



'Relationships and Sexual Health' Report of the Lewisham People's Parliament December 2025

This report is written in plain English

The Lewisham People's Parliament

The People's Parliament is here to represent the views of people with learning disabilities who live in Lewisham. It is a project run by Lewisham Speaking Up and it is currently funded by the City Bridge Foundation.

There are six Lewisham People's Parliament reps who are elected by other people with learning disabilities. They are paid above the London Living Wage for their work with Lewisham Speaking Up.



Background to this report on Relationships

This Lewisham People's Parliament was held to find out what people with learning disabilities think about relationships and sexual health.

We talk about relationships and sexual health in groups such as our monthly big group, zoom group, men's group and women's group. Earlier this year, Turning Point's sexual health team came to our men's and women's groups to talk about sexual health and contraception.

In 2024, Lewisham Speaking Up became a member of the Lewisham Safeguarding Adults Board. We know that people with learning disabilities and autistic people are more likely to experience domestic abuse in relationships. Our 1:1 advocates have supported people to report abuse or to safely leave abusive relationships. In October 2024 we held an accessible safeguarding training session, where 15 people with learning disabilities were trained to be aware of the signs of abuse and what to do about it.

The Parliament meeting



Ife chairing the meeting

The meeting was held in the Lewisham Council Chamber. We would like to thank Lewisham Council for letting us have the rooms for our meeting.

We invited people to join us on the 5th December and 53 people with learning disabilities came in person.

This included guests from Lambeth Assembly, Advocacy In Greenwich, Brighter Horizons, Every Story and Leemore Day Centre. We would like to thank them for joining us.

The meeting was chaired by People's Parliament rep Ifeoma Orjiekwe.

Ife welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some ground rules. Then he made a speech to open the Parliament.

Ife said that we would be talking about:

- What do we need to have healthy relationships?
- What support do we need for our sexual health?
- How are relationships represented in the media?

Ife said that sexual health is important because it is part of your mental health. It's important to know you are physically healthy, but also that you are taking part in sexual activities safely and not putting yourself at risk of harm and abuse.

She said that romantic relationships are important and everyone should be supported to look for them if they want to. But Ife also said that they are not everything in life. It's painful to lose a romantic relationship but it is important that people remember all the other great things they have. It is also okay to wait until you are ready, or to decide not to have romantic relationships at all.

She asked everyone to keep an open mind, and said it's okay if it is a difficult thing to talk about. She said it is okay to set out of the room, or ask someone to slow down or use different words to explain something.

Ife then introduced our first guest speaker, Dr Claire Bates from Supported Loving.

Claire told us about [the Sexuality and Relationships Rights Charter](#). It was made with the Tizard Centre, the National Development Team for Inclusion, and My Life My Choice. They had found that lots of people didn't know their rights around sex and relationships.

Claire explained that everyone has the right to make decisions about their relationships, sexuality and sex life. If somebody does not have capacity to make all of their own decisions, they should be supported to have as much choice and freedom as possible.



Claire giving her presentation

Claire said we all have the same rights:

- I have the right to intimacy (feeling close to someone), relationships or sex, even if people, like my parents or staff, do not agree with my choice of partner
- I have the right to choose my own partner no matter who they are, what they look like or what they believe in.
- I have the right to have sex if I choose to, whether I am in a relationship or not (as long as both people agree)
- I have the right to get married or have a civil partnership
- I have the right to not be in a relationship
- I have the right to be taken seriously
- I have the right to privacy at home with a partner
- I have the right to sex and relationships support that I understand
- I can choose what contraception is right for me
- I have the right to express my gender and sexuality
 - I can dress in any way
 - I have the right to masturbate, use legal pornography and sex toys if I want

Claire said that with our rights, there are also some responsibilities

- We need to understand consent, and our partner needs to be able to tell us they agree using words or signs
- We need to understand about sexually transmitted infections, and how to not spread them to our partner
- We need to make sure everything sexual we do is in a private place
- We need to make sure anyone we do anything sexual with is over 16 years old
- We need to understand that sex between a man and a woman can make a woman pregnant, and we must use contraception if we don't want this

Claire asked us to share this charter with staff and professionals. She said that if our rights are being restricted, we should talk to someone we trust or an advocate.

Claire is running an event called Shout about Sex on the 23rd April in East London. You can book a ticket [here](#) for free!

Then lfe invited our next guests, Megan and Ena from Turning Point

Megan and Emily said that they worked in sexual health, and Turning Point are doing some work with groups that do not get enough sexual health support. One of those groups is people with learning disabilities.

Megan and Emily talked about why it is important to talk about sexual health, even though it might be embarrassing! They said that there are places you can go if you



Megan and Emily giving their speech

have questions or worries, like a sexual health clinic.

Sexual health is important for many reasons, like

- Getting treated if we catch sexually transmitted infections
- Preventing pregnancies we don't want
- Making sure our sex lives make us happy

They said that this is important for all adults to know about sexual health, and have somewhere accessible to go when they need support.

lfe then invited everyone to join one of three workshops:

- A workshop on 'sexual health'
- A workshop on 'healthy relationships'
- A workshop on 'relationships in the media'

Workshop 1 – Sexual Health

This workshop was run by Ena who works for Turning Point and Naz

We talked about different types of contraception

- Condoms and internal condom, which protect from sexually transmitted infections as well as pregnancy
- Vaginal ring
- Coil
- Depo injection
- Combined pill
- Mini pill
- Contraception patch
- Emergency contraception, like the Morning After pill

What do we mean by sexually transmitted infection?

- An infection that you get from sex, including oral sex or sexual touching
- Some are bacteria, and you can take antibiotics to get better
- Some are viral, and they can't always be cured
- People were very scared of HIV/AIDS because many people died from it, but now most people who have HIV don't die from it
- Consent is important and it includes being honest about sexually transmitted infections and contraception

What support do we need with contraception?

- We need to be given all of the options, and the risks of each. People shouldn't make the decision for us
- Contraception isn't just for sex. Sometimes it makes health conditions better like: PCOS, endometriosis, depression or menopausal symptoms. We should have this option even if we don't have sex
- People shouldn't assume we don't have sex
- Men should learn about contraception for women, and women should learn about contraception for men



Workshop 1 feeding back from their discussion

Workshop 2 – Healthy relationships

This workshop was led by Megan from Turning Point

What is a healthy relationship?

- What you want and need being respected
- Being honest, supportive and reliable
- Helping each other in difficult times
- Being gentle and respectful
- Don't take people for granted
- You can see someone as much or as little as you like

What do you have to think about in relationships?

- Finances
- Emotional support
- Social partners
- Communication
- Sexual connection
- Co-caregivers
- Being there through the hard times
- Negative patterns – if they won't stop, walk away

Workshop 3 – relationships in the media

This workshop was led by Lewisham Speaking Up

What does the media mean?

- Newspapers, radio, TV, social media, magazines
- Famous people's relationships are reported in the media
- Dating shows like Love Island, First Dates, Married At First Sight, Naked Attraction, Undateables
- Relationships on soaps like Eastenders and Coronation Street
- People posting about their relationships on social media like Tiktok, Facebook, X, Instagram and YouTube
- Relationships in adverts like coffee adverts. There are often mini stories in adverts

Are relationships you see in the media the same as real life?

- Soaps try to make relationships realistic
- You can get hurt on social media, like getting catfished
- People can take advantage of your finances
- Real life relationships can be boring due to every day routine
- TV relationships have to be exciting to keep people watching
- Relationships on social media aren't realistic. People don't share everything on social media
- You have to be careful of click-bait like "how to attract anyone"

Are people with learning disabilities portrayed having relationships in the media?

- No, not many. The media tend to use people with a physical disability for stories about disability
- People who have learning disabilities usually are shown having relationships with family, not romantic relationships
- People with learning disabilities are not encouraged to have romantic relationships
- Roles on TV for people with learning disabilities are limited, there should be more opportunities

- More people with learning disabilities should be on adverts
- Do not make a drama of people with learning disabilities having a relationship
- We want to see people with learning disabilities having a happy and normal relationship like everyone else

How does the media help you with relationships in real life?

- it teaches you about relationships
- it encourages you to talk about your experiences
- it educated you on the wrong and right way
- media can expose sexual and domestic abuse, and provide help lines
- social media can be judgemental and show harmful things



Workshop 3

Summary

Relationships and sexual health are an important part of our physical and mental health, our confidence and happiness. Everyone should be supported to have relationships if they want to, and to be supported to stay safe and healthy. Some people still assume that people with learning disabilities don't want or can't have healthy relationships and sex.

People talked about their rights around sex and relationships, including the right to choose their own partner, to have privacy, to get information they understand and to make decisions about their relationships. These are the same rights as everyone else.

Sometimes these rights aren't upheld by professionals, or carers of people with learning disabilities.

- People talked about not getting the privacy they want in supported living. Sometimes carers don't let people have sleepovers, or they ask people to leave their door open when they are with a partner or on their own.
- People said that they don't get enough information about contraception and are not supported to get involved in making the decision about what contraception to use.
- People also said that they don't get enough support to have healthy relationships, to learn the signs of abuse or to deal with break-ups.

The media can help by showing people with learning disabilities having healthy and normal relationships. This can educate people about healthy relationships, and it can also stop people making assumptions about people with learning disabilities' relationships. However, people said that relationships on TV and social media aren't very realistic. People with learning disabilities aren't often shown in romantic relationships on TV, and when they are, it is often made into a drama.

- People said they want to see more positive, normal and happy relationships for people with learning disabilities.

Overall, people felt it is important to have accessible information, trusted support and open conversations about relationships and sexual health. People with learning disabilities want their rights to be respected, to be taken seriously and to be included in how support services are designed.

What did people say about the Parliament?

To evaluate the success of the People's Parliament on Transport, we used an accessible method with facial expression stickers.

We asked people with learning disabilities to rate the Parliament by choosing a face sticker. 50 out of 53 people (94%) put up a sticker. This is what they thought about the Parliament meeting:

Stickers	Number of stickers
Yellow smiley face (good)  =	41
Orange unsure face (in the middle)  =	6
Red sad face (bad)  =	3
Total of all stickers  +  +  =	50

What Next?

These are the things that the People's Parliament will do next:

- Send this report to Local Members of Parliament, Lewisham Council, service providers in Lewisham and other people who may be interested
- Present this report to the Lewisham Learning Disability Partnership board and the "Life with Opportunities" subgroup
- Send this report to Learning Disability England and other self-advocacy groups around the country

For more information or to discuss anything to do with this report, contact Lewisham Speaking Up.

Email info@lsup.org.uk

Web lsup.org.uk