



Introduction

“A number of seemingly small steps can make a big impact toward helping people face tough challenges or make a fresh start.”

– Professor Katherine Milkman, 2015

[Watch our foreword video \(https://vimeo.com/1049579132\)](https://vimeo.com/1049579132)

Welcome

[Watch our Introduction video \(https://vimeo.com/1049579164\)](https://vimeo.com/1049579164)

Equally Safe and Supported is a practical set of resources designed to make support and justice accessible to women with learning disabilities who have experienced gender-based violence.

Who is this toolkit for?

This self-assessment toolkit is designed for use by both frontline staff and service managers working across health, social care, education, justice, and third sector services.

Why use it?

The toolkit helps organisations to reflect on, assess, and improve how they support women with learning disabilities who have experienced gender-based violence. It supports a rights-based, inclusive approach to service development.

By completing the toolkit, your organisation can identify practical ways to:

- ▶ Remove barriers to support for women with learning disabilities.
- ▶ Build staff confidence and awareness.
- ▶ Take forward an improvement plan based on real needs and actions.

What is in it?

The toolkit contains the following resources:

- ▶ Evidence of best practice in removing the barrier's women with learning disabilities face when seeking support and justice for gender-based violence.
- ▶ A self-assessment tool.
- ▶ An improvement planning template, including suggested actions you can take to make improvements.
- ▶ Inclusive resources, and signposting.

Background

Equally Safe and Supported has been co-produced by the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD) and People First (Scotland)'s Equally Safe Group. The Equally Safe Group are a group of women with learning disabilities and expertise in gender-based violence.

The toolkit is based on the findings and recommendations of our co-produced research report: [Unheard, Unjust: But Not Hidden Anymore. Women with Learning Disabilities' Experience of Gender-Based Violence in Scotland](http://www.sclد.org.uk/unheard-unequal-unjust-but-not-hidden-anymore-new-report-launched-at-scotlands-learning-disability-and-gender-based-violence-conference-2023/) (www.sclد.org.uk/unheard-unequal-unjust-but-not-hidden-anymore-new-report-launched-at-scotlands-learning-disability-and-gender-based-violence-conference-2023/) (SCLD, 2023).

This report tells us that, as well as being at greater risk of gender-based violence, women with learning disabilities experience pervasive barriers to accessing support and justice.

These barriers may be unintentional or unrecognised. Therefore, we hope this toolkit will be a practical resource for organisations to make their services accessible to women with learning disabilities who have experienced gender-based violence.

What is a learning disability?

In consultation with people with learning disabilities, the Scottish Government (2019, p.9) defines a learning disability as follows:

“A learning disability is significant and lifelong. It starts before adulthood and affects the person's development. This means that a person with a learning disability will be likely to need help to understand information, learn skills and live a fulfilling life. Some people with learning disabilities will also have healthcare needs and require support to communicate.”



SCLD also note on their website that:

“A learning disability is different for everyone. No two people are the same. Challenges faced by people with learning disabilities can vary widely. In all cases a learning disability is lifelong.

A learning disability affects the way a person learns new things throughout their life. Many people who have a learning disability can get qualifications, work, have loving relationships, and live independently. Some people with a learning disability might need more support throughout their life.”

How does a learning disability affect someone?

A person with a learning disability can experience stigma and poor outcomes across a wide range of issues including accessing their human rights, education, employment, relationships, and family life.

See the diagram below:



Common challenges faced by people with learning disabilities



About the law

The Equality Act (2010) requires changes to be made to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities; these are called reasonable adjustments. These adjustments level the playing field for people who would otherwise face an unfair uphill struggle to get the services that other people may take for granted.

Examples of reasonable adjustments include:

- ▶ Arranging support to understand information and communicate feelings and decisions;
- ▶ Allowing more time for appointments;
- ▶ Changing the places and times where appointments happen.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) also requires public organisations to take measures to ensure people with disabilities have:

- ▶ freedom from exploitation, violence, and abuse;
- ▶ equal access, to the physical environment, to information and communications, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public;
- ▶ support to make their own decisions;
- ▶ their family life respected;
- ▶ equality before the law without discrimination.

How to use this toolkit

Through our research and co-production work, we identified four priority areas for improvement. These are:

- ▶ **Priority 1:** Fairness informed practice
- ▶ **Priority 2:** Decision-making
- ▶ **Priority 3:** Peer support
- ▶ **Priority 4:** Collaboration and co-production

Each section is structured around these key areas of practice, using the Think-Ask-Act-Repeat model.

Managers may focus on strategic planning, policy alignment, and team processes.

Frontline staff may focus on direct support, practice, communication approaches, and accessibility.



Not every question or resource will be relevant to every role, please engage with the content most applicable to your work.

If a section or statement does not apply to your service (e.g., if you do not provide face-to-face support), you can note this in your improvement plan.

The toolkit invites you to follow our four-step model to reflect on and improve your practice. This four-step journey looks like this:

Think

To improve the accessibility of your service, it helps to know what works and what does not. The first step is therefore to be informed.

THINK describes the lived experiences of victim/survivors with learning disabilities and the services who support them, as well as including examples of good practice.

Ask

The second step is to ASK yourself what you are doing well and where you could improve.

This involves completing a self-assessment. Here you will be presented with a series of good practice statements. You will then have the option to say whether your organisation delivers this good practice ALWAYS, SOMETIMES or NEVER.

Act

The third step is to ACT.

Once you have completed the self-assessment, the next step is to plan what actions you need to take to improve your service.

All the statements you responded to will automatically be transferred to your improvement plan, along with suggested actions you can take to make improvements. You can find your improvement plan under [My account](https://equallysafe.scll.org.uk/account/) (<https://equallysafe.scll.org.uk/account/>) , or in the ACT section.



Repeat

The last step is to repeat THINK, ASK, ACT to ensure continuous improvement. Here are some tips on how to do this effectively:

- ▶ Give yourself time to implement your improvement plan before reviewing it. This might be 6-12 months.
- ▶ Make sure you have a monitoring system in place to measure your improvements so they don't go unrecognised.
- ▶ Celebrate your improvements.