

A Practitioner Research Project exploring

What is the impact on a family of looking after a child with autism and/or learning disabilities who demonstrates violent or extreme behaviour?

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Abstract

National policy frameworks, such as Changing Lives, and Getting it Right for Every Child, have called for early intervention in Children and Families Social Work, and accentuate the need for transparent provision of services, and effective communication between practitioners and families. In this qualitative practitioner-research project, six carers of children with autism and learning disabilities were interviewed.

The study examined the experiences of carers of children with autism and learning disabilities, who exhibit violent or extreme behaviour. The findings confirmed the existing literature that carers experience a very high level of stress and exhaustion. They were often very concerned for their own mental and physical well-being, their ability to continue to meet the needs of their children, and the impact on the family as a whole. They worried about the potential for placement breakdown, and recommended an approach that better valued their own insight and expertise in caring for their own children, and more consistency and transparency in the provision of services. They felt that services were still too focussed on crisis management, rather than early intervention, and that professionals needed to be better able to communicate with them about the provision of services.