

Is it good enough?

A guide to working with parents with learning disabilities

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AGENDA

1. Good enough – the term
2. Who are parents with learning disabilities?
3. What does the law tell us?
4. Tips for good practice

Good enough – the term

- 1950s Donald Winnicott concept
- “Good enough” better than perfectionism
- Focus on supporting families
- “Good enough” a measure for no children’s services involvement?

We are not looking for perfection

Re L (Care: Threshold Criteria) [2007] 1 FLR 2050:

(Hedley, J)

“Society must be willing to tolerate very diverse standards of parenting, including the eccentric, the barely adequate and the inconsistent. It follows too that children will inevitably have both very different experiences of parenting and very unequal consequences flowing from it.

It means that some children will experience disadvantage and harm, while others flourish in atmospheres of loving securing and emotional stability. These are the consequences of our fallible humanity and it is not the provenance of the state to spare children all the consequences of defective parenting. In any event, it simply could not be done.”

It can be good enough...

Re B (A Child) (Care Proceedings: Threshold Criteria) [2013] UKSC 33, [2013] 2 FLR 1075:

(Baroness Hale):

“We are all frail human beings, with our fair share of unattractive character traits, which sometimes manifest themselves in bad behaviours, which may be copied by our children. But the State does not and cannot take away the children of all the people who commit crimes, who abuse alcohol or drugs, who suffer from physical or mental illnesses or disabilities, or who espouse antisocial political or religious beliefs.”

Parents with learning disabilities

- More likely to have children removed from their care
- Focus on diagnosis to determine level of intervention required
- Often require support with parenting over a longer period
- Children in their care often have higher support needs

(Working Together with parents Network (WTPN) update on the 2016 good practice guidance on working with parents with a learning disability)

When is a parent a parent with a learning disability?

‘Learning disability’ includes the presence of:

- A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence) with;
- A reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning);
- which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development.

(Valuing People 2001)

But the guidance tells us...

“Lack of a formal diagnosis of learning disability may affect a parent’s eligibility for some services but, ultimately, a parent who presents as having difficulty with, or being unable to, read, write, budget, deal with numbers or abstract concepts, process information, retain and apply it etc. will almost certainly require support to enable them to raise their children safely and well”.

*(Working Together with parents Network (WTPN)
update on the 2016 good practice guidance on
working with parents with a learning disability)*

Good practice guidance key principles

1. accessible information and communication
2. clear and co-ordinated referral and assessment processes and eligibility criteria
3. support designed to meet the needs of parents and children based on assessment of their needs and strengths
4. long-term support, if necessary
5. access to independent advocacy

Parenting with support

Re D (A Child) (Care Proceedings: Adoption) [2016]
EWFC 1, [2017] 4 WLR 55
(Munby, J)

“parenting with support must move from the
margins to mainstream in court determinations”

What is *Re D* about?

- Both parents with learning disabilities
- 4 year-old son
- Spent 16 weeks in residential setting
- Moved to own accommodation with extensive package of support
- Final care order made in 2012
- Local Authority sought to remove in 2014
- Care plan for adoption

Re D continued...

- Required good enough parenting for this particular child
- Good enough for him required a greater level of input
- Gap between what parents could achieve and what the child needed was too great even with most extensive support
- Would become parenting by professionals/other carers – ‘substitute parenting’

WTPN Good Practice Guidance

- Early identification of parents with learning difficulties is essential.
- Importance of liaising with other professionals
- Assessment under the Care Act 2014
- Information in a way the person can understand
- Focus on the things that can be changed and improved

Other relevant case law (1)

Nottinghamshire County Council v XX and others [2022]
EWFC 10, [2022] 4 WLR 60

- WTPN guidance to be followed
- timely referral to adult social care
- if child on child protection plan parents should have their own advocate as soon as possible
- support distilled into one document – what is available and how often, timescales and who is responsible

Other relevant case law (2)

A Local Authority v G (Parent with learning disability) [2017] EWFC B94

- 3 children, one parent with a learning disability.
- Focus on capacity to change
- Local Authority seeking care and placement orders
- Necessary support package amounts to substituted parenting

Tips for good practice

- Think about what support parents need early on
- Get your referral through to adult services (with consent)
- Think about your communication – language, format and explanation
- For your analysis ensure you have considered the extent of the support needed
- Remember – don't set the bar too high – it's got to be “good enough”

Thank you for listening.

Any questions?



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