe place to live
- helped them with their children
- did not tell other people about private things
- believed in parents and gave them confidence.

Support groups

Parents also liked going to a support group that was just for them. Being in a group meant parents could:

- help each other
- make new friends
- share sad feelings
- sort out their problems
- learn how to speak up for themselves.

Fact Sheet B

Being a parent - things to think about

- Have you ever looked after a baby or small child?
- Do you like babies and children?
- Do you know what babies need?
- What sort of help will you need?
- Could you care for a baby as well as yourself?
- How do you feel when babies cry?
- How do you feel about changing a dirty nappy?
- How would your life change if you had a baby?
- Does your partner like babies and children?
- Would your partner want to live with you if you had a baby?
- Would you want to live with your partner if you had a baby?
- Will your family help you if you have a baby?
- Would you be bored or lonely if you tried to bring up a baby by yourself?
- Would you have enough money to buy everything a baby needs?
- Where would you live if you had a baby?