

LEARNING DISABILITIES

Adults with learning disabilities who also experience mental illness may be referred to the Trust's Learning Disability Service, for specialist diagnosis & treatment. This service includes psychiatry, speech & language therapy, physiotherapy & specialist community learning disability nursing. These services are provided in community settings, including the family home, social services day & residential facilities. The service also works in conjunction with GP's, Social Workers, and alongside paid & unpaid carers. Learning Disability does not include those who have a 'Learning Difficulty', which is a more broadly defined education term. Generally speaking, the IQ will fall below 70.

Somerset Partnership NHS & Social Care Trust's Learning Disability Service can be contacted on 01823 423126/423127

For help, information & support for carers in Somerset, contact Learning Disability Carers Coordinator, Rachel Mason on 07919 165162

For further advice on anything to do with learning disability, contact the National Learning Disability Helpline free (See Useful Contacts)

Autistic Spectrum Disorder & Asperger syndrome

Up to 1/3 of people with a learning disability are thought to have an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects the way a person communicates & relates to people around them. They experience difficulties with everyday social situations & interactions. Their ability to develop friendships is generally limited, as is their capacity to understand other peoples emotional expression.

There is also a condition called Asperger syndrome.

Asperger syndrome is a form of autism, used to describe people at the 'higher functioning' end of the autistic spectrum.

People with Asperger syndrome find it more difficult to read the signals which most of us take for granted. As a result, they find it more difficult to communicate & interact with others. They often have fewer problems with language than those with autism – often speaking fluently, though their words can sometimes sound formal or stilted.

People with Asperger syndrome do not usually have the accompanying learning disabilities associated with autism; in fact they are often of average or above average intelligence.

They often develop an almost obsessive interest in a hobby or collecting. Memorising facts about a special subject is common - such as train timetables.

They also often prefer routines in daily life, & any unexpected alteration or delay to this routine can make them anxious or upset.

The causes of autism & Asperger syndrome are still being investigated. There is strong evidence to suggest that Asperger syndrome can be caused by a variety of physical factors, all of which affect brain development - it is not due to emotional deprivation or the way a person has been brought up.

Children with Asperger syndrome become adults with Asperger syndrome. Much can be taught to develop the basic skills needed for everyday life, such as how to communicate appropriately with people.

Because the condition is not as marked as the condition of people with autism, Asperger's may not be diagnosed for a long time. This can mean that their particular needs may go unrecognised, and parents may blame themselves, or worse still, blame their children for their unusual behaviour.

The Trust has a dedicated team, which specialises in the diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome.

Contact the Asperger Syndrome Consultancy Service on 01278 426203

The National Autistic Society (NAS) is the UK's leading charity for people with an autistic spectrum disorder. The NAS champions the rights & interests of all people with autism & Asperger syndrome, & those who carer for them.

(for contact numbers and addresses see Useful Contacts and the Book List)

Adult ADHD

Adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a continuation of ADHD from childhood. The main difference is in the type of difficulties & symptoms experienced.

Work lives & relationships prove troublesome, & there is a likelihood to feel restless or 'on edge', & perhaps acting impulsively on occasions. A typical ADHD adult may have gone through life being constantly misunderstood.

Smoking, drinking alcohol and, in some cases, drug taking are also

more common among ADHD adults.

As an adult, getting a diagnosis of ADHD is not straightforward. ADHD adults will have experienced their symptoms for most of their life and, despite frustration, are likely to have reluctantly accepted them as part of their unique make up.

In most instances, its family, friends or work colleagues who instigate a visit to a doctor. Seeing a GP is the first port of call, and may be followed up by appointments with a psychiatrist or other specialist.

Although there is no complete cure for ADHD, a number of treatments can significantly help with the management & control of symptoms. The main treatments for adult ADHD are: behavioural therapy, psychotherapy and medication.

Further information is available from www.addiss.co.uk/adults. They also publish ADHD News & have a comprehensive book/video store.

(see Useful Contacts and the Book List)

Tourette Syndrome

Tourette syndrome symptoms generally appear before the age of 18. First symptoms are usually mild facial tics, such as eye blinking. A range of symptoms can also develop, from 'motor' tics that affect the face/neck muscles, through to those that affect other areas of the body & limbs. 'Vocal' tics can also be present, ranging from a simple clearing of the throat, through to grunts, sniffing noises & barks. Obscene words may be used, alongside repetition of the words of others, or of their own words.

There is a spectrum of Tourette syndrome, & other, more debilitating aspects may be present – such as obsessional compulsive disorder (OCD), learning disabilities, and depression. The syndrome does not affect a person's IQ, & they have a normal life span. Males are affected 3 or 4 times more often than females. Although there is no cure, there are treatments available.

The cause of the syndrome is not known, but is probably caused in part by abnormal genes, that alter how the brain uses its chemical transmitters. Some people benefit from medication, if the symptoms are of a more severe nature.

Further information is available from: www.tsa.org.uk & www.tourettes.me.uk