



Who are Parents with Learning Difficulties?

Most parents with learning difficulties (intellectual or borderline intellectual disability) fall into one of the following three groups.

1. Firstly, there are those who grew up in institutions but now live in the community and have had a family of their own.
2. The second group includes those who were never institutionalized but have received special services for persons with intellectual disabilities for most of their lives. These parents are often clients of Developmental Disability Services.
3. The third group is known as the 'hidden majority'. These parents typically have mild to borderline intellectual disabilities. Many were classified as 'slow learners' and received special support with learning at school. However, after leaving school, most are not labeled and do not receive any ongoing services.

Julie Strike, a mother with intellectual disability and a self-advocate, explains that parents with intellectual disabilities are just the same as other parents, only more vulnerable:

1. **“We just want what everyone else wants”**; love, acceptance, satisfying relationships, and a family of our own. However, when persons with intellectual disabilities want to start a family of their own, they often meet with resistance from both professionals and significant others.
2. **“Parenting is no walk in the park”**; it takes a lot of balancing, adjusting and nurturing. All parents need support from their family and their community in order to raise their children. Parents with intellectual disabilities are no different. However, parents with intellectual disabilities are more likely to lack this support.



3. **“All parents (not just parents with intellectual disabilities) have stuff to learn”**; having a child does not come with a parenting manual. However, learning opportunities are often more limited for parents with intellectual disabilities, due to low literacy, a lack of social support, and to services being ill-equipped to accommodate their learning needs.

4. **Parenting is tougher when you have limited resources**: The things that make parenting tough for parents with intellectual disabilities are things that would make parenting tough for any parent. Parents with intellectual disabilities all too often have to contend with past experiences of abuse and victimization, and with past and present experiences of poverty and poor health.

Further Reading

IASSID Special Interest Research Group on Parents and Parenting with Intellectual Disabilities. (2008). Parents labeled with Intellectual Disability: Position of the IASSID SIRG on Parents and Parenting with Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 21, 296-307.

Strike, J., & McConnell, D. (2002) Parents with Intellectual Disability: Just the Same, Only Different. *Interaction* 15 (4), 11 – 15.

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