Introduction

The Equally Safe and Supported training resources have been designed to make support and justice accessible to women with learning disabilities who have experienced gender-based violence, by complimenting the Equally Safe and Supported Self-Assessment Toolkit.

Who is this toolkit for?

These resources are 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 resources help organisations to reflect on, assess, and improve their understanding of how to support women with learning disabilities who have experienced gender-based violence. It supports a rights-based, inclusive approach to service development and support.

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

- Remove barriers to support for women with learning disabilities.
- Build staff confidence and awareness.
- Take forward practical ideas and actions to make your services more accessible to women with learning disabilities who have been affected by gender-based violence.

What do we mean by learning disabilities?

'Do you have a learning disability?' This isn't always a simple question and asking it the wrong way can do harm.

Some women will tell you they have a learning disability if you ask. Others won't. Their reasons are deeply personal and often tied to past experience of being spoken down to, not being believed, or even having their children taken away.

'It's not the fact you've got a learning disability – it's how they treat you differently when they find out. They speak to you differently, like you're not an adult anymore'

Some women say yes because they want the right support – like clearer explanations or help filling out forms. Others say no because they don't trust how they will be treated. Some fear that services will pass on information to social work or put their families at risk.

'I didn't tell them. I was scared. But then when they didn't meet my needs, I knew it was my fault – not theirs'

'They [social worker] told me I'd be choosing to be homeless if I left him. If I'd gone to Women's Aid or whoever, Social Work would've got involved and they'd have given my kids to him – just because he had a house'

What you can do instead:

- **Start with trust** – if a woman doesn't tell you she has a learning disability, it might be because she's scared, not because she doesn't have one
- **Get to know the person first** – take your time, let her lead
- **Avoid direct labels too early** – Instead of asking 'Do you have a learning disability?' ask:
- Would you like this in Easy Read?
- Would you like me to explain that in a different way?
- **Show that you are a safe place** – Display a poster, add a note on your website, letting people know your service is learning disability friendly
- **Offer information in different ways as standard** – not just when someone discloses disability
- **Be aware of generational differences** – Some women will have lived their whole lives hiding a learning disability; some will have grown up in households where private business 'stayed at home'; some will be more open but may not have the language to explain due to poor education and low expectation of relationships

'I used to be embarrassed to say I had a learning disability. But then I realised it meant I could get the right support, and that changed things'

'This isn't about ticking a box. It's about creating safety so women can tell you what they need, and trust that you'll listen – without judging'

You can find out more about what a learning disability is here: what is a learning disability? *(https://equallysafe.scld.org.uk/toolkit/introduction-2/what-is-a-learning-disability-4/)* and here: how does a learning disability affect someone? *(https://equallysafe.scld.org.uk/toolkit/introduction-2/how-does-a-learning-disability-affect-someone-5/)*

What is in the resources?

The resources contain 4 modules. These are:

- Fairness-informed practice
- Supported decision-making
- Peer support
- Collaboration and co-production.

Within each module you will find:

- Evidence of best practice in removing the barrier's women with learning disabilities face when seeking support and justice for gender-based violence.
- Learning activities including reflection exercises and suggestions to help you get the most out of these activities.
- Animated examples of good and poor practice.
- Videos from subject experts including women with lived experience of learning disabilities and gender-based violence.
- Recommendations for practitioners.
- Recommendations for organisations.
- A quiz.
- Further information and resources.

How to use the resources

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 activity or resource will be relevant to every role, please engage with the content most applicable to your work.

Need some help? boxes

In these sections, we have suggested some prompt questions to help you reflect on your practices. These are not definitive. Think about them in terms of your personal life, your organisation, and the resources you have available.

True/false statements

In these sections, you will be invited to read some statements and choose whether you think they are true or false.

Once you have selected your answer, we will explain why the answer you gave is correct or incorrect.

Animations

The animation in these modules contains the voices of women with learning disabilities and is based on their lived experiences of seeking support and justice for gender-based violence.

Quiz

Each module has a quiz at the end where you can test your learning by completing a short true or false quiz.