

Early Indicators of Concern in Residential Support Services for People with Learning Disabilities

A Guide

The *Abuse in Care?* Project

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Introduction

This guide has been developed following detailed research into known cases where abuse took place in residential support services for people with learning disabilities. Analysis of these cases produced a series of indicators of concern and found that these indicators fell into six distinct areas. Abuse or neglect was found to be associated with situations where practitioners had identified a number of indicators of concern, spread over a range of these six areas. The findings from this project suggest that we should be most concerned when such a **spread or range** of indicators is identified.

This Guide presents the six areas of concern and gives some of the commonly occurring examples reported by practitioners during the research. There is then a further sheet that can be used to collect information and reflect on the risks that might be present in a service. You can access detailed accounts of the areas of concern and the research [here](#).

The Guide can be used in one of three ways. An individual can use the sheets to record and structure concerns. A group of people, including families and professionals can use the sheets to collect concerns about a service from different sources. A team from a service can use the sheets to review and reflect on their own service. We suggest a simple but essential process:

Record - Reflect - Talk to Someone – ACT

There are two other important notes:

1. A pattern of concerns is *not proof* of abuse and *abuse can happen when concerns aren't apparent*. This is a guide to help people to record, reflect, talk to someone and ACT. It is based on evidence and experience from examples where abuse did occur and these indicators were present but not acted upon.
2. The use of this guide does not replace listening directly to people in services. On the contrary, it gives an important reason to listen more closely before and after concerns are raised.

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Early Indicators of Concern – Learning Disability Services

Examples from the Research		
<p>1. Concerns about management and leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Manager can't or won't make decisions or take responsibility for the service • The Manager doesn't ensure that staff are doing their job properly • The Manager is often not available • There is a high turnover of staff or staff shortages • The Manager does not inform Social Services that they are unable to meet the needs of specific service users 	<p>2. Concerns about staff skills, knowledge and practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff appear to lack knowledge / understanding of what it means to have a learning disability • Members of staff appear to lack skills in communicating with individuals and interpreting their interactions • Members of staff use judgemental language about the people they support • Members of staff are controlling and offer few choices • Communication across the staff team is poor • Abusive behaviours between residents are not acknowledged or addressed 	<p>3. Concerns about residents' behaviours and wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents' behaviours change – perhaps becoming withdrawn or anxious • Residents' communications and interactions change – increasing or stopping for example • Residents' needs appear to change • Residents' skills change – self-care or continence management for example • Residents behave very differently with different staff or in different environments e.g. day centre
<p>4. Concerns about the service resisting the involvement of external people and isolating individuals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is little input from outsiders/professionals • Individuals have little contact with family or other people who are not staff • Appointments are repeatedly cancelled • Members of staff do not maintain links between individuals and people outside of the service e.g. family, friends, • Management and/or staff demonstrate hostile or negative attitudes to visitors, questions and criticisms • It's difficult to meet residents privately 	<p>5. Concerns about the way services are planned and delivered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents' needs are not being met as agreed and identified in care plans • Agreed staffing levels are not being provided • Staff do not carry out actions recommended by external professionals • The service is unsuitable for some residents but no better option is available • The resident group appears to be incompatible • The diversity of support needs of the group is very great 	<p>6. Concerns about the quality of basic care and the environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of care of personal possessions • Support for residents to maintain personal hygiene is poor • Essential records are not kept effectively • The environment is dirty/smelly • There are few activities or things to do • Residents' dignity is not being promoted and supported

Early Indicators of Concern – Learning Disability Services

Name of Service

1. Concerns about management and leadership

2. Concerns about staff skills, knowledge and practice

3. Concerns about residents' behaviours and wellbeing

3. Concerns about the service resisting the involvement of external people and isolating individuals

5. Concerns about the way services are planned and delivered

6. Concerns about the quality of basic care and the environment