

Disability discrimination at work

1 . Understanding disability discrimination

Disability is one of 9 'protected characteristics' covered by discrimination law (Equality Act 2010). The law protects people against discrimination at work – this includes harassment and victimisation.

Employers must do all they reasonably can to protect people from discrimination and take [steps to prevent disability discrimination at work](#). This includes recognising the benefits of having an inclusive and diverse workforce that does not exclude disabled people.

Who is responsible

Anyone who discriminates against someone at work is responsible for their own actions.

Employers can be held responsible too – this is called [vicarious liability](#).

Employers also have a responsibility – a 'duty of care' – to look after the wellbeing of their employees. If an employer does not do this, in some cases it could lead to a serious breach of someone's employment contract. If an employee feels they have no choice to resign because of it, the employer could face a claim of disability discrimination and [constructive dismissal](#).

All employers must take [steps to prevent disability discrimination happening in the first place](#).

By law, employers must also make [reasonable adjustments](#) for disabled employees and job applicants. If they do not do this, it could be discriminatory (the legal term is 'failure to make reasonable adjustments').

Public sector organisations have an extra legal responsibility to stop discrimination, harassment and victimisation, under the [public sector equality duty](#).

What discrimination law covers

Discrimination law covers:

- direct or indirect discrimination
- discrimination arising from disability
- failure to make reasonable adjustments
- harassment
- victimisation

[Find out about the different types of disability discrimination](#)

Who is protected by disability discrimination law

At work, the law protects the following people against discrimination:

- employees and workers
- contractors and self-employed people hired to personally do the work
- job applicants – find out more about [discrimination when applying for a job](#)

It's against the law to discriminate against someone because:

- they have a condition or impairment considered a disability by law
- it's believed they have a disability even if that's not true
- they have a connection with someone who's disabled, for example a family member, friend or colleague
- they have another association with disability, for example they volunteer for a disability charity

Find out more about:

- [what disability means by law](#)
- [types of disability discrimination](#)

Past disability

The Equality Act 2010 also protects people who are no longer disabled but had a disability in the past.

Examples could include:

- someone is turned down for a promotion because of a high absence record in the past, when their employer knew this was because of a serious injury that was considered a disability
- someone is harassed at work because of a past mental health condition

If someone does not tell their employer they're disabled

Nobody has to tell their employer – or potential employer – that they're disabled or might have a disability.

Reasons for not saying anything could include:

- they do not realise their condition is a disability
- they do not think of themselves as disabled
- they're worried about how their employer might react
- they do not want anyone to know

Employees are still protected from discrimination if their employer could reasonably be expected to know they have a disability.

[Read more about considering whether someone has a disability](#)

When an employer can make a decision based on disability

In some cases, it may not be against the law for an employer to make a decision based on someone's disability. But the law in this area can be complex. It's a good idea for employers to get legal advice first.

[Find out more about when an employer may make a decision based on disability](#)

Covid and disability discrimination

Disabled people and many people with health conditions have been disproportionately affected by the covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

By law, employers must consider this when they make any decisions related to the pandemic, for example:

- workplace safety
- returning to work
- ways of working, for example flexible working or hybrid working
- supporting staff who are at a high risk from covid
- redundancy

[Read our covid advice for employers and employees](#)

2. How and when disability discrimination can happen

Disabled people can face discrimination and harassment every day, inside and outside of work.

It can happen in any aspect of work. Common situations include when decisions are made around:

- accessibility of the workplace or the tools and systems people need to use
- ways of working, for example flexible working or hybrid working
- recruitment
- redundancy and dismissals
- sickness and absence
- terms and conditions of employment, including pay and promotion
- training
- working hours or rest breaks
- work-related events – for example team-building or away days, conferences or team social events

It's against the law (Equality Act 2010) to discriminate against someone because:

- they have a condition or impairment considered a disability by law
- it's believed they have a disability even if that's not true
- they have a connection with someone who's disabled, for example a family member, friend or colleague
- they have another connection with disability, for example they volunteer for a disability charity
- they had a disability in the past

Find out more about:

- [what disability means by law](#)
- [types of disability discrimination](#)

How it can happen

Discrimination and harassment can happen in different ways. For example it might:

- be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident
- happen in the workplace, at work social events or when people are working remotely
- happen face to face, on social media, in emails or phone calls

- be spoken or written words, imagery, graffiti, gestures, jokes, pranks or unwanted physical behaviour
- not always be obvious or noticed by others
- not always be someone's intention to discriminate or cause offence

Who someone can experience it from

Someone could experience disability discrimination or harassment from anyone they come into contact with because of their job, including:

- someone they work with
- a manager, supervisor or someone else in a position of authority
- someone who is less senior than them, for example a manager being bullied or harassed by their staff – this can be called 'upward bullying' or 'subordinate bullying'

Someone could also experience disability discrimination or harassment from a customer, client or member of the public. An employer should take steps to prevent this.

Discrimination is often directed at an individual, but it's not always the case. Sometimes there can be a workplace culture that's not specifically aimed at one person – for example making offensive comments about disabled people.

When disability discrimination may not be obvious

Sometimes discrimination or harassment is very obvious, for example:

- telling someone you will not give them a promotion because they're disabled
- dismissing someone because they have a disabled child
- making fun of or mocking someone's disability

Other things are not always obvious and may not be noticed by other people. This can include:

- [unconscious bias](#) – when someone's thoughts or decisions are influenced by beliefs or assumptions that may not be right or reasonable
- stereotyping people – having a fixed view about what someone's like or what they can do based on their disability
- microaggressions – small comments, questions or behaviours that are offensive or inappropriate, sometimes without the person who's doing it realising

Examples of stereotyping and microaggressions

Common examples include:

- helping someone when they have not asked for help – this suggests thinking the person is not capable of doing it on their own
- being surprised when someone talks about their partner, children or hobbies – this suggests thinking someone who's disabled is somehow not able to live a 'normal' life
- telling someone not to use the accessible toilet because they do not look disabled – not all disabilities are obvious

Get more advice and support

It can sometimes be difficult to understand the different types of discrimination. If you need help, you can contact the:

- [Acas helpline](#)

- [Equality Advisory and Support Service \(EASS\)](#)

Employers and managers can also read the [Employment: Statutory Code of Practice from the Equality and Human Rights Commission](#). This detailed guidance can be useful if you would like to understand the Equality Act 2010 in more depth.

Related content

[/supporting-disabled-people](#)

[/accessibility-at-work](#)

[Check you're following discrimination law when recruiting](#)

3. Types of disability discrimination

It's important to understand the different types of disability discrimination, so you know how to deal with it and what your rights and responsibilities are under discrimination law (Equality Act 2010).

Disability discrimination includes:

- direct or indirect discrimination
- discrimination arising from disability
- failure to make reasonable adjustments
- harassment
- victimisation

Getting help

It can sometimes be difficult to understand the different types of discrimination. If you need help, you can contact the:

- [Acas helpline](#)
- [Equality Advisory and Support Service \(EASS\)](#)

Direct discrimination

Direct disability discrimination is when someone is put at a disadvantage and treated less favourably because of:

- their own disability
- the disability of someone they know or have a connection with ('discrimination by association')
- a 'perceived' disability – this means thinking someone has a disability when they do not ('discrimination by perception')

Direct discrimination against someone who's disabled

This is when a disabled person is put at a disadvantage and treated less favourably because of their disability.

Example of direct discrimination

Mo has a job interview and is offered the job. After Mo tells the employer about their disability, the employer withdraws the job offer and does not explain why, even after Mo asks for an explanation.

The employer offered jobs to 3 people but Mo's job offer is the only one that's withdrawn. If the employer's reason for withdrawing the offer was Mo's disability, this would be direct discrimination.

Discrimination by association

This is when someone is discriminated against because they have a connection with either:

- someone who's disabled, for example a family member, friend or colleague
- a group of disabled people

The legal term is 'discrimination by association'. It's also known as 'associative discrimination'.

Example 1 – a connection with a disabled family member

Jo has a disabled child. Jo has needed to take several days off at short notice to take their child to medical appointments related to their disability. Jo overhears their manager say, "the amount of time off that child causes is not acceptable". The next day, Jo is dismissed. This could be discrimination by association.

Example 2 – a connection with a group of disabled people

Pat volunteers at the weekends, driving a minibus that takes people with a learning disability on day trips. Pat's line manager sees Pat dropping the group members off.

At work, the manager makes inappropriate and offensive comments about Pat and the people on the trip. The manager also starts treating Pat differently in other ways. For example, they say Pat cannot come to weekly team lunches any more because they need to cover the phone, when that's always been shared between the team.

This could be discrimination by association as well as harassment.

Discrimination by perception

It's against the law to discriminate against someone because of a 'perceived' disability – this means thinking someone has a disability when they do not. The legal term is 'discrimination by perception'.

Example of discrimination by perception

Some colleagues complain about Raja's 'unpredictable' behaviour, and spread rumours that Raja has a serious mental health condition. They stop inviting Raja to social events and training.

Raja has said sorry to colleagues and explained they have been behaving differently recently because of something happening outside of work. But the apologies make no difference and Raja continues to be excluded.

Raja's colleagues wrongly believe Raja has a mental health condition and they're treating Raja less favourably because of it. This is likely to be discrimination by perception.

Indirect discrimination

Indirect disability discrimination is when a working practice, policy or rule applies to everyone in a group, but it puts a disabled person or disabled people at a disadvantage.

The group could be everyone in your organisation or any other grouping of staff, for example everyone who works in a particular role or team.

This includes:

- anyone who the working practice, policy or rule applies to now, for example current staff
- people who it would apply to in the future, for example anyone who applies for a job
- anyone who would be affected by something an organisation is proposing to introduce

Indirect discrimination can be less obvious than direct discrimination, and it may not always be someone's intention to discriminate.

It can apply to any working practice, policy or rule, whether it's written down or not. Some examples are:

- policies on ways of working, for example flexible working or working from home
- working hours
- the way employees are selected for redundancy

For someone to experience indirect disability discrimination, all of the following must apply:

1. The working practice, policy or rule must be the same for everyone within a relevant group of staff or job applicants.
2. It would put other staff or job applicants with 'the same protected characteristic' at a disadvantage, compared to people who do not have that characteristic.
3. The disabled person is personally put at a disadvantage.
4. It's a course of action the employer cannot justify if legally challenged.

'The same protected characteristic' does not mean disabled people as a whole. It means people with a particular disability, for example people with an equivalent level of visual impairment. It does not matter if there's nobody else at work with the same disability – it's whether anyone with that particular disability would be put at a disadvantage.

Example of indirect discrimination

Jay has type 1 diabetes and works in a factory. The rest break policy says everyone has a lunch break at the same time, with no other breaks during the shift. Jay sometimes needs snacks between meals to help manage their diabetes.

If Jay's employer does not make a reasonable adjustment for Jay, for example more evenly distributing Jay's break times across the day, this is likely to be indirect discrimination.

It does not matter that nobody else with type 1 diabetes works in the factory. It could still be indirect discrimination if the policy would disadvantage anyone who's affected in the same way as Jay by type 1 diabetes.

When a decision based on disability might not be discrimination

In certain circumstances under the law an employer might be able to make a decision based on disability. Ways they can do this include:

- positive action
- objective justification
- occupational requirement

Find out more about using:

- [positive action and objective justification](#)
- [an occupational requirement in recruitment](#)

Discrimination arising from disability

'Discrimination arising from disability' is a legal term. It means when someone is treated badly (the law says 'unfavourably') or put at a disadvantage, not because of their disability itself, but because of something that's a result of their disability.

Examples could include:

- absence from work because of regular hospital appointments
- problems with speech or movement
- difficulties with reading or writing
- difficulties with memory or concentration
- needing regular rest breaks or toilet breaks
- needing an assistance dog

For this type of discrimination, the person does not have to compare how they're treated to how someone else is treated for the law to apply.

It does not apply if the person or organisation treating the person unfavourably did not know, and could not reasonably have been expected to know, about the disability.

Example of discrimination arising from disability

Mae has cancer and is having chemotherapy. The time off Mae takes for the chemotherapy appointments and recovery leads to their manager following the company's procedure for too much absence and Mae gets a warning. Because of the warning, Mae is not able to apply for promotion.

This could be discrimination arising from disability. The company could have made a reasonable adjustment to make sure this did not happen, for example recording these absences differently from standard absences.

Failure to make reasonable adjustments

When an employer knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, that a job applicant or employee has a disability, they must:

- consider if they need to make reasonable adjustments
- make the adjustments as soon as they can, if the changes are reasonable

Otherwise it could be 'failure to make reasonable adjustments' under discrimination law.

[Find out more about reasonable adjustments](#)

Harassment

Harassment is when someone experiences unwanted behaviour related to a disability or another protected characteristic (age, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation).

To be harassment, the unwanted behaviour must have either:

- violated the person's dignity
- created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person

It can be harassment if the behaviour:

- has one of these effects even if it was not intended
- intended to have one of these effects even if it did not have that effect

The law on harassment also applies when someone:

- is being harassed because they are thought to have a certain disability when they do not
- is being harassed because they're connected with someone who's disabled
- witnesses harassment, if what they've seen has violated their dignity or created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment for them

[Find out more about harassment](#)

Example 1 – harassment because of disability

Shar sometimes loses their balance because they have multiple sclerosis (MS). People at work regularly make comments and jokes about it, which makes Shar feel humiliated and uncomfortable. It's likely that this is harassment because of disability.

Example 2 – harassment aimed at someone else

Andi hears a group of colleagues making offensive comments about someone at work who has a learning disability. Andi has also seen them getting the person in trouble by persuading them to do something wrong. Andi is intimidated and offended by this.

This behaviour is not aimed at Andi. But Andi could still make a complaint of harassment related to disability if it's created a hostile environment for them at work.

Victimisation

Victimisation is when someone is treated differently or less favourably as a result of being involved in some way with a discrimination or harassment complaint. The law also protects someone from victimisation when someone else thinks they're involved with a complaint.

Someone could be victimised because:

- they made a complaint about disability discrimination or harassment
- they're gathering information that might lead to making a complaint
- they supported someone else's complaint
- they said something or gave evidence that did not support someone else's complaint
- someone else thinks the person has done any of the things above or is considering them

Ways someone could be victimised include:

- being labelled a troublemaker
- being left out
- not being allowed to do something

Example of victimisation

Ali made a formal complaint at work because their manager had not made the reasonable adjustments that had been agreed. Ali had previously talked to their manager about it and then followed the company's grievance procedure when their requests and concerns were ignored.

Since then, Ali's manager has become increasingly critical of Ali, picking on them in front of other staff. They've also stopped Ali from applying for any promotions. Ali believes this is happening because of the formal complaint. This is likely to be victimisation.

Related content

[/supporting-disabled-people](#)

[/what-disability-means-by-law](#)

4. Reporting disability discrimination at work

If you've experienced or witnessed disability discrimination or harassment at work you can make a complaint to your employer.

Your employer should:

- take your complaint very seriously
- handle it fairly and sensitively

It's a good idea to make a note of what's happened. This should include dates, times and names, including any witnesses. Making a note can be especially helpful if you find talking about the experience particularly distressing.

It's best to make a complaint as soon as possible. But if you make a complaint a long time after an incident took place, your employer should still take it seriously.

If you've experienced it yourself

If you think you've experienced discrimination, talk with your employer or someone senior at work. It's usually best to [raise the problem informally](#) first.

If this does not resolve the issue, or it does not seem appropriate, you can [raise the problem formally](#). This is known as 'raising a grievance'.

Alternatively, your employer may have their own specific bullying and harassment policy for handling disability discrimination and harassment complaints. If so, you should follow that policy and procedure to make your complaint.

If the problem is not resolved

If you made a formal complaint of disability discrimination or harassment and this did not resolve the problem, you can consider making a claim to an employment tribunal.

If you want to do this, first you must tell Acas you intend to make a claim to an employment tribunal.

There are strict time limits for making a claim to an employment tribunal. In most cases, you have 3 months minus 1 day from the date the discrimination or harassment happened.

Find out more about:

- [making a claim to an employment tribunal](#)
- [employment tribunal time limits](#)

To make a claim to an employment tribunal, there is no requirement to have worked for an employer for a set amount of time.

If you witnessed it happening to someone else

If you see someone at work being discriminated against or harassed, you could step in and try to stop it happening, if you feel it's safe to do so.

After it's happened, you should talk to the person who's experienced the discrimination or harassment to see if they want your support.

You might also want to talk to someone else to get advice and support before deciding whether to report it – for example someone at work who's been trained to advise people who are considering making this kind of complaint.

You might decide to:

- report what you've seen or heard
- make a harassment complaint yourself if what you've witnessed has violated your dignity or created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment

If you decide to report it

If you decide to report the discrimination, talk with your employer or someone senior at work. It's usually best to [raise the problem informally](#) first.

If this does not resolve the issue, or it does not seem appropriate, you can [raise the problem formally](#) (known as 'raising a grievance'). This is if you're making a complaint yourself because what you've seen or heard has violated your dignity or created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment.

Alternatively, if your employer has their own specific bullying and harassment policy for handling disability discrimination and harassment complaints, you should follow that policy and procedure to make your complaint.

Supporting someone else's complaint

Ways you could support someone else's complaint include things like:

- comforting or supporting someone who's experienced disability discrimination or harassment
- making a statement, which may or may not mean you appear as a witness at a hearing

If you're making a witness statement, you can ask for it to be anonymous. But keeping your identity secret cannot be guaranteed. For example, if the case goes to an employment tribunal, you might be asked to give evidence in person.

Discrimination law protects you from being victimised because you've supported someone else's complaint. Find out more about [types of disability discrimination](#), including victimisation.

Disability hate crime

Harassment at work can sometimes be a crime, for example if you're the victim of:

- physical or verbal abuse
- threats of physical violence
- online abuse
- damage to your property

Any criminal offence can be a disability hate crime if you were targeted because you're disabled. You can also be the victim of a disability hate crime if someone thinks you're disabled, or you have a connection with someone who's disabled.

Deciding whether to report it to the police

If you tell your employer, they should talk to you about whether you want to report it to the police, and support you if you choose to report it.

Your employer should not put any pressure on you to make any particular decision. If you do not want to tell the police, you do not have to.

In most cases, your employer should go along with your decision. But your employer might decide they have to tell the police in some circumstances. This might include if you or they think there's likely to be:

- an ongoing risk to your safety or the safety of others
- an increased risk to your safety because you're a vulnerable person

If your employer is going to report it to the police, they should talk with you about it before telling them, and let you know when they've told them.

[Find out more about how your employer should deal with hate crime](#)

Get more advice and support

Help and support is available for anyone affected by disability discrimination.

Support through your work

Depending on what's available at your work, this might include:

- counselling or mental health support through an employee assistance programme (EAP)
- someone who's been trained to advise people who are considering making a discrimination or harassment complaint
- staff support networks – for example a disability network

Other specialist support

To help you understand your rights and options, you can:

- [contact the Acas helpline](#)
- [contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service \(EASS\)](#)
- talk to your trade union if you have one

If you're struggling to cope and need someone to talk to, you can contact:

- [Samaritans](#)

For disability hate crime, get specialist help and support from:

- [SupportLine](#)
- [True Vision](#)
- [Victim Support](#)

Related content

[/supporting-disabled-people](#)

[/what-disability-means-by-law](#)

5. How employers should handle a disability discrimination complaint

As an employer, you should:

- take any complaint of disability discrimination very seriously
- think very carefully about the way you handle a complaint, to make sure you do it fairly and sensitively and follow the right procedures

If you do not, the problem might be raised as a formal complaint later, or lead to an employment tribunal claim if it's not resolved.

Taking it seriously can:

- show you are working to make the workplace fair
- give staff confidence to raise an issue
- help stop and prevent unacceptable behaviour
- reduce the likelihood of legal action

Keep an open mind

When you're dealing with a disability discrimination complaint, it's important to understand that:

- something that seems like a small thing to you can feel very different to the person experiencing it
- it may be very hard for the person to talk about what's happened
- they may be worried about who to trust, whether their complaint will be ignored or if they'll be seen as a troublemaker
- people can be affected by disability discrimination in different ways

It's important that you:

- listen to what the person says

- leave any personal feelings you have to one side
- look at how it's made them feel or how it's affected them
- do not make any assumptions
- consider the person's specific circumstances
- look into the complaint thoroughly and fairly

How to approach a disability discrimination complaint

As an employer or manager, you should take any complaint of discrimination very seriously, and look into it as soon as possible. You must follow a full and fair procedure.

It's important to understand the [different types of disability discrimination](#) so you know what your responsibilities are under discrimination law (Equality Act 2010).

A complaint or concern might come from:

- an employee about something they've experienced
- an employee who's witnessed unacceptable behaviour or treatment
- a trade union or employee representative on behalf of an employee

You should look into the complaint in a way that's fair and sensitive to:

- the person who made the complaint
- anyone who witnessed it
- anyone accused of discrimination or harassment

You should keep the complaint as confidential as possible. People should only have appropriate information on a strictly need-to-know basis.

Find out the steps you should take to [handle a discrimination or harassment complaint at work](#).

If the complaint has been made a long time after the incident took place, you should still take it seriously.

If it's a disability hate crime

Harassment at work can sometimes be a crime. For example if someone is the victim of:

- physical or verbal abuse
- threats of physical violence
- online abuse
- damage to their property

Any criminal offence can be a disability hate crime if the person is targeted because they're disabled. Someone can also be the victim of a disability hate crime if someone thinks they're disabled, or they have a connection with disability or someone who's disabled.

[Find out how employers should deal with harassment that could be a crime](#)

Supporting staff who've been affected

Disability discrimination can be very distressing and in some cases have a severe impact on someone's mental health and wellbeing.

You should make sure that:

- reporting disability discrimination is as easy as possible
- anyone who's experienced or witnessed it feels safe and protected
- anyone accused of discriminating against someone is treated in an impartial and fair way, including after any appropriate procedures
- you're aware of the impact this has had on people involved and offer ongoing support to help improve working relationships
- you talk to anyone affected privately and allow plenty of time
- you're aware of any specific support someone might need throughout the process, for example [reasonable adjustments](#)
- you offer [mental health support](#) to staff, for example through an employee assistance programme (EAP) or trained mental health first aiders
- the person investigating the complaint is impartial and trained for the role

More advice and support for employers

For more advice about your options, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).

Acas support for employers and managers includes:

- [tailored support for your organisation](#)
- [training on dealing with unacceptable behaviours at work](#)
- [equality, diversity and inclusion training](#)

[Find out more about supporting disabled people at work](#)

Related content

[Check you're following discrimination law when recruiting](#)
[/what-disability-means-by-law](#)

6. Steps for employers to prevent disability discrimination

All employers should take steps to try to make sure disability discrimination does not happen at work.

You should aim for a culture of zero tolerance of disability discrimination. To try to achieve this, you should:

- remove or reduce risks of disability discrimination
- offer support to anyone who's affected by it
- make it clear to everyone who works for you, or uses your services, that disability discrimination is against the law (Equality Act 2010) and you will not tolerate it
- train your staff on recognising disability discrimination and encourage them to report it
- make sure all your policies are consistent in having zero tolerance of disability discrimination
- recognise the benefits of an inclusive and diverse workforce that does not exclude disabled people

If you are a small business or organisation and feel you do not have enough resources to do all these things, you should still do as much as you can. You can introduce many of these things at little or no cost.

Employ and support disabled people

Disability discrimination can be less likely to happen when you have a diverse range of staff.

If you employ and support disabled people, you can:

- draw from the widest possible pool of talent for jobs at all levels
- have a workforce that better reflects your customers and the wider community
- recruit and retain staff who often have more resilience and problem-solving skills through developing ways of living with a disability
- bring new skills to the organisation
- improve staff morale by treating everyone fairly
- show customers, clients and other organisations your commitment to equality

[Find out more about supporting disabled people at work](#)

Encourage inclusive behaviour

There are many ways you can encourage inclusive behaviour around disability. For example, you could:

- take [positive action](#) to make the workplace fairer if disabled people are disadvantaged or under-represented in your organisation
- provide ways for staff to share their experiences of living with a disability, if they're comfortable doing so
- encourage senior staff and managers to be role models, including sharing their own experiences of disability where appropriate
- [make the workplace more accessible](#) – this includes anywhere staff are working, including working from home
- give information to staff, job applicants and customers in formats they can access and language that's easy to understand

[Find out more about improving equality, diversity and inclusion at work](#)

Talk about language and disability

It's important to talk with your staff about appropriate language to use when discussing disability. This includes when you're speaking directly with someone who's disabled and in wider communications at work.

You should make it clear that ableist language is not acceptable. This means language that's inappropriate, offensive or negative towards disabled people, including things some might consider as 'banter' or jokes. You should also be sensitive in the terms you use around disability.

[Find out more about talking about disability at work](#)

Put policies and procedures in place

You must follow a full and fair procedure for handling discrimination complaints, in line with the [Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures](#).

You may want to develop specific policies for your organisation, for example:

- a bullying, discrimination and harassment policy – including how you will handle complaints
- an equality, diversity and inclusion policy

If you create a specific equality, diversity and inclusion policy

If you decide to create a specific equality, diversity and inclusion policy, you should do this in consultation with either:

- trade unions
- other employee representatives, where there's no trade union

The following are examples of what you should consider including:

- talking about disability at work – including language and terminology
- supporting and listening to disabled staff – this could include setting up a formal group like a disability network
- supporting allies – people who are not disabled but who want to help make sure their workplace is inclusive
- steps you will take to avoid stereotyping people who have a disability
- addressing issues relating to covid-19 (coronavirus) and the disproportionate effect on some groups

[Find out more about creating an equality, diversity and inclusion policy](#)

Make sure other policies are in line

It's important that all your policies match up. You should check all relevant policies to make sure they do not discriminate against anyone because of disability, including:

- absence
- data protection (following UK GDPR)
- dress code
- flexible working
- recruitment
- social media
- training and development
- working hours

For example:

- your recruitment policy should cover making [reasonable adjustments](#) for job applicants who need them
- your absence policy should take into account staff who need [time off for reasons related to their disability](#)
- your social media policy should make it clear there is zero tolerance of disability discrimination, including on personal devices

Train staff

This includes:

- training everyone who works for you on recognising and understanding disability discrimination
- training managers to know how to support disabled employees
- training managers and others to know how to deal with disability discrimination complaints
- training appropriate staff as mental health first aiders
- providing regular equality and diversity training for all staff

Acas training for employers and managers includes:

- [training on dealing with unacceptable behaviours at work](#)
- [equality, diversity and inclusion training](#)
- [free online training](#) – including disability discrimination and reasonable adjustments

It's important to understand that training on its own is not likely to get rid of unconscious bias or discrimination. Training needs to be part of a wider plan.

Consider mentoring

You may want to consider a mentoring scheme. For example:

- a scheme to support disabled staff to progress in their career
- a 'reverse mentoring scheme' where disabled staff or those with long-term health conditions share their experiences and ideas with senior staff

Create ways for staff to be heard

This can include:

- setting up a formal group for disabled people and their allies to share experiences, raise concerns and support each other – for example a disability network
- appointing disability champions

Make sure you support any groups or roles once they're set up. This includes:

- giving people the time to be involved
- actively listening to concerns raised
- taking steps to resolve issues – this could include things like [making changes so your workplace is accessible](#)

Evaluate and measure change

You should regularly check if policies and procedures for preventing disability discrimination and handling complaints are working or if they need to change.

It's also important to regularly evaluate other steps you've taken. How you do this will depend on what you've done and any particular issues you were trying to address.

For example, you could:

- [check the diversity of your staff](#)
- do anonymous staff surveys
- see if you have a disproportionate staff turnover for staff who are disabled
- do an analysis of roles and pay grades to see if disabled staff are represented and paid fairly
- consult with your trade union, if there is one

Get more advice and support

If you need help to deal with any challenges in your organisation, you can:

- [contact the Acas helpline](#)
- [get tailored support for your organisation](#)

Employers and managers can also read the [Employment: Statutory Code of Practice from the Equality and Human Rights Commission](#). This detailed guidance can be useful if you would like to understand the Equality Act 2010 in more depth.

Related content

[/what-disability-means-by-law](#)

[/supporting-mental-health-workplace](#)

[Check you're following discrimination law when recruiting](#)