

Unified Paths

Supporting Inclusive Business Practices

A comprehensive guide for retail businesses to create a more inclusive experience for people with learning disability

**This guide is dedicated
to helping retail
professionals navigate
the path to a business
landscape that
embraces
the power of inclusion.**

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● Introduction ○ ● Guide overview

● What is this guide?

This guide includes information to help retail businesses create a shopping environment that embraces people with learning disability, fostering a more inclusive and accessible business landscape.

In the United Kingdom, there are reported to be 1.5 million people with learning disability, and this figure is believed to be an underrepresentation. In addition, to families and carers who may shop with their relatives who have a learning disability.

Hence, by neglecting the needs of this significant demographic, businesses may unintentionally be leaving substantial revenue on the table. Especially as online shopping is not popular among people with learning disability.

● Who can use this guide?

Anyone who wants to make their business more inclusive.

Whether you are an owner steering the strategic direction, a manager guiding daily operations, a staff member contributing to the workflow, or a designer shaping the user experience, you can find practical tips and insights within these pages.

Learn more about the
Purple Pound

● Introduction ○ ● Guide genesis

● How was this guide created?

The guide emerged from a collaboration with the learning disability community in Cardiff. Their insights, experiences, and invaluable perspectives formed the base of this guide.

This guide serves as a bridge between the lived experiences of people with learning disability and the strategic considerations crucial to owners and managers.

● How to use this guide?

To maximise the efficacy of this guide, we organised it into eight main sections, each addressing specific challenge/barrier faced by people with learning disability.

Within each category, you will discover tailored solutions crafted to empower retail businesses to overcome these challenges.

Regardless of your business's size or type, the principles outlined here are applicable across diverse scales and industries.

● WHAT IS LEARNING DISABILITY?

Learning disability is a **hidden disability**, and each person is unique.

Someone with a learning disability might have challenges in:
Reading or writing
Managing money
Household tasks
Socialising

Yet, with the right support, most people with learning disability lead an independent life.

LEARNING DISABILITY \neq **LEARNING DIFFICULTY**

LEARNING DISABILITY

Can be associated with
Angelman syndrome
Asperger syndrome
Down syndrome
Autism

LEARNING DIFFICULTY

Such as

Dyslexia
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
Dyspraxia
Dyscalculia.

True inclusivity is not just about acknowledgement; it's about taking action and creating environments **where everyone can be included.**

The Challenges

- **Unfamiliarity**
- **Lack of escape spaces**
- **Absence of facilities**
- **Lack of options**
- **Wayfinding**
- **Crowded environment**
- **Sensory load**
- **Communication**

Unfamiliarity

People with learning disability often find **comfort** in familiar brands, merchandise locations, and colours.

Some may prefer using the same stores while traveling to maintain a sense of familiarity.

Unpredictable changes, such as:

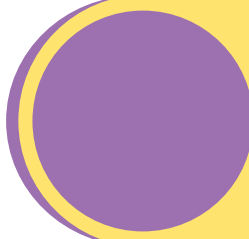
- alterations in merchandise locations
- layout
- new technology
- seasonal shifts

can induce stress, potentially leading to leaving the store.

“They keep changing it, when I get used to it, they change it. They change it so much.”

“... because I live here, I know where they are, if I didn't live here, I wouldn't know where they are.”

Recommendations



More tips on how to announce changes can be found in the communication section.

- **Promote predictability:**

Maintain consistency in your business elements, including menu, uniform, interior design, colours, graphic design, identity, and merchandise location.

Minimise significant changes to create a stable environment.

Extend the practice of predictability consistently within one store or among several stores.

- **Announcing changes:**

Preannounce significant changes, so people can know what to expect.

Consult with local groups before processing any big change.

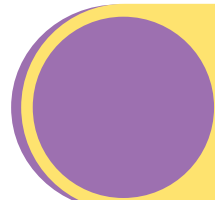
Announce key changes among local groups.

- **Accessible support:**

Ensure the availability of staff around the changes to answer questions and provide assistance.

Create videos to explain and announce changes.

Create wayfinding videos and in-store tours to support predictability for new customers.



Cardiff People First
creates walk-in videos.
Have a look here!

Lack of escape spaces

People with learning disability may experience **distress** from crowds or sensory overload.

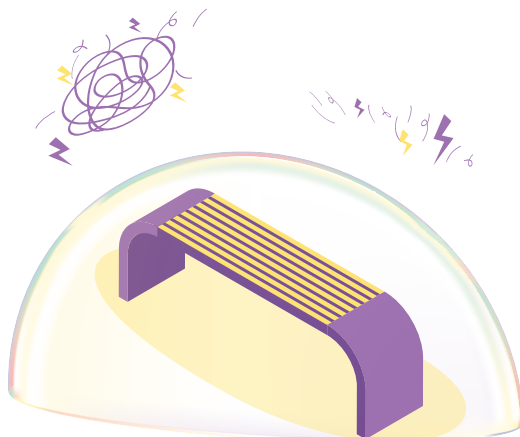
A designated space is **crucial** for taking a break, reaching out to a trusted person, or regaining composure.

Lack of escape spaces may result in leaving **without completing the intended activity**.

“Saturday nights,
I wouldn’t last
more than
10 minutes.”

An escape space could be:

- Quiet room
- Outdoor space
- Sensory room
- Quiet corner
- Bench



Sensory overload

occurs when your brain receives an overwhelming amount of information from your five senses exceeding its processing capacity.

Recommendations

● Escape space availability:

Designate an escape space within your facility for customers to retreat and recover.

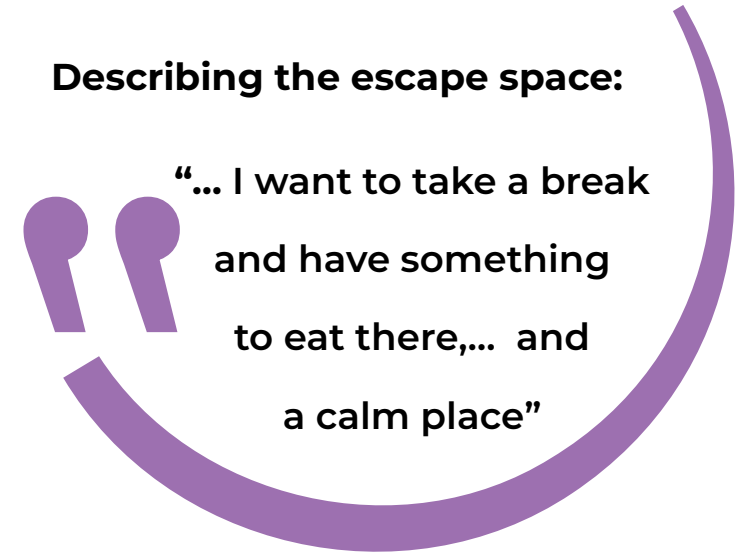
If a dedicated room is not possible, consider providing rest alternatives like a bench in a quiet corner or an outdoor seat.

● Access to escape space:

Provide **clear signs** to the escape space.

Ensure floor staff are aware of the escape space and know how to guide customers overwhelmed by providing clear directions or accompanying them if necessary.

Describing the escape space:



“... I want to take a break and have something to eat there,... and a calm place”



Escape space characteristics:

● Has a sense of privacy

● Comfortable

● Quiet

● Connected to the facilities

● Connected to the outdoors

● Well-lit with natural lighting

Absence of facilities

People with learning disability expressed a **need** for some facilities during their shopping experiences.

Various facilities play a **crucial role in supporting the shopping** and leisure experience of people with learning disability

Shopping facilities:

- Toilets
- Maps and signs
- Escape space
- Staff/ information desk
- Restaurants and cafes
- Seats/ benches

“My favorite is [a market in Cardiff] but I like [a closed shopping street in Cardiff] more because it has toilets”



Recommendations

● Facility access:

Designate an escape space within your facility for customers to retreat and recover.

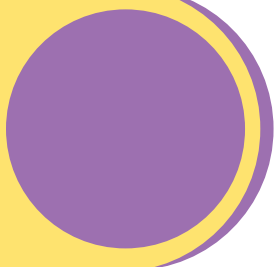
If a dedicated room is not possible, consider providing rest alternatives like a bench in a quiet corner or an outdoor seat. Ensure that your facility provides access to as many mentioned facilities as possible, to address diverse needs.

Facilities do not have to be confined to your space; explore options within the complex you are located in to enhance inclusivity.

Facilitate easy customer access to these facilities through clear communication and signs on their locations and usage.

Security features

Cardiff People first offers disability awareness training for staff. You can learn more about it here.



“more benches to sit down, they used to be but now.”

You need to sit down to put your money and put everything away.”

● Shopping facilities

Toilets: an important facility for everyone, ensure that it is located within proximity of your facility, and ensure accessibility to a disabled toilet.

Escape space: helps people to recover and elongate their visit.

Restaurants and cafes: can sometimes serve as an escape space.

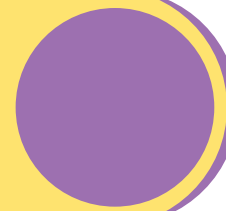
Maps and signs: crucial for accessible navigation.

Security features (staff/ CCTV cameras): security enhances the sense of safety.

Staff/ information desk: Acknowledge the importance of trained staff who can skilfully guide customers to the different facilities, ensuring a supportive and inclusive experience.

Seats/ benches: can sometimes serve as an escape space.

More tips on signs can be found in the Wayfinding section.



Lack of options

People with learning disability value having a **range of options**.

The availability of options raises the sense of independence.



“I don’t like the escalators coming down only escalators going up.”



“I think they [people with learning disability] would, I think they would like the choice out of different things because it is good to have two choices rather than no choices..”



Recommendations

- In all initiatives to create a more inclusive environment, ensure offering **diverse options**.
- Offering choices **empowers individuals**, contributing to a more inclusive and accommodating experience.

Examples of giving options:

Escape space

Quiet room

Sensory room

Quiet corner

Bench

An outdoor space

Wayfinding aids

Leaflet maps

Wall maps

Interactive maps

Floor directories

Floor staff to guide

Vertical connections

Lifts

Escalators

Stairs

Ramps

Payment

Cash

Card

Contactless


Wayfinding

Accessible wayfinding is vital for people with learning disability as it **increases their sense of independence**.

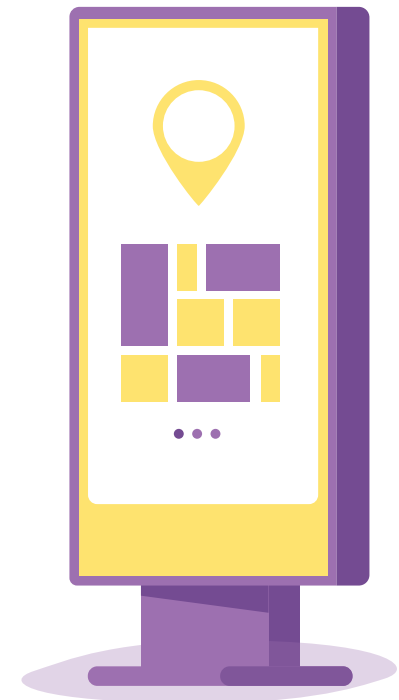
Predictable and aided wayfinding is **not only essential for reaching the destination** but also crucial for **accessing important facilities like toilets**.

Unclear signs can be confusing and misleading, leading customers to give up on reaching their destination.

Some people with learning disability might be **shy or unconfident** to ask for directions.



“As I walk in [shopping centre in Cardiff] there is no sign in saying toilets or if they are, I find them small. As a whole it is not easy to find the toilets anywhere.”



Recommendations

● Diverse wayfinding aids:

Use various wayfinding aids such as **maps, signs, and directories** to create an environment that is easier to navigate.

Use **colour coding** to support wayfinding.

Depending on your facility scale, use **various landmarks** to signpost customers

● Inclusive communication:

Use the easy-read principle in maps, signs, and directories.

Incorporate **visuals and symbols** and avoid using jargon.

Trained staff can support wayfinding and help signpost customers.

“
Almost all participants who mentioned that they would ask for directions, said that they will ask a security staff not a random person.”

‘Easy-read’ refers to the presentation of text in an accessible, easy to understand format.

[Learn more here.](#)

Wayfinding: signs

Unclear signs can be **confusing and misleading**, leading customers to give up on reaching their destination.

With the absence of clear signs some might choose to just keep walking/searching for the destination which might **lead to stress and frustration**.



“They need to put signs to tell you where the shops locations are. One big sign that is more accessible for people especially for people with a learning disability because I find it confusing.”



“As I walk in [shopping centre in Cardiff] there is no sign in saying toilets or if they are, I find them small. As a whole it is not easy to find the toilets anywhere.”

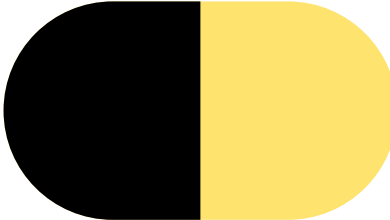
Recommendations



Uses standard symbols only



Has no jargon



Has good colour contrast



Use large text



If the sign is bilingual, there is a clear distinction between the two languages



Visible within its context



Gives clear instructions



Provide signs options

Crowded environment

Crowds can be **stressful** for people with learning disability.

It might be overwhelming for them which **may lead them to leave.**

People with learning disability showed a **preference for open spaces** so they do not feel **confined.**

“I can cut through [...] if there is too many people, to avoid people.... because there is not to many people, if the [...] is busy I normally go through [...] to go from one place to another.”

“I don't like when it is crowded, no, and people walk into me.”



Recommendations

● **Design for ease:**

When designing your space, prioritise open layouts over confined, cluttered areas to alleviate the stress caused by crowds.

Aim for wide aisle and low shelving.

● **Entrances and exits:**

Differentiate entrances and exits, especially in spaces with multiple access points.

Clearly label each door to minimise confusion.

People with learning disability prefer automatic doors as they help ease crowds (better flow).

● **Escape spaces:**

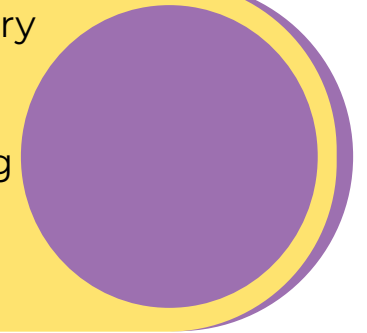
Create an escape space/s within your facility to provide a retreat from crowded environments.

● **Uncrowded periods:**

Create quiet hours with good slots range, mornings, afternoons and evenings, also keep them available during weekends and weekdays.

If you cannot have quiet hours, provide a schedule highlighting less crowded hours, to help customers plan visits during quieter periods.

Quiet hours reducing the sensory load of a space. For example: dimming the lighting, reducing music, and turning off display screens.



Sensory load

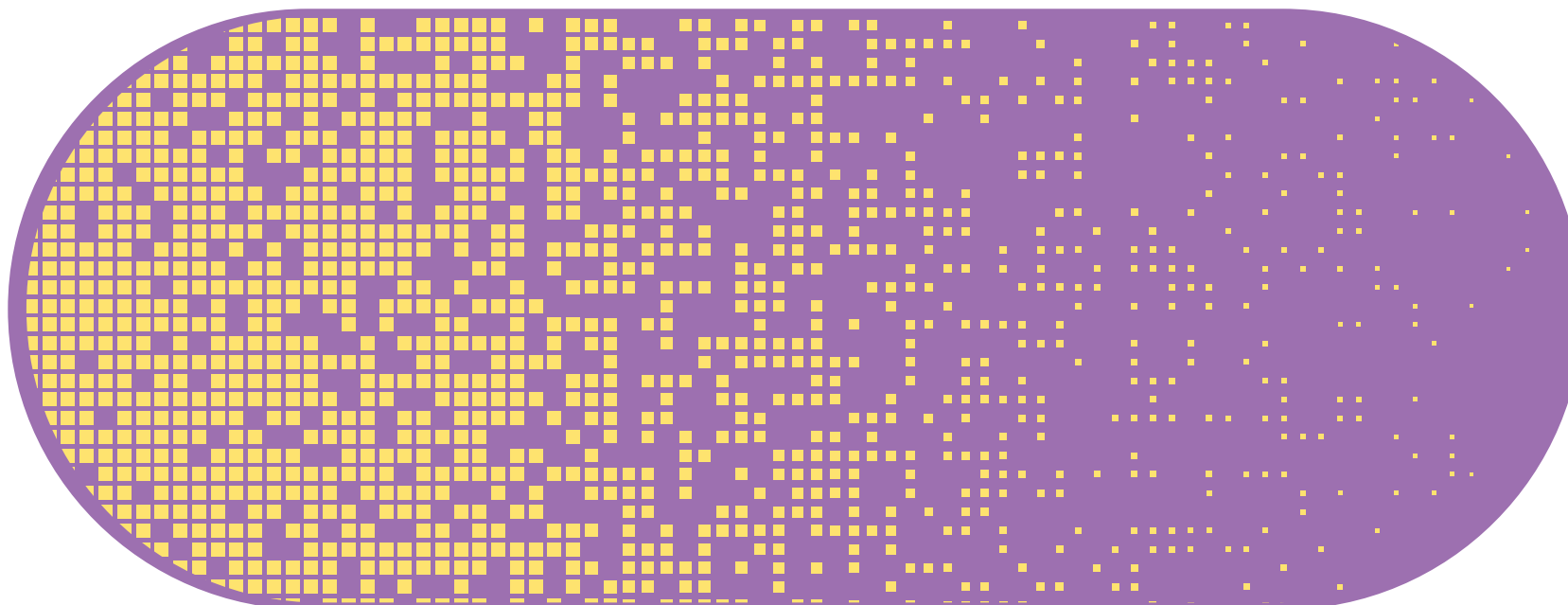
Sensory overload can be stressful for people with learning disability.

Among the sensory elements, **lighting and noise** are the most significant concerns for people with learning disability.

People with learning disability showed an **inclination towards coloured and decorated environments**, compared to minimalistic settings.

“Very bright, and glare and the ceiling is low here.”

Patterns like this caused distress:



Recommendations

● Lighting:

Prioritize **natural lighting** over artificial sources.

If natural lighting is challenging, avoid using bright, direct artificial lighting to minimize discomfort.

Use **dimmers** to adjust lighting levels depending on the amount of natural lighting available.



● Sound:

Create **quiet hours** at various schedules and announce them or provide a schedule highlighting less crowded hours.

Provide escape space.

● Colours and decorations:

Employ colours and decorations to create a unique identity for your space

Use colour coding to aid wayfinding and navigation.

Use decorations as landmarks around your facility.

Avoid using complex repetitive patterns as it can cause discomfort.

Communications

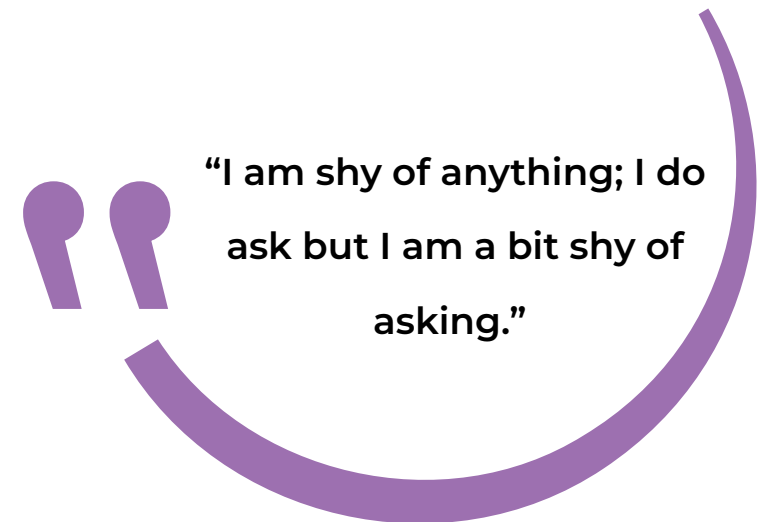
Some people with learning disability may face **challenges accessing key information** due to limited use of smartphones or laptops.

Even if they use these devices, information may be hard to find or **inaccessible**.

People with learning disability might be shy or unconfident in asking for help.

When they ask for help, they would ask staff or security **not a random person**.

Stereotypical perceptions about learning disability may contribute to this reluctance.



“I am shy of anything; I do ask but I am a bit shy of asking.”

Recommendations

● **Prioritise word of mouth:**

The most effective way to communicate with customers with a learning disability is through verbal communication.

Prioritise that for your major changes and any key information announcements.

Collaborate with local organisations to announce key information and updates.

When collaborating with local groups make sure to use accessible forms of communication and plain English.

● **Diverse communication:**

Avoid relying solely on digital platforms for announcements.

Support different modes of communication for example flyers, in-store screens and banners.

Use easy-read leaflets, banners, and screens.

● **Empower floor staff:**

Trained floor staff can provide customers with any key information.

Some local organization for people with learning disability in Cardiff:

Cardiff People First
Mirus

“Best way to communicate with someone with a learning disability is word of mouth”

Recap of key insights:

To wrap up we translated the recommendations into levels, **optimum scenarios, moderate approach, and minimum consideration**. With the minimum considerations being the least invasive and the easiest to implement, it serves as your starting point!

Optimum scenarios



Collaborate with local organisations for consultations and announcements regarding key changes	Options of quiet room, sensory room and/or benches	Provide the recommended facilities within your space	More options	Various clear wayfinding aids supported with colour coding and landmarks.	Escape space Avoid confined layouts Use automatic doors	Incorporate natural lighting. Avoid direct artificial lighting.	Collaborate with local organizations
Video maps Virtual tours	Quiet room Sensory room	Provide the basic facilities within your space or complex		Easy read signs, maps, and directories.	Quite hours	Avoid repetitive patterns.	Various announcements methods.
Maintain consistency Minimize significant changes	Quiet corner Bench Outdoor area	Trained staff	Less options	Trained staff Clear signs	Distinguish entrances and exits	Quiet hours.	Trained staff

Unfamiliarity

Lack of escape spaces

Absence of facilities

Lack of options

Wayfinding

Crowded environment

Sensory load

Communications

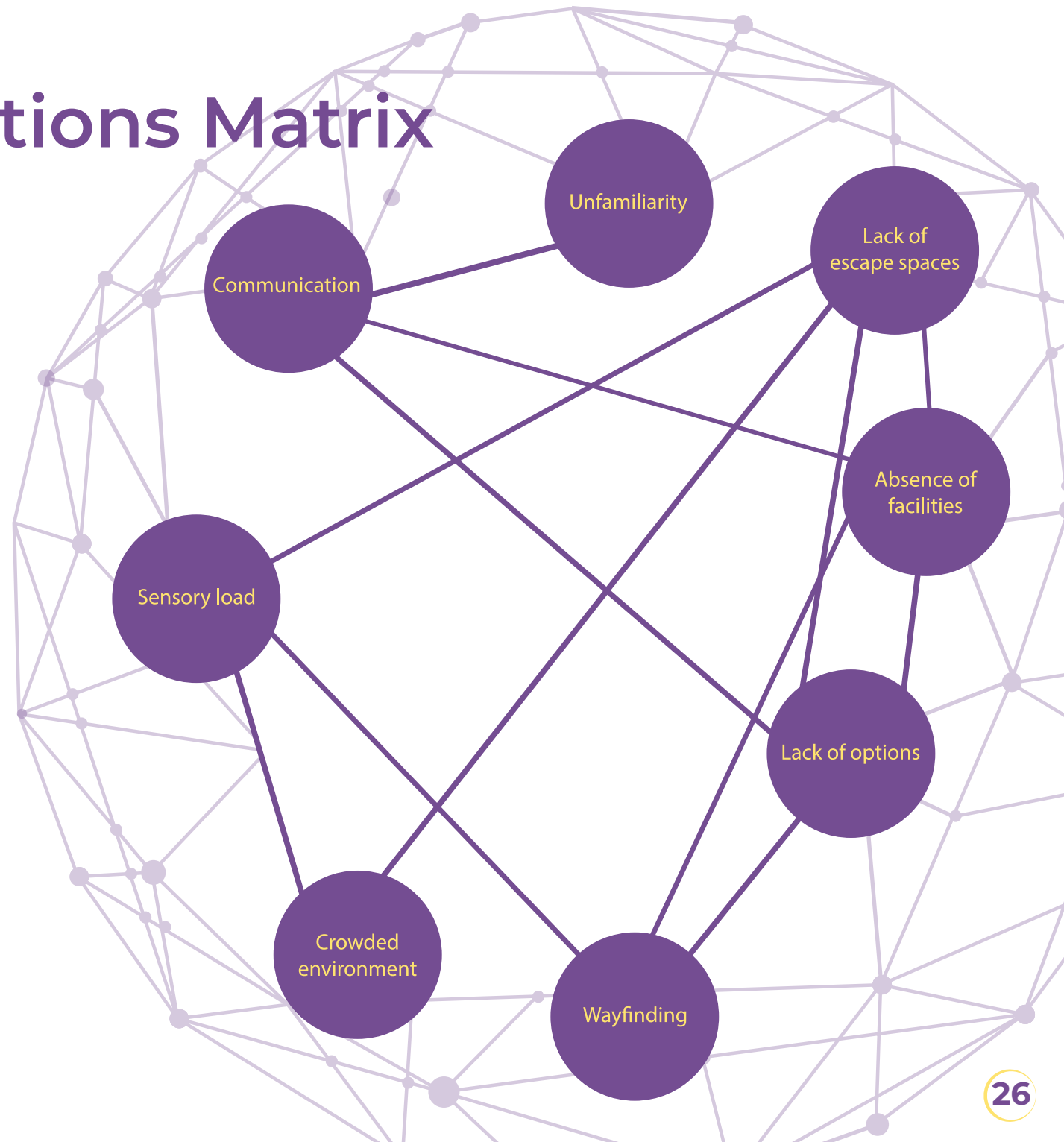
Minimum consideration

Recommendations Matrix

As you navigate through our recommendations, you will notice a beautiful synergy where solutions resonate and intersect. Where addressing one aspect unravels solutions for others.

For example, providing escape space supports crowded environments and sensory overload. Clear signs can support wayfinding and predictability.

This matrix illustrates these connections.



People with learning disability are people, just like you, and if they have the help they need, they can become your best customers!

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The guide emerged from a collaboration with the learning disability community in Cardiff.

In collaboration with



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If you like the guide, please fill this form

References

- Mencap, How common is learning disability?
- Mencap, What is a learning disability?

Further readings

- mencap
- NHS
- Learning Disability Wales
- Sensory inclusive supermarkets
- Designing accessible services
- PAS 6463:2022 Design for the mind. Neurodiversity and the built environment. Guide