Families, Friends and Relationships

People not seeing their family is a big problem for many of us. The survey shows how big a problem it is. There are lots of reasons for people with learning difficulties not seeing their families including past policies. It is important to make sure that doesn’t happen from now on.

Too many parents with learning difficulties don’t look after their own children. Most who do live with parents or relatives. In our experience lack of support and poor support is the reason for this unequal treatment happening. This is also true of people with learning difficulties who are carers. The survey shows that half of carers with learning difficulties get no help with caring or want more.

We are worried about how many people with learning difficulties don’t see a friend from one year to the next. Friendships need to be encouraged and supported – to help form them and maintain them. This issue is not new to people with learning difficulties. People have spoken up about this over a number of years.

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In this part of the interview we asked people about how much contact they had with their family and friends. We also asked people living in private households whether they were a carer for someone else.
Contact with Families

We asked people who were not living with members of their family how often they saw them.

- One in ten (11%) saw them every day or nearly every day.
- One in three (33%) saw them every week or nearly every week.
- Just over one in three (37%) saw them every year or nearly every year.
- Just under one in five (19%) never saw members of their family.

The same questions were asked in the Millennium Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (PSE). Figure 16 shows how much contact adults had with members of their family in our survey and the PSE survey.

![Bar chart showing contact with family members](chart.png)

Figure 16: How Much Contact People Had With Members Of Their Family That They Were Not Living With
This figure shows that people with learning difficulties had much less contact with members of their family that they were not living with. It is important to remember, however, that people with learning difficulties were much more likely to be still living with their families.

We wanted to find out which people were more likely to see their families at least (or nearly) every week. The following list starts with the things that were most important and ends with the things that were least important. People were more likely to see their families at least (or nearly) every week if they:

- Lived in a private household or accommodation provided under the Supporting People programme
- Were younger
- Lived in more affluent areas

Caring for Children

One in fifteen of the people we interviewed (7%) had children. Of the people who had children, just over half (52%) looked after their children. Women were slightly more likely to be a parent than men (9% compared to 6%). But men and women were just as likely to be looking after their children if they had any (52% of women, 53% of men).

Nearly all people who were looking after their children were living in private households (98%). Of the people living in private households who were looking after their children:

- Nearly half were living with other relatives (43%)
- Just over one in three were living with partners (34%)
- Nearly one in seven were living with their parents (15%)
- a few (8%) were living alone.
Over two in three people (70%) were very happy looking after their children. Just over one in five were quite happy looking after their children (22%). A few (9%) were not happy looking after their children.

Most people (81%) had help in looking after their children. The most common sources of help were

- The person’s partner (67%)
- The person’s parent (21%)
- Another relative (16%)
- A support worker (8%)
- Social Services (7%)
- A friend (4%)

One in five people (21%) would like more help in looking after their children. If they wanted more help, people said they would turn to

- Their parent (34%)
- Their partner (31%)
- Another relative (24%)
- Social services (10%)
- A support worker (4%)
- A friend (4%)

Caring for Adults

We asked some people whether they helped to care for anyone who was elderly, ill or had a disability. The people we asked were people who were living in private households with other people.
One in four people (26%) said they lived with someone who was elderly, ill or had a disability. We asked these people about whether they helped care for this person.

Over one in three (37%) said they did help care for them. This means that one in ten (10%) people living in private households helped care for another adult who was elderly, ill or had a disability.

They were most likely to be caring for

- A parent (67%)
- Another relative (16%)
- Their partner (13%)
- A friend (2%)

The most common caring activities they did were

- Cleaning (60%)
- Shopping (57%)
- Cooking (39%)
- Washing/ironing (32%)
- Personal care (23%)

One in three people with learning difficulties who were also carers (32%) said they did not receive any help with their caring responsibilities. If they did receive help it was likely to be from

- A parent (56%)
- Another relative (56%)
- A friend (3%)
- Social Services (3%)
- A support worker (2%)
- Their partner (2%)
Nearly everyone (98%) said they were quite or very happy with the support they received. But quite a few people (18%) said they would like more support.

We asked people who were carers who they would turn to for help in caring. The most likely people they said they would turn to were

- A parent (43%)
- Another relative (33%)
- Their partner (7%)
- Social services (6%)
- A friend (5%)
- A support worker (4%)

We wanted to find out which people were more likely to be caring for another adult. The following list starts with the things that were most important and ends with the things that were least important. People were more likely to be caring for another adult if they:

- Had lower support needs
- Lived in more deprived areas
- Were poor
- Were older
- Saw members of their family less often
- Had better general health

Friends

We asked people if (other than their family) they had friends they liked to talk to or do things with.

Just over two out of three people (69%) had contact with friends at least once a year. Nearly one in three (31%) said
they did not have any contact with friends. One in twenty people (5%) had no friends and also did not see anyone from their family.

- Over two out of three people (69%) saw friends who also had learning difficulties.
- One in four people (25%) saw friends who did not have learning difficulties.

Figure 17 shows how often people saw their friends. It shows that the friend’s people saw often were friends who also had learning difficulties.

Figure 17: How Often People Saw Their Friends

Questions were also asked in the Millennium Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (PSE) about how often people had contact with their friends.26 Figure 18 shows how much
contact adults had with friends in our survey and the PSE survey. In this figure we have combined friends who do and do not have learning difficulties. (The PSE survey just asked about friends in general).

This figure shows that people with learning difficulties had much less contact with friends that people in Britain in general. In particular it shows that many more people with learning difficulties have no contact at all with friends than other people in Britain.

We wanted to find out which people were more likely to see their friends who also have learning difficulties at least (or nearly) every week. The following list starts with the things that were most important and ends with the things that were least important.
People were more likely to see their friends who also have learning difficulties at least (or nearly) every week if they:

- Saw friends who did not have learning difficulties more often
- Did a wider range of community-based leisure activities
- Lived in either a Registered Residential Care Home or were supported under the Supporting People programme
- Had higher support needs
- Had better general health
- Did not have a paid job
- Were not poor
- Did not have a long-standing illness or disability
- Did not belong to a minority ethnic community
- Were women

We also wanted to find out which people were more likely to see their friends who did not have learning difficulties at least (or nearly) every week. The following list starts with the things that were most important and ends with the things that were least important. People were more likely to see their friends who did not have learning difficulties at least (or nearly) every week if they:

- Saw friends with learning difficulties more often
- Had lower support needs
- Were younger
- Lived in either a Registered Residential Care Home or were supported under the Supporting People programme
- Lived in more affluent areas
- Had a paid job
- Saw members of their family more often
Barriers to Relationships

Finally, we asked people whether they could see their family and friends as often as they wanted.

Nearly one in three people (30%) said they would like to see their friends more often. We asked these people what stopped them seeing their family and friends as often as they wanted. The most common things they said were:

- They live too far away or problems with travelling (44%)
- Not enough time (21%)
- Lack of money (13%)
- Not always enough support (11%)
- They or I am too busy (10%)
- Can not get out or too ill (4%)
- Afraid of going out (4%)