

# Disability **Awareness**

A brief overview



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## What is disability awareness?

Disability awareness involves recognising the rights and needs of disabled people and treating them with respect and equality. This includes understanding the challenges and barriers that disabled people may face and taking steps to create a more inclusive and accessible environment.

There are many ways to promote disability awareness, including:

- Becoming educated about disability-related issues and the experiences of disabled people.
- Using inclusive language and the correct etiquette when interacting with disabled people.
- Advocating for disabled people's rights.
- Actively working to create more inclusive and accessible spaces (including removing physical and social barriers).
- Supporting organisations that promote the rights and inclusion of disabled people.
- Collaborating and learning from disabled people.

## Why is disability awareness important?

Disability awareness is important because it helps to promote the rights and equality of disabled people. By understanding and acknowledging the challenges and barriers that disabled people may face, a more inclusive, supportive, and accessible society can be created. This includes ensuring public spaces are wheelchair accessible, providing accommodations in the workplace, and promoting the use of assistive technologies.

Becoming educated about disability issues and treating disabled people with respect and kindness, can also help to reduce stigma and discrimination against disabled people. Finally, disability awareness is important because it allows us to recognise the strengths and contributions of everyone, and helps create a more diverse and inclusive society.

# Models of disability

There are several different models of disability that have been proposed over the years. These models attempt to understand and explain the various ways in which disabled people experience the world around them. The two most commonly discussed are the medical and social model.

**The Medical Model:** This model views disability as a personal tragedy or deficiency that requires medical intervention. Under this model, disability is viewed as a problem that is inherent to the individual, and sees the role of medicine as fixing or curing the person's impairment, rather than addressing the social and environmental barriers and discrimination that can prevent disabled people from fully participating in society.

**The Social Model:** In contrast this model argues that people are disabled not by their impairment, but by barriers in society which make life harder for disabled people. These barriers can be physical but, just as often, they are the result of other people's attitudes. Removing these barriers creates a more inclusive and accessible society and offers disabled people more independence, choice, and control. The social model of disability has been influential in shaping disability rights and accessibility legislation.

## MEDICAL MODEL

- Disability is the problem of the disabled person and they're disabled by their impairments.
- Professionals are the experts and in control.
- Disabled people are passive receivers of services aimed to cure.
- If the person can't be cured, they must adjust to manage in a society of inequalities, barriers and discrimination.
  - Exclusion, segregation, lack of independence and alternative services.
  - Impairment becomes the focus of attention.

**Society remains unchanged**

## SOCIAL MODEL

- People are disabled by societies barriers, policies, and attitudes.
- Disabled people are the experts of their own lived experiences and should make their own choices and have informed consent.
- Communities have responsibility to identify their barriers and biases, and develop solutions.
- Diversity is a normal part of life and everyone is equal.
- Disabled people should have equal rights, independence, and full access to society.

**Society evolves**

If you would like an image of the differences between the medical and social model of disability, please visit this [infographic](#).

# What is the difference between diversity, equity, inclusion, and equality?

**Diversity** refers to the presence of a wide range of distinct characteristics among individuals within a group or organisation. These characteristics might include differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, cultural background, and other personal characteristics.

**Equity** refers to the fair distribution of resources and opportunities to ensure that everyone has the support they need to thrive. It involves considering the unique needs and circumstances of different individuals and groups, and providing them with what they need to achieve equal outcomes. This can involve taking steps to address systemic barriers and biases that may have an impact on certain groups, in order to promote fairness and equality.

**Inclusion** refers to the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity – it involves creating an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and supported, and where their unique experiences and perspectives are actively sought and appreciated. Inclusion is about creating a sense of belonging and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate and contribute.

**Equality** refers to the idea that everyone should be treated fairly and without discrimination. It means that everyone should have the same rights, opportunities, and access to resources, regardless of their background or identity.

In summary, diversity is about representation and acknowledging differences among individuals. Equity is about ensuring that everyone has what they need to be successful, considering their unique needs and circumstances. Inclusion is about creating a sense of belonging and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate and contribute, and equality is about treating everyone the same, regardless of their differences.

# Strategies for promoting inclusivity and accessibility for disabled people

There are many ways that organisations and communities can promote inclusivity and accessibility for disabled people. Some of these include:

- **Providing accessible physical spaces:** This can include installing ramps, lifts, and handrails, as well as making sure that doorways and bathrooms are wide enough to accommodate individuals using wheelchairs or other mobility aids.
- **Offering assistive technology:** This can include providing software or hardware that makes it easier for disabled people to access information and communicate, such as screen readers or text-to-speech software.
- **Providing accessible content:** This can include creating materials in multiple formats (e.g., audio, large print, electronic) and using clear and concise language, as well as providing closed captions or transcripts for videos and other multimedia content and using alt text for images.
- **Offering accommodations:** This can include providing sign language interpreters, real-time captioning, or other reasonable accommodations to ensure that disabled people can fully participate in events and activities.
- **Incorporating disability awareness and sensitivity training:** This can help to ensure that disabled people feel welcome and included, and can help to reduce the impact of unconscious bias or stigma.
- **Communication and interaction with disabled people:** This includes the use of appropriate language and etiquette.

It is important to remember that promoting inclusivity and accessibility is a continuous process that requires ongoing effort and attention. It is also important to consult with disabled people and disability-led organisations to ensure that the needs and perspectives of the disabled community are being considered and addressed.

If you would like an image about inclusivity and accessibility, please visit this [infographic](#).

## Inclusive language

It is important to use respectful and appropriate language when referring to disabled people. However, the way that disability is referred to can vary depending on the country and cultural context. For example, in the UK it is more common to use the term "disabled person," while in the US, the term "people with disabilities" is more commonly used.

While it's always preferable to ask a disabled person how they prefer to be addressed, the UK Government guidelines for using respectful terminology is:

Avoid	Use
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
(the) handicapped, (the) disabled	disabled (people), people with disabilities
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition or impairment]
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal	with a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural)
cripple, invalid	disabled person
spastic	person with cerebral palsy
able-bodied	non-disabled
mental patient, insane, mad	person with a mental health condition
deaf and dumb; deaf mute	deaf, user of British Sign Language (BSL), person with a hearing impairment
the blind	people with visual impairments; blind people; blind and partially sighted people
an epileptic, diabetic, depressive, and so on	person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression, or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression
dwarf; midget	someone with restricted growth or short stature
fits, spells, attacks	seizures
disability-friendly, disabled toilets/parking	accessible toilets/parking, parking for blue badge holders

Source: [Gov.uk](#). If you would like an image with inclusive language, please visit this [infographic](#).

## Etiquette

It is important to approach a disabled person with the same respect and consideration that you would show to anyone else. Here are some suggestions to create a respectful and inclusive environment for disabled people.

- Address disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else.
- Use clear, concise language and speak at a normal volume and pace.
- Speak directly to a disabled person, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them.
- Never patronise the person or attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to.
- Maintain eye contact and listen actively to what the person is saying.
- Respect their boundaries: Some disabled people may be comfortable talking about their disability, while others prefer not to. Respect their wishes and don't pry or ask inappropriate, or invasive questions.
- When describing people, it is not important to talk about the disability unless you are directly discussing disability related issues. Otherwise, people are described in the same manner non-disabled people are described.
- If the person uses a wheelchair or other assistive device, do not lean on it, use it for support or push someone's manual wheelchair without their explicit permission first.
- If you are unsure how to communicate with a disabled person, you can ask them if there is anything you can do to make communication easier for them.
- Focus on the person, not the disability, as a person's disability is just one aspect of who they are.
- Avoid making assumptions about what a disabled person can or cannot do. Remember that every person is unique and everyone has different abilities and limitations.

# The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act is a UK legislation that promotes equality and provides legal protection for individuals against discrimination on the basis of various characteristics. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sex orientation

The Act also offers protection against discrimination by association. This protection is for people who are discriminated against because someone close to them falls under the definition of one of the protected characteristics, such as carers.

The Act applies to England, Scotland, and Wales and defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Under the Act, it is unlawful to discriminate against an individual because of their disability in the areas of work, education, access to goods and services, and other areas of public life.

The Equality Act requires employers, service providers, and public bodies to make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled people are not disadvantaged. This may include things like providing accessible parking or providing alternative formats for information. To read more about the Equality Act, please visit the [UK's Governments website](#).

# Discrimination

Disability discrimination occurs when an individual is treated unfairly or less favourably because of their disability. It can take many forms, including direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, and failure to make reasonable adjustments. It is unlawful to discriminate against an individual because of their disability in areas including employment, education, access to goods and services, and other areas of public life.

**Direct discrimination** is when an individual is treated unfairly because of their disability. For example, an employer refusing to hire an individual because they have a disability.

**Indirect discrimination** is when a policy or practice that appears neutral on the surface has a disproportionate impact on disabled people. For example, a requirement that all employees be able to lift a certain amount of weight could disproportionately impact individuals with mobility impairments.

**Harassment** is unwanted conduct related to an individual's disability that has the purpose or effect of violating their dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

**Failure to make reasonable adjustments** is when an employer or service provider fails to take appropriate steps to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged. For example, failing to provide a wheelchair ramp for an individual who uses a wheelchair.

## Unconscious bias

Unconscious bias refers to the biases that we hold that we are not consciously aware of. These biases are often a result of the cultural and social messages that we have absorbed over our lives. Unconscious biases can impact our thoughts, actions, and decisions in subtle ways, and can have a significant impact on the way that we interact with and perceive others.

Unconscious bias towards disability can manifest in many ways. For example, an individual with unconscious bias towards disability may:

Assume that disabled people are not capable of certain tasks or responsibilities

Treat disabled people differently or less favourably than others

Have lower expectations for disabled people

Be more likely to stereotype or make assumptions about disabled people

It is important to recognise and address unconscious bias towards disability, as it can lead to discrimination and unequal treatment of disabled people. Some ways to address unconscious bias include educating oneself about disability issues, being aware of one's own biases and stereotypes, and actively working to create a more inclusive and respectful environment for disabled people.

# Ableism

Ableism is a form of discrimination or prejudice against disabled people. It is rooted in the belief that disabled people are inferior or less capable than those without disabilities. Ableism can manifest in various ways including:

- Refusing to hire an individual with a disability because of their disability.
- Denying access to goods, services, or facilities to disabled people.
- Using offensive or derogatory language to refer to disabled people.
- Stereotyping or making assumptions about disabled people.
- Failing to make reasonable accommodations or access accommodations for disabled people.
- Treating disabled people differently or unfairly because of their disability.
- Being belittling or condescending towards disabled people.

Ableism can have a significant impact on the lives of disabled people and can contribute to negative stereotypes and stigma surrounding disability. For example it can lead to:

- **Limited opportunities:** Ableism can create barriers to education, employment, and other opportunities that are essential for personal and professional growth.
- **Inaccessibility:** Ableism can result in physical, social, and digital environments that are not accessible to disabled people, making it difficult or impossible for them to fully participate in activities or access necessary resources.
- **Stigma and discrimination:** Ableism can lead to negative attitudes and stereotypes about disabled people, which can result in stigma and discrimination. This can affect the self-esteem and well-being of disabled people and create additional challenges in their lives.
- **Health inequalities:** Disabled people may experience health disparities due to a lack of access to quality healthcare and other services. This can lead to poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancies.

It is important to recognise and address ableism in order to create a more inclusive and equitable society. This can involve challenging negative attitudes and stereotypes, advocating for the rights of disabled people, and taking steps to remove barriers and create accessible environments.

# The role of allies and advocates in supporting disabled people

Allies and advocates play an important role in supporting disabled people and promoting disability rights. Allies are individuals who support and advocate for the rights and equality of a group other than their own. In the context of disability, allies can be individuals who do not have a disability themselves, but who support and advocate for the rights and equality of disabled people.

Advocates, on the other hand, are individuals who actively work to promote and defend the rights of a particular group or cause. In the context of disability, advocates may work to promote the rights and equality of disabled people through activities such as lobbying for policy changes, participating in disability rights campaigns, and educating others about disability issues.

Both allies and advocates can play a crucial role in supporting disabled people by:

- Using their privilege and platform to amplify the voices and experiences of disabled people.
- Advocating for the rights and equality of disabled people.
- Educating themselves and others about disability issues.
- Challenging ableism and discrimination when they see it.
- Promoting inclusivity and accessibility for disabled people.

By supporting disabled people and advocating for their rights and equality, allies and advocates can help to create a more inclusive and equitable society for everyone.

For information on disability statistics, please visit this [infographic](#).