

Official reports expressing concern about the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach adopted by Children’s Services departments when assessing the needs of disabled children and their families.

A 2020 Department of Health and Social Care report¹ that noted:

Even where the sole reason for contact with children’s social care was because of the social care needs of an autistic child, there was a tendency to use the social work assessment as an opportunity to judge parenting capacity through a child protection lens rather than through a lens of social care need. This has long been a complaint of families caring for disabled children.

We were also particularly troubled by reports we received from families who had been brought into the child protection process because of disagreements with practitioners about how their child’s behaviour could best be managed within the home setting ... this is a repeated concern that we hear from parents and carers outside of this study in the course of our ongoing communications with families over the years both in our roles as Chief Social Workers and during our many years in practice leadership roles.

Fear of being labelled a bad parent or concerns about being blamed for failing as a parent may limit a family’s willingness to seek help.

A 2021 (interim) report from the independent review of children’s social care² commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education that noted:

‘a consistent theme in what the review has heard’ was that families with disabled children felt ‘that they are navigating a system that is set up for child protection, not support’ (page 29);

that the review had heard ‘from care-experienced parents who describe the undignified position of being subject to child protection investigations if they seek help, which in turn stops them asking for the support they need’ (page 30); and

that ‘the system appears to be disproportionately spent on assessing and investigating families instead of providing support’ (page 30).

The 2022 SEND Review³ that referred to the experiences of some families with disabled children that they were:

put off seeking support from children’s social care because of fear they will be blamed for challenges their children face and treated as a safeguarding concern rather than receive the support they need.

The 2022 Final Report of the independent review of children’s social care⁴ that:

we have heard time and again from both social workers and families [of disabled children] that one size fits all assessments are overly intrusive for families, are not

¹ Chief Social Workers for Adults and the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families *A spectrum of opportunity: an exploratory study of social work practice with autistic young adults and their families* (Department of Health and Social Care 2021).

² J MacAlister *The Case for change* (2021) an interim report of the independent review of children’s social care, p.29.

³ HM Government *SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time. Government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England* CP 624 Department for Education (2022) p10.

⁴ J MacAlister *Final Report. The independent review of children’s social care* (2022) p 39.

tailored enough to the needs of families, and do not align well with the framework for adult social care.