**Learning disabilities and learning difficulties: What’s the difference?**

Although these two terms are often used interchangeably, there’s a marked difference between an individual with learning difficulties and one with learning disabilities. Understanding the difference is key to providing the right care and support for the individual, whether you’re a carer, relative or friend.

The main difference is that a learning disability constitutes a condition that affects learning and intelligence across all areas of life, whereas a learning difficulty can be seen more as an obstacle to a specific form of learning or a difficulty in processing information, for example with reading, writing or spelling.

On their website, MentalHealth.org defines the two terms as follows:

* **Learning disability** - a condition which affects learning and intelligence across all areas of life.
* **Learning difficulty** - a condition which creates an obstacle to a specific form of learning, but does not affect the overall IQ of an individual

So, as described above, a learning difficulty does not affect general intelligence, whereas a learning disability is linked to an overall cognitive impairment.

An example of a learning difficulty would be dyslexia.

Dyslexia would be classed as a learning difficulty since it impacts only a certain area (the ability to read, write and spell) but doesn’t affect their overall life skills, otherwise. The individual can function without the need for ongoing care.

An example of a learning disability would be Downs Syndrome.

Downs Syndrome is a learning disability, since it impacts all areas of the individual’s life, including their health, physical condition, IQ and life skills. Although many individuals with Downs syndrome can be largely independent and function with limited care, others may need constant support or have other disabilities that affect their lives.

It’s important that specialist care is tailored to each individual, centred around their unique needs and wants. Having a better understanding of the conditions and challenges a person faces greatly influences the approach needed for their care and support.