



A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

# Employing Someone With a Learning Disability

Everything you need to know — from your first questions to making your first hire.

This guide is for any employer who is curious, cautious, or simply wants to understand what employing someone with a learning disability actually involves. It's built on real research, and it's designed to give you straight answers.

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4 What will it cost? · 5 How it works in practice · 6 Your next steps



FROM STEP AND STONE

## You're already asking the right question.

The fact that you're reading this means you're open to the idea — and that's the most important first step. Many employers share exactly the same questions you do: about performance, costs, safety, and day-to-day practicalities.

This guide addresses every one of them, honestly and based on evidence. The research is clear: when the right support is in place, employing someone with a learning disability is good for the individual, good for your team, and good for your business.

### WHAT IS A LEARNING DISABILITY?

A learning disability affects the way a person understands information and learns new things. It is a lifelong condition. People with a learning disability can and do work successfully across many industries — with the right role and support in place.

## Why Should I Consider This?

Inclusive hiring isn't just the right thing to do — there's a compelling practical case too.

**Higher**

attendance vs average

**Better**

punctuality records

**Longer**

average job retention

**Lower**

staff turnover costs

Source: Mencap / Beyer (2017) systematic review of employer research

Workers with learning disabilities have been consistently rated higher than their non-disabled colleagues on attendance, punctuality, accepting authority, and being well-received by customers and the public. These aren't anecdotes — they come from employer surveys across multiple independent studies.

- Access a wider talent pool at a time when recruitment is hard
- Retain staff for longer, reducing costly turnover
- Build a workforce that reflects your community
- Improve your reputation as a fair and inclusive employer
- Boost team morale and wider company culture

*"Employers who have employed people with a learning disability in the past report significantly more favourable attitudes toward doing so again — not out of obligation, but because it worked."*

## What Does the Research Actually Show?

Let's look at the areas employers worry about most.

### Productivity

Multiple comparative studies have found no significant difference in productivity between disabled and non-disabled workers. The key factors are a well-matched role and clear expectations — the same things that make any employee successful.

### Health & Safety

Research shows no significant difference in health and safety incidents between people with a learning disability and non-disabled workers. When people are employed through sensible support processes, the risk is no greater — and in many cases lower.

### Loyalty & Commitment

Studies consistently show improved loyalty and commitment from employees with learning disabilities. They tend to be highly motivated workers who value their opportunity and bring that energy to their role every day.

## Let's Address Your Concerns Directly

Here are the most common concerns employers raise — and what the evidence actually shows.

### MYTH

"They won't be able to do the job."

### FACT

There is no significant difference in productivity when roles are well-matched and expectations are clear. Workers with learning disabilities perform at least as well as non-disabled peers across many job types.

### MYTH

"It will cost me a lot to make adjustments."

### FACT

Most reasonable adjustments are low cost — and many are completely cost-neutral. Clearer instructions, adjusted duties, or flexible scheduling rarely require financial outlay.

### MYTH

"It's a health and safety risk."

### FACT

Research shows no significant increase in safety incidents. When employed through supported processes, people with learning disabilities represent no greater risk than other workers — and in some cases less of one.

### MYTH

"I don't have a job they could do."

### FACT

Supported employment specialists can help identify or adapt roles that match the individual's strengths. Many employers are surprised by what works with the right adjustments in place.

# What Will It Actually Cost Me?

This is often the question employers want answered most — so here it is straight.

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Workplace adjustments</b>        | Usually low or zero cost. Examples: written task lists, adjusted break times, reallocated duties. Most require no financial investment at all.    |
| <b>Personal support on the job</b>  | Provided through the supported employment model — typically by a job coach, not the employer. Support reduces over time as the person settles in. |
| <b>Training</b>                     | Often minimal additional time. Learning may be slower initially, but once tasks are learned, performance is consistently reliable.                |
| <b>Insurance &amp; compensation</b> | No evidence of increased claims. Research shows no significant difference in safety incidents with appropriate support in place.                  |

**THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT MODEL**

Supported employment is a personalised approach that matches the right person to the right role, provides a job coach to support both employee and employer during the transition, and gradually reduces that support as the person becomes confident and independent. You are not expected to manage this alone.

## What Does Good Look Like?

Employers who've had the best outcomes share a few things in common.

**1**

### **Match the role to the person**

Work with a supported employment specialist to identify tasks that suit the individual's strengths. This isn't about lowering expectations — it's about finding the right fit.

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**2**

### **Set clear expectations**

Provide written task lists, consistent routines, and clear instructions. Workers with learning disabilities often excel when they know exactly what is expected of them.

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**3**

### **Use the support available**

Job coaches and employment support workers are there to help. You don't need to have all the answers — ask questions and use the expertise around you.

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**4**

### **Give it time**

Initial learning may take a little longer. Employers who saw the best results invested patience early on — and were rewarded with exceptional loyalty and reliability.

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**5**

### **Include them in the team**

Social inclusion matters. Employees with learning disabilities thrive when genuinely part of the team — invited to breaks, included in communications, valued by colleagues.

## Your Next Steps

You don't need to have everything figured out before you take the first step.

- **Have a conversation.** Speak to a member of Step and Stone's work transition team and we can walk you through the process and answer your specific questions.
- **Consider a work experience placement.** Unpaid work experience is a positive first step. It lets both sides test the fit before a formal offer — and builds confidence for everyone involved.
- **Think about what roles you have.** You may be surprised. Many jobs can be adapted to suit someone with a learning disability. A supported employment specialist can help you look at your business with fresh eyes.
- **Talk to your team.** Inclusive culture starts before the hire. Brief your team, answer their questions, and frame this as an opportunity — because that's exactly what it is.



### A FINAL WORD FROM STEP AND STONE

The employers who've done this — who've taken the step and hired someone with a learning disability — are consistently the most positive about doing it again. Not because they felt they had to, but because it worked. For them, for their teams, and for the person they gave a chance.

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*Research basis: Loo (2004); Beyer / Mencap (2017); British Journal of Nursing (2002); Ineson (2014). This guide was produced by Step and Stone to support inclusive employment.*