

Supporting children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) within your setting

What is PMLD?

The term profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) is a description rather than a diagnosis. PMLD covers a diverse group of children with learning disabilities who have a complex range of difficulties. Children with PMLD have more than one disability, including a profound cognition and learning difference and communication and language difference, often requiring those who know them well to interpret their responses and intent for communication. It is important to consider that reactions and responses may be very subtle and children need to be given time to react.

When supporting children with PMLD frequent communication with their primary caregiver is essential to correctly interpret children's behaviour and ensure their wellbeing. Advice from other professionals supporting the child should also be followed. If you are unsure as to who these are, contact your local care navigator <https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/care-navigation/>

The strategies provided below offer general guidance which support all areas of child development; however, they should be implemented in a way that is personalised to the unique child accordingly. Repetition of strategies and a multi-sensory approach is KEY.

STRATEGIES

Intensive Interaction - an approach to developing interaction and communication between people with complex communication differences and the people around them, focussing on skills such as use of eye contact, vocalisations and taking turns. For example, mirroring positive facial expressions such as smiling, joining in with noises that the child makes. Please see <https://www.intensiveinteraction.org/> for further information.

Cause and Effect using a recordable button device - a simple communicator device such as a recordable button device could be introduced for the child to press during circle time with a pre-recorded of 'Hello'. This is a simple way of supporting children to understand that their actions can carry meaning.

Objects of Reference - these are objects where special meanings are attached to specific items, people, or places. For children with PMLD, this can really help them to engage with the world around them and communicate their likes and dislikes. Simply show the object to the child or let them hold/feel it and follow this up straight away with the activity or thing it represents. For example, you might symbolise the playground with a patch of artificial grass that children can touch, feel, and engage with. Use the **same, simple vocabulary** when presenting the object each time



Contact us:

Early Years, Inclusion and Childcare
County Hall, Glenfield LE3 8RF
Tel 0116 305 7136
Email childcare@leics.gov.uk
Web [leicestershire.gov.uk/local offer](http://leicestershire.gov.uk/localoffer)

Communication Passport - A communication passport presents the unique child to everybody that works and interacts with them. It draws together information to help others understand the child and have successful interactions. It records the child's preferences, including their preferred method of communication and indicators of wellbeing e.g. 'When I am sad, I kick my legs.' Communication passports should be easily accessible by all adults within your setting and frequently updated in conversation with primary caregivers to reflect the child's current interests and communication preferences. There are a variety of templates that you could use for the communication passport. For further information, please see <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/oxtc/resources/>

Sensory Provision – Sensory stories, sensory massage and more specialised sensory resources can all support the development of a child's communication, cognition, attention, and wellbeing.

Sensory Stories – Bring a story/nursery rhyme to life using a range of props and resources whilst sharing the story with the child e.g., for Incy Wincy Spider, resources including a rain stick, a pipe, a puppet spider, a light for the sun and a watering can with water could be used.

Sensory Story Massage – The integration of movements and pressure using resources as well as hands could be used whilst sharing a story with a child e.g., for 'We're going on a bear hunt, 'swishy swashy' could be completed as rubbing your hands up and down the child's arms, and for 'thick oozy mud', the child could be encouraged to squeeze playdough in their hands.

Treasure baskets – gather a variety of resources in a basket that stimulate all of the senses e.g., light up toys, vibrating tubes, foil blankets, shakers. This may be presented in a darkened room/tent.

For all sensory activities, observe and see whether the child demonstrates an active like or dislike to the stimulus or environment. It may be that the activity needs to be repeated for several occasions before a reaction is observed.



Providing opportunities for choice making and expressing preferences:

- Within the day, provide opportunities for children to make choices. Initially introduce choice making by presenting a highly motivating item alongside a non-motivating item e.g., flashing ball and sock. Accept ALL the child's attempts for choice making including eye gazing, reaching towards, vocalising, moving, smiling. Initially focus on objects for choice making and present at opportunities even when adults are aware of the choice they are likely to make.
- Once you know the child well, you may become aware of the visual cues of their body in how they indicate they're enjoying an activity or not.

Useful Links:

- <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/early-years/early-years-send-inclusion>
- <https://www.storieswithsymbols.com/videos>
- <https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/services/help-support-resources/?v=12927>
- <https://www.stepscentre.org.uk/>
- <https://newlifecharity.co.uk/play-therapy-pods/>
- <https://menphys.org.uk/the-menphys-hub/>
- <https://www.sense.org.uk/places/sense-loughborough/>
- <https://www.mencap.org.uk/>
- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/blog/pml-d-and-communication-strategies-to-use-in-the-classroom>
- <https://www.pml-dlink.org.uk/>
- <https://www.snoezelen.info/>

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