

DISABILITY AWARENESS

What does the Disability Discrimination Act do?

- Prohibits discrimination in employment where an employer has 15 or more full time employees and to make "reasonable adjustments" to allow successful employment (under review and the threshold limit to be reduced).
- Prevents service providers from refusing to provide services to disabled people on the grounds of their disability. There is a duty to make "reasonable adjustments".
- Requires service providers to change policy and procedures or provide auxiliary aids in order that disabled people can access their services. There is a duty to make "reasonable adjustments".
- Requires service providers to remove physical barriers from the built environment or provide alternative means of access to a service where barriers cannot be removed (from October 2004).

NB 1: To qualify for protection from the provision of DDA a disabled person needs to make their needs known in the first place.

NB 2: However, there is a duty on an organisation to anticipate disabled people's needs.

Who is covered?

- The Act states that a disabled person is someone who has a "physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities".
- Long term means that a person is likely to be covered by the Act if their disability has lasted 12 months, will last for at least 12 months or is likely to last for the rest of that person's life.

- Groups which tend to be included are (but not limited to) people who have:
 - Difficulty walking;
 - Difficulty seeing (if vision is not corrected by standard prescriptions);
 - Difficulty hearing;
 - Mental Health service users;
 - Learning Disabilities;
 - Disfigurement such as facial scars;
 - Asthma or problems with breathing;
 - Symptomatic HIV.

Communicating with disabled people

Disabled people are individuals just like anyone else. You cannot tell exactly how you should interact with a disabled person until you have met that particular disabled person!

Below are some general tips that may help you:

- Avoid describing disabled people by their impairments, e.g. "the deaf", "she's an epileptic" etc. Use "a deaf person", "she has epilepsy".
- The collective adjective is "disabled people". You should avoid terms such as "the disabled", "the handicapped" and "invalids".
- Learn to offer help rather than assuming a person requires your help. Do not be offended if your offer of help is politely declined.
- Never grab at a wheelchair, rest on a wheelchair or push a wheelchair without the user's permission.
- When communicating with wheelchair users or people of short stature, if appropriate try to place yourself at the same eye level as them e.g. sit down on a chair.
- When speaking to someone with a speech impairment, be honest, patient, and relax. Help by repeating words, rephrasing sentences or if necessary, seek an alternative form of communication.
- Never pat, stroke or distract a working guide dog.

- Resist the temptation to greet the guide dog before the owner.
- Do not assume that all mental health service users are psychotic. Depression, anxiety and stress are equally commonplace. Never confront challenging behaviour with your own form of challenging behaviour.
- The easiest way to guide a blind or partially sighted person is by offering them your left elbow as a guide. You should stand on the person's right, slightly ahead of them. When seating a blind or partially sighted person help them by placing their right hand in the middle of the top of the back of a chair.
- When communicating with deaf or hard-of-hearing people:
 - Be prepared to speak slowly and clearly;
 - If you are not understood, try rephrasing a sentence;
 - Remember you can also write things down;
 - Do not cover your mouth or talk when eating;
 - Shouting distorts lip patterns and expressions;
 - If possible use qualified communicators and sign interpreters.

Adjustments for People with Hearing Impairments

- Written information (leaflet or guide).
- Facility to take and exchange written notes.
- A verbatim speech-to-text service.
- Portable induction loop system.
- Subtitles and Teletext displays.
- Videos with sign language interpretation.
- Information displayed on a computer screen or LED signs.
- Accessible Websites.
- Textphones, telephone amplifiers, inductive couplers.
- Awareness of type talk.
- Audio-visual telephones.
- Audio-visual fire alarms.
- Qualified sign language and lip-speakers.
- Deaf awareness training.

Adjustments for People with Visual Impairments

- Readers.
- Documents/information in large print, or in Moon or Braille.
- Information on computer disk.

- Information on audio tape.
- Telephone/verbal services to supplement other information.
- Spoken announcements or verbal communication.
- Accessible websites.
- Assistance with guiding.
- Audio description services.
- Large print signage.
- Tactile maps/plans and three dimensional models.
- Touch facilities.
- Blind/Visual Impairment Awareness Training.

Adjustment for someone with learning difficulties

- Arrange for specific learning disabled awareness training.
- Exercise caution in areas of confidentiality, undue influence and understanding of contracts.
- When appropriate, encourage customers to visit an office and meet a representative face to face.
- Printed information and letters should be in plain English with unavoidable jargon explained simply and clearly.
- Consider submitting information to the Plain English Organisation to obtain the "Crystal Mark" of clarity.
- Ensure information is in a clear print and evenly spaced.
- Use of picture keys or pictorial diagrams which explain information effectively.
- Directional signs and instructions: pictorial form or as a diagram. For example, Aeroplanes on Motorway signs for directions to an Airport.
- Remember, there are differences in understanding levels for people, even with the same learning disability. No two people are going to be exactly the same. Don't make assumptions.
- Consider producing audio or video versions of information for those who have difficulty with printed information.

Adjustments for someone with a speech impairment

- Patience, politeness and honesty are crucial.
- Politely ask the person to repeat the sentence as many times as is practicable. As you become accustomed to their speech, you will understand more.
- Try asking the person to re-phrase the sentence.
- Repeat back the words you understand as a question. The person then may only have to say "yes" or "no".
- Politely ask if there is anyone else there who can assist or ask a colleague of yours to listen and help.

- It may mean an alternative means of communication is required, such as visiting your premises, fax, e-mail, text phone, website, information letters or letter.
- Although the person is used to not being always understood they will appreciate genuine effort and reasonable attempts to satisfy their need.

Auxiliary aids for people who use wheelchairs or are of short stature

- Provision of wheelchairs or scooters for large premises.
- Wide doors/automatic doors.
- Provision of a lift (or chair lift for short flights of stairs).
- Provision of a suitably sloped ramp of the correct width with grip mats, grab bars.
- Providing an "assistance bell".
- Buttons, switches and handles should be at an appropriate height.
- Literature and information should be at a height that is reasonable for most.
- Consider stacking horizontally and not vertically.
- Provision for Evac-chairs or Safe areas (which the Fire Brigade are aware of) in the event of fire.
- Changing the venue if you are to meet person-to-person.
- Find out who the customer is and address them. Don't speak to the carer or facilitator if they are not the customer¹.

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