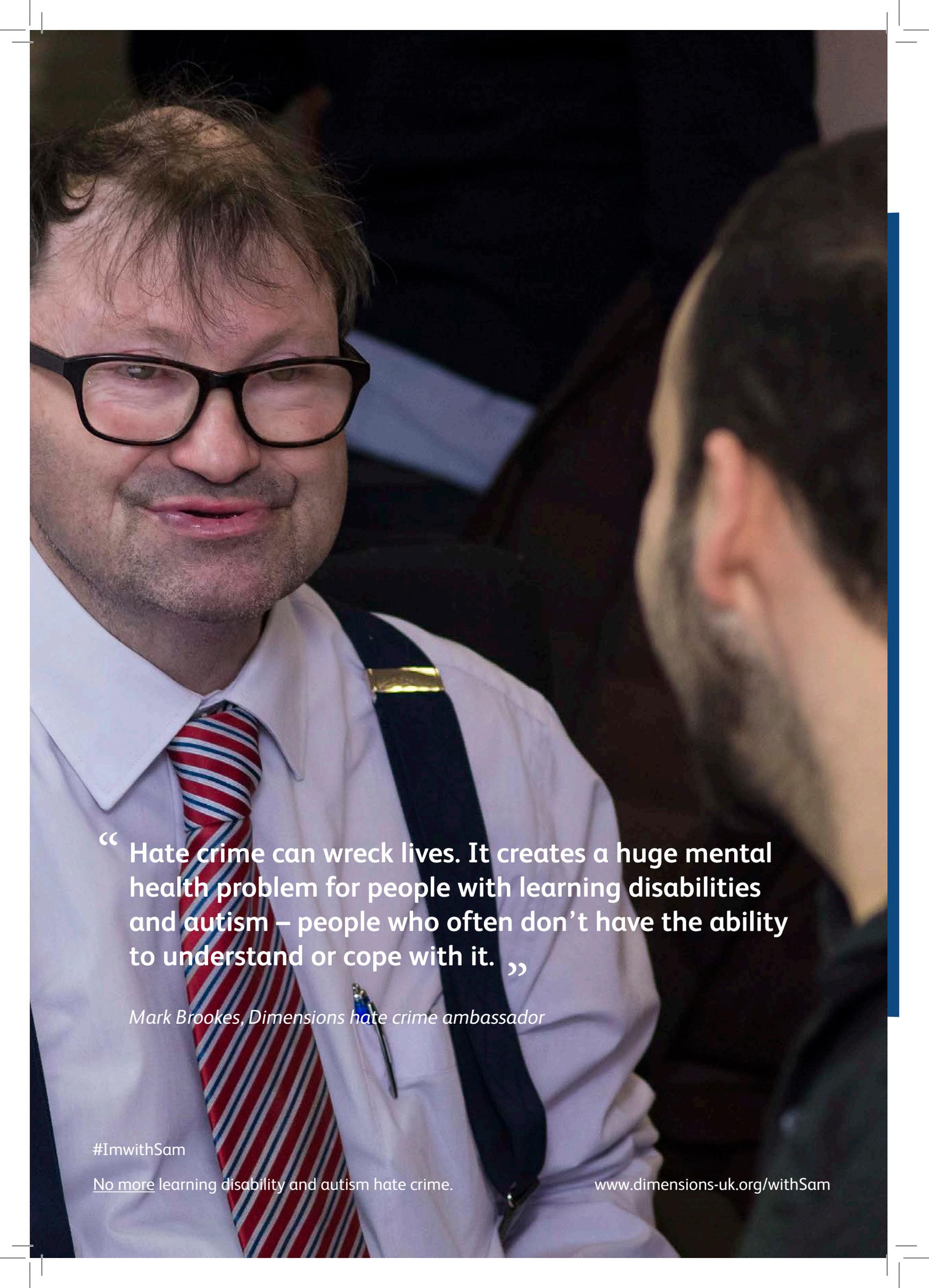




## I'm with Sam

No more learning disability and autism hate crime.



“ Hate crime can wreck lives. It creates a huge mental health problem for people with learning disabilities and autism – people who often don’t have the ability to understand or cope with it. ”

*Mark Brookes, Dimensions hate crime ambassador*

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## Foreword

Hate crime robs people of their confidence, their independence and sometimes, their lives. Despite the work that has taken place since the tragic deaths of Fiona Pilkington and her daughter seven years ago, new research conducted by Dimensions shows no let-up in the daily abuse faced by people with learning disabilities and autism. For people without a learning disability or autism, the daily horror of this can be hard to imagine.

That's why we'd like to introduce you to Sam. Sam is in many ways just like you, just like your child. But Sam's learning disability makes him or her a target. A target for verbal, physical and financial abuse. A target for on and offline bullies. A target for children, neighbours, strangers and so-called friends. Sam needs – anyone would need – our government and wider society to have their back.

Bringing Sam to life has helped Dimensions, working with many people with learning disabilities and autism, and through multiple partners across the sector, to identify the principal issues underpinning learning disability hate crime. Working together we have developed a blueprint for change, comprising eight principal goals.

Everyone has a part to play. Politicians and civil servants, mums and dads, teachers, police and care professionals have critical roles. But everyone can help give this campaign momentum.

In this pack you will find painful personal testimonials, key survey data and an overview of the changes we propose.

You can help. Please read and use the material in this pack. Influence where you can. Get in touch and tell us how you can contribute. And tell people that like me, [you're with Sam](#).

*Steve Scown, Chief Executive, Dimensions*

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## The horror of hate

Over 320 members of the learning disability and autism community who responded to Dimensions research expressed just how mentally destructive learning disability and autism hate crime can be, describing some of their emotions:



Others mentioned feeling suicidal, powerless, vulnerable, depressed and distressed. The problem extends to family and friends, and the costs radiate through society: in the classroom, to health, to social services and to the police amongst others.

Many victims admit they wouldn't tell the police, or report the crime.

“ Sam was abused by a 40-yr old neighbour. He thought it was funny to call him Forrest Gump and Derek (from the Ricky Gervais show). He also tells us that he's a fucking retard... His wife is a special needs teacher at a pre-school. ”

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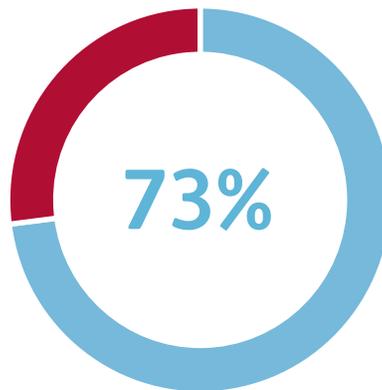
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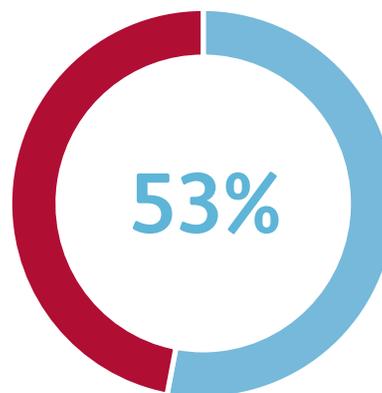
## Most people are victims

The Dimensions research reveals frightening levels of hate crime targeting people with learning disabilities or autism:

Respondents who have experienced hate crime:



Respondents who have experienced hate crime in the last year:



“ My son has been repeatedly called offensive names in public, and has been struck by a stranger too. He has been bullied at school and by the general public, mocking his disabilities. ”

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## Campaign Partners

Dimensions' campaign partners are with Sam. They support the blueprint for change. They have committed to championing the campaign. They represent the length and breadth of the learning disability and autism sectors. Together, as a movement, we demand the changes that will give Sam a better life:



“ The police never even took our name when we went to the police station. I think the police, judges and CPS are not choosing to prosecute cases because it's hard to get a conviction. I've heard judges blame victims in court with LD because of their vulnerability. ”

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# A blueprint for change

Delivering the blueprint below will make Sam's life unrecognisably better:

1. Separate disability hate statistics into learning disability / autism, and other disabilities.
2. Change the law to make disability hate a crime online.
3. The Department of Education to adapt resources to better support all primary and secondary schools with positive messages around difference.
4. Manufacturers to incorporate greater learning disability sensitivity into toys, games and other children's entertainment.
5. The Department of Health to develop simple guidance to help families and support workers identify and manage cases of hate crime.
6. The Crown Prosecution Service to improve investigation protocols within the criminal justice system in situations where there is a learning disabled victim.
7. The Home Office to improve resources and training for police officers and others to help them when receiving a report of hate crime from a person with a learning disability or autism, including funding self-advocates to provide specialist victim support.
8. Together, we and our campaign partners will evaluate the effectiveness of new coercive behaviour legislation on people with learning disabilities or autism, leading to specific change recommendations and / or a green paper recommendation on stronger legislation to protect vulnerable people from hate crime.

“ Over the summer we have been targeted by a neighbour by putting mannequin heads in her window to scare him... Now he doesn't want to go in our garden. ”

“ As a support worker I have encountered hate crime several times against people with learning disabilities whom I supported. Although police were sympathetic, no-one was ever charged. ”

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# 1. Separate disability hate statistics into learning disability/autism, and other disabilities.

“ Adults were crowding round his wheelchair shouting abuse. Telling him to shut up. Excluding him because of his learning disability. ”

The most recent [Home Office statistics](#) show a 25% year on year increase in hate crime. This may actually be good news, showing that hate crime is increasingly being reported. 2,500 disability hate crimes were recorded by the police last year. In contrast the National Crime Survey estimates a true figure of 70,000 disability related hate crimes – a figure which reveals just how few people report offences.

Dimensions welcomes the reported increase because it means more victims are coming forward. For too long hate crimes were left to go unchallenged. Society is now more likely to challenge prejudice, but the figures show that this is not a time to be complacent.

Crucially, police data does not discriminate between crime against people with learning disabilities and other disabilities. But fully 53% of respondents to the Dimensions survey reported being a victim of hate crime in the preceding year.

People with learning disabilities and autism are a specific target for crime, and in future data must be able to:

- Distinguish between people with learning disabilities or autism and others
- Identify patterns in crime that particularly apply to this group

The police and CPS have done a lot of work to help tackle disability hate crime, including awareness and attitude change programmes in schools, public workshops, more accessible police stations and the [True Vision project](#). But in the last few years, hate crime has dropped off the radar. Getting the right data is a crucial precursor to achieving change.

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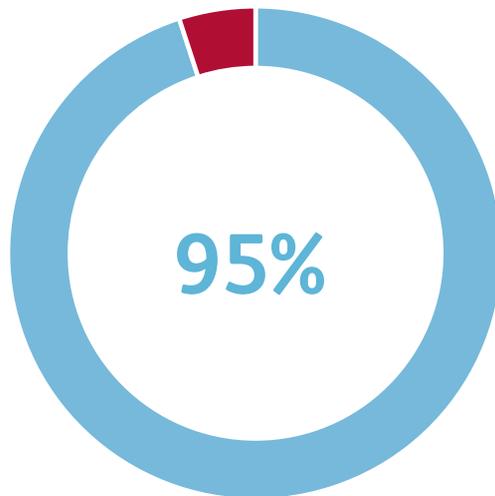
## 2. Change the law to make disability hate a crime online.

“ He’s been bullied and had online hate from fellow students & I’m certain someone tried to groom him online too. ”

The law must be changed to make disability hate a crime online. The law says that it can be an offence to stir up hatred on the grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation. Disability should be added to this.

Indeed, not to do so is itself discriminatory.

Survey respondents who say changing the law to make learning disability and autism hate crime illegal is important or very important:



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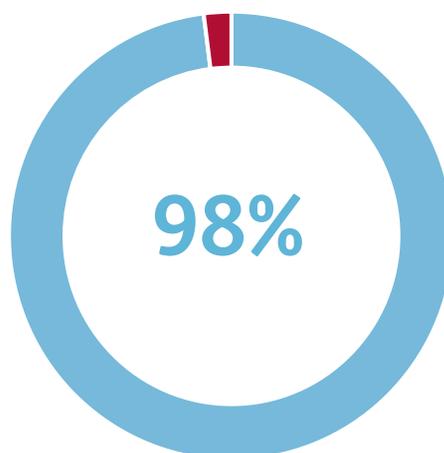
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### 3. The Department of Education to adapt resources to better support all primary and secondary schools with positive messages around difference.

“ My son has Autism, Tourette’s, Sensory Processing Disorder and Dyspraxia. He has been called names, mocked, excluded from social events and team games, sat alone on coach trips, been verbally abused by a class mate and the child’s mother. ”

Children have always been bullied for being different. The seeds of hate are sown at an early age at home and in the classroom. It is particularly important to tackle this through effective school education that helps children celebrate, not scorn, difference.

Survey respondents who say that a primary and secondary school curriculum that teaches children about difference is important:



I'm with Sam is calling for a well funded public awareness programme, specifically including curriculum and non-curricular resources to support all primary schools including special and private schools with positive messages around difference. This needs to be continued into secondary school where peer pressure can lead young people to forget the values they learn in primary education.

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## 4. Manufacturers, producers and authors to incorporate learning disability sensitivity into their products.

“ He needs positive role models who can both encourage him to not be ashamed of who he is, and also educate the public on all fronts about what it’s really like to have this condition. ”

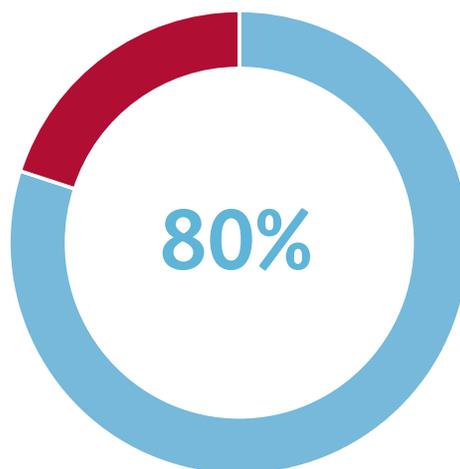
Shows such as Mr Tumble, The Dumping Ground and Nina and the Neurons all celebrate difference by featuring children with a variety of disabilities. However, such shows are in the minority.

Whilst there are many children’s books featuring learning disabled or autistic characters, very few have reached mainstream readers.

And there are very few toys and games that help normalise learning disability and autism. We are calling on all those responsible for children’s entertainment to consider ways to incorporate greater learning disability and autism sensitivity into their products as part of the normal landscape of childhood.

We know it’s not easy. But normalising difference is, to put it simply, vital.

Survey respondents who say it is important or very important for manufacturers of toys and games to incorporate learning disabled characters:



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## 5. The Department of Health to develop simple guidance to help families and support workers identify, and manage cases of hate crime.

“ He’s been beaten, abused, paid for protection and had things damaged and stolen from him. When schools don’t even bother dealing with bullies what’s the point in going to the police? Kids are being told it’s ok to abuse anyone different from them. ”

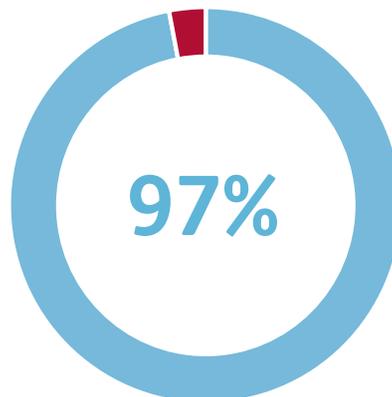
Nearly half (48 %) of all learning disabled victims tell us they didn’t report the crime. As a society we tell people with learning disabilities to ‘just ignore’ name calling and deliberate exclusion from social circles. This starts at school and it means that people with learning disabilities have a high bar for unacceptable behaviour.

Many don’t have the language to name and report crime, particularly including the signs and symbols to talk about sexual abuse.

Many people with learning disabilities maybe unaware than a crime has taken place. Their disability makes them particularly vulnerable to physical and financial predators.

For all these reasons, trusted people – whether family, friends, paid support or others – have a critical role to play. But for professional and family carers alike it can be enormously difficult to spot the signs of crime, to talk about it, deal with the consequences and to report it appropriately. A freely available national training and support programme would be a good start.

Survey respondents who say it is important or very important to make it easier to report learning disability or autism hate crime:



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[www.dimensions-uk.org/withSam](https://www.dimensions-uk.org/withSam)

## 6. The Crown Prosecution Service to improve investigation protocols within the criminal justice system in situations where there is a learning disabled or autistic victim.

“ He wanted to know he could report it as a crime and it would be taken seriously. He said this should be ‘common sense,’ that it should generally be regarded as ‘what you do.’ ”

All hate crime – whether on the grounds of race, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation – should be treated equally under the law.

But we believe that section 146 – the freedom for a judge to double a sentence if motivated by hate – has never been invoked for a learning disability hate crime. There is no effective approach to investigating disability hate crime that stands up in court.

Equally worryingly, when the CPS investigated why cases involving learning disabled victims rarely get to court, they found that the reliability and credibility of the victim was often an issue.

It is unacceptable in a modern democracy that a person’s learning disability prevents them from getting justice. Investigation protocols, including training of police and other caseworkers, in situations where there is a learning disabled victim must be urgently reviewed.

An education system that fails to give people with learning disabilities the language skills needed to be a credible witness is a further underlying problem.

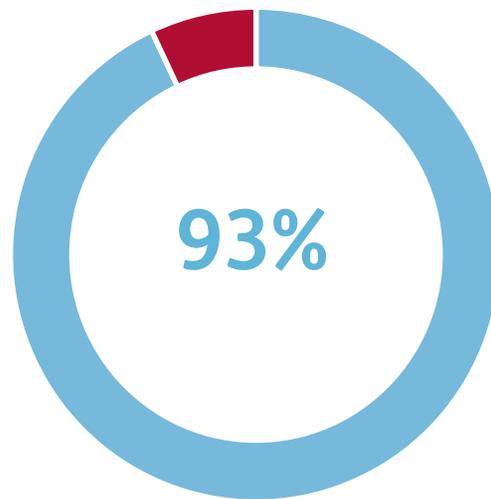
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Survey respondents who say it is important or very important to have sentence uplifts where a crime is motivated by hate:



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## 7. The Home Office to improve resources and training for police officers and others to help them when receiving a report of hate crime from a person with a learning disability or autism, including funding self advocates to provide specialist victim support.

“ The police took weeks to interview our son and by then it was too late for him to be reliable. ”

Many learning disabled people are afraid of the unknown – and police stations can be intimidating places. Few police officers are trained to communicate appropriately with a person with learning disabilities and individuals with a learning disability may be scared of not being listened to, not being believed, of being ignored or ridiculed. For many, after all, that is a substantial part of their life experience.

Recent research by Laura Crane and Katie Maras, [Experiences of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Policing in England and Wales: Surveying Police and the Autism Community](#) showed that:

- Police officers reported frustration with a lack of training, information and organisational support thereby limiting their capability to respond effectively to individuals with ASD. Yet police officers generally felt they were doing the best they could in the face of these constraints.
- The majority of parents (74 %) and autistic adults (69 %) were dissatisfied with their experiences, reporting discrimination, a lack of clarity and explanation, and feeling that their needs were not met. In particular, many respondents felt that an inappropriate physical environment (e.g., interview rooms, custody suites) coupled with a lack of appropriate support and explanation led to emotional stress, along with breakdowns in communication.

Police training, reporting procedures, and station environments must be invested in accordingly.

Excellent innovations such as 3rd party reporting centres (such as citizens advice bureaux or the local people first office) need to be more widely promoted; few people are aware of them.

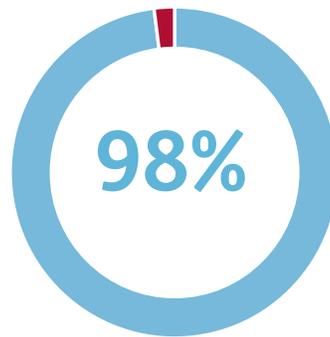
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“ The lack of an adequate advocacy program is also a huge deficit in our communities. ”

Survey respondents who say it is important or very important to have improved police officer training:

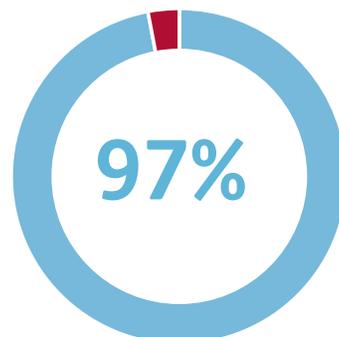


People with learning disabilities and autism already play a major role in helping society support their peers. “Experts by Experience” are employed by organisations like Dimensions and the NHS to scrutinise services and recommend change.

Victim Support and Witness support are organisations that do important work within the criminal justice system.

Additional funding for them, or for local and national learning disability and autism self-advocacy organisations should be used to provide expert peer support in cases of learning disability or autism hate crime.

Survey respondents who say it is important or very important to have specialist victim support from self advocates:



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8. Together, we and our campaign partners will evaluate the effectiveness of coercive behavior and other legislation, leading to specific change recommendations and / or a green paper recommendation on stronger legislation to protect vulnerable people from mate crime.

“ When I reported mate crime (financial abuse) I was told it was not a hate crime and wasn't a crime at all if people had conned me out of £4,000 because I trusted them. The police told me it was more likely that I would be forced to give control of my finances to non-autistic person than those that stole from me being prosecuted. No action was taken by the police at all. ”

When you have a learning disability or autism it can be tough to make friends. When your so-called mates abuse that trust, the results can be appalling.

Mate crime is an insidious, hidden form of disability hate crime, where vulnerable people are bullied or manipulated by the very people they consider friends. Abuse can begin in the playground, with pushing and shoving. Amongst adults, it may result in vulnerable people being manipulated to give away money or possessions or even to commit crimes.

In spring 2015 Autism Together (then Wirral Autistic Society) published the results of a survey into mate crime in Merseyside amongst people with autism. One hundred per cent of 16-25s said they found it tough distinguishing genuine friends from bullies. Eighty percent felt they had been bullied or taken advantage of by someone they considered a friend. Three quarters of adults surveyed felt they'd been manipulated to do the wrong thing.

We propose an initial assessment of existing legislation and will encourage the Law Society to review any gaps in statutes to ensure that vulnerable people are protected from mate crime by the law. Following our assessment, we will develop new legislation, as appropriate, to fill any gaps in the current system.

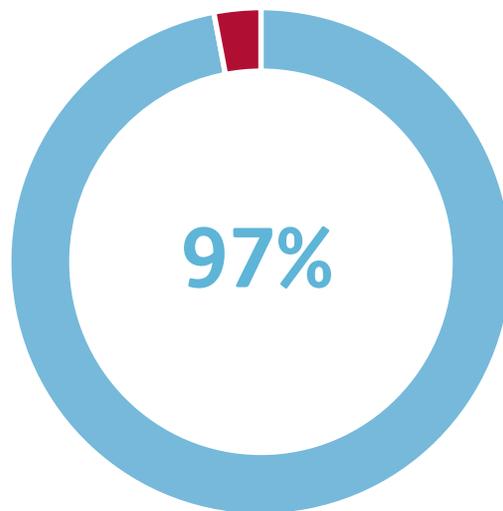
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Survey respondents who say it is important or very important to have stronger legislation to protect vulnerable people from mate crime:



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## Further personal testimonials

All the quotes used in this report are real. To truly put yourself in the shoes of a victim of learning disability or autism hate crime, or their family, read on for another selection of lived experiences:

“We were verbally attacked in the park when we asked a family to put their 5 dogs on a lead because my grandson was afraid. He has autism. I had a really bad time when I reported it to the police the first time. They eventually treated it as a hate crime but then dropped it because there were no independent witnesses.”

“My children and I are all disabled. They have autism as well as other disabilities. We have been sworn at, threatened by neighbours and we have had them try to hit us with their vehicles.”

“My son was verbally assaulted by a man on public transport because of the way he speaks. We thought we had handled it well until the following week when he was on a train and a crowd of drunk people came on (the man who verbally attacked my son was drunk.) My son had a major meltdown, he attacked his dad, another guy on the train tried to get involved in what he thought was a fight and the train guard ended up getting assaulted... The impact of the first incident has been devastating for my son. It has made him wary and scared and changed the way we live our life.”

“My 18 year old Daughter has Tourettes syndrome, autism, BPD and other complex mental health issues. She swears and shouts out. Some people are very scared. I’ve been told on several occasions that she shouldn’t be allowed out in public. She has been assaulted on public transport where police have not acted because of her mental state.”

“My own child is 6 and autistic and I fear for the future as schools and colleges failed to protect my nephew repeatedly.”

“On the day my child was diagnosed with autism. An old woman told me to shut him up (he was stimming verbally) then in the same afternoon a man told me that if I was alive in 1940’s me and my spastic son would have been gassed. At the time I was travelling on a local bus service and not one person helped me...”

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“I had to defend an eviction of someone with Aspergers who became a victim of bullying and people did not understand his repetitive behaviour... The abuse included threats to him and his family, lies and false reporting. He was also called an f\*\*\*\*\* retard and I found the police as awkward as sin trying to make him the criminal and not the victim. These people were once his friends before they decided to try and ethnically cleanse the neighbourhood...”

“Most hate crime happened in school but it was called bullying and no one took it seriously - it should be. No one taking it seriously taught me that it wasn’t serious, just a fact of life I had to deal with on my own.”

“We had equipment provided to keep our disabled child safe repeatedly damaged and were mocked for having extra needs the police did not understand the vulnerability of our situation and how it was a direct result of our child disabilities.”

“Having been a victim of hate crime for many years, I have also developed a guilt trying to blame myself for everything that is happening to me, I feel this is the most damaging part, a feeling which doesn’t leave me 24/7 and gives the perpetrator power over me 24/7. My life is stopped or slow at best, when I manage to pick up the pieces from the last attack I always live with a fear when and what will happen next. The effects of hate crime are more disabling than my disability (ASD).”

“I’ve walked down the streets with my autistic son who is now 13. He tends to dance as he walk and moonwalks when there are other people about and both of us had nasty comments and broken bricks throws at us including half eaten sweets. Thankfully the bricks didn’t hit us but very close to the point of scaring my son where he won’t go down the same road if there is anyone else down it.”

“My son was bullied repeatedly at school, not physically but verbal & mental abuse all the time but school ignored it and he became suicidal at age 10. School refused to acknowledge the problem because they had no idea how to stop it.”

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## Further personal testimonials

“I have been at the end of very serious threats to my life and being spat at and laughed at in the street near my home and in the town centre too.”

“Every time I left the house with my disabled husband and my two disabled kids I would be called names. The two lads would make animal noises. I had my car vandalised three times. Police and councils need to step up to the fact that anyone who causes hate crime should be evicted. Why should disabled people be forced to leave their homes because of their behaviours?”

“My child was bullied at school and online. Both reported to school. I had a gang of children wanting my son to go outside so they could hit him, because my son who is autistic pushed a girl away from him because she was slapping him across his face. My son was excluded from school because he was called a retard and the lad tried to gouge my son’s eyes out. My son pushed the lad away, he wasn’t given chance to explain properly just excluded straight away.”

“My child had a meltdown in public. A man approached and shouted that people like me should not be allowed to have children.”

“My nephew (20 and autistic) was recently attacked by a group of college girls who pushed him about and squeezed his juice box over his head. It doesn’t appear that the college adequately dealt with the girls, if at all.”

“I have reported 2 hate crimes. Neither went anywhere but felt it was important for statistics.”

“I was targeted for gang rape because I’m autistic and was easy to trick, and was told I should be grateful because it’s the only time anyone is ever going to f\*\*\* me.”

“Nasty comments whilst out generally and one in particular very upsetting. A cashier in major supermarket was mimicking and laughing with two customers in front of us. Directed toward my grandson who is autistic, non verbal and makes loud noises. Reported to management. Was fuming but also upset for him and just won’t shop there now.”

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“Our next door neighbours on our right have actively persecuted our children for having autism, glaring hatefully at them when they were playing (either peacefully or not - the children used to scream at each other when younger and became more harmonious in later years,) but the hate surfaced and never went away no matter what the circumstance. The man of the couple drove straight at our son when he was playing with friends, and has called him ‘retard’ when walking past each other...”

“Being yelled at, called ‘retard’ or ‘spastic’ in the street (I have sensory ataxia and a visual impairment as well as autism). Having my partially sighted guide cane stolen from me while I was out. Having things thrown at me and being spat on. Police were unhelpful and I fear the police due to me being sectioned by them before for my severe challenging behaviour in public. So I fear reporting crime due to fear of the police.”

“I’ve been shouted at because my son has autism and doesn’t always behave in a socially acceptable manner, i.e. stimming, shouting, having a meltdown etc. Whilst I wouldn’t consider this a hate crime, I believe if other crimes such as stealing, physical abuse etc. were punishable under a tougher law designed for special needs people, it would raise more awareness and might help stop the verbal abuse that most carers have to endure.”

“As a self-employed carer lots of my clients have first-hand experience of hate crimes, I’m very concerned over the amount of ‘mate crime’ that goes unreported and I try to ensure all my customers are aware of it and how to report it.”

“(My younger sister) is resilient and (most of the time) quite thick-skinned, but I feel so angry on her behalf. Only recently I have learnt more about hate crime/incident reporting and would think to do this. Think that visibility of people with learning disabilities in culture (not just ‘as disabled people’) as well as changing attitudes in schools is so important.”

“My son has ASD but high functioning so is in mainstream school. I have had to pick him up from school at least once a week when he just can’t cope any more. He is tormented, attacked, belittled, incriminated... all because he is different.”

“I’m frightened of saying anything to anybody that will be taken the wrong way. I’m frightened of going out.”

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# Notes to Editors

## Further information

Dimensions formal policy position statement on Learning Disability and Autism Hate Crime can be found at [www.dimensions-uk.org](http://www.dimensions-uk.org), alongside an Easy Read version.

The primary campaign spokesman is Mark Brooke. Mark, a Dimensions employee, has a learning disability and is a long term campaigner around hate crime. You can contact him through the Dimensions press office, [www.dimensions-uk.org](http://www.dimensions-uk.org)

## Have you been affected by learning disability or autism hate crime?

Hate crimes and incidents hurt; they can be confusing and frightening. By reporting them when they happen to you, you may be able to prevent these incidents from happening to someone else. You will also help the police understand the extent of hate crime in your local area so they can better respond to it.

Reporting makes a difference - to you, your friends, and your life. In an emergency, call 999. You can also phone your local police, or [report it online](#). Or you can [download an Easy Read reporting form](#).

Agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux and [Stop Hate UK](#) can report it for you, if you tell them. If you have a support worker, tell them. They will support you to report it.

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# Notes to Editors

## Who is Dimensions?

Dimensions is a not-for-profit charitable registered society that supports 3500 people across England and Wales.

Dimensions provides evidence-based, outcomes-focused support including sector leading positive behaviour support for people with learning disabilities, autism and complex needs.

Dimensions helps people to be actively involved in their communities. You can find out all about Dimensions at [www.dimensions-uk.org](http://www.dimensions-uk.org)

## What is learning disability and autism hate crime?

Learning disability and autism hate crime is any offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person's learning disability, autism or perceived disability.

This definition is intended to encompass crime where an individual is taken advantage of physically or financially due to their learning disability, such as 'mate crime.' For that reason, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is adopting the term 'crime against disabled people' in preference to 'hate crime.' (Whilst this term removes the fervour of "hate", it does focus more on the disabled victim, consequently Dimensions supports this change.)

Tell others "I'm with Sam" - Join our campaign and play your part in tackling this pernicious problem

[#ImwithSam](https://twitter.com/ImwithSam)

[No more learning disability and autism hate crime.](http://www.dimensions-uk.org/withSam)

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# Proving life can get better

Dimensions provides evidence-based, outcomes-focused support including sector leading positive behaviour support for people with learning disabilities, autism and complex needs. We help the people we support to be actively involved in their communities.



## Find out more

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