

How to Stand Up for Your Rights



What is disability discrimination?

Disability discrimination is when a person is treated unfairly because of characteristics related to their disability.

If you believe someone has treated you badly because of your disability, you might choose to talk directly to that person, to tell them how you feel. They might not know about your disability – in this case, it is not discrimination.

Explaining your disability to someone can help them to be more respectful of your disability.

Examples of disability discrimination

Disability discrimination can take lots of forms. Some examples of disability discrimination include:

- a manager books laser tag for a staff Christmas party, even though they know a staff member with epilepsy will not be able to attend due to the seizure-triggering lights
- a university student who has difficulty with handwriting is refused her request to instead type on a laptop during an exam
- an employee with a disability has applied for reasonable adjustments to be made to their workplace, at a small cost to the business owner. The business owner continually complains about this to the other staff members.



Prepare what you are going to say

If you believe you have experienced discrimination, you might choose to talk to the person about your experience. The person might be someone you see regularly, like a work colleague, or someone you don't see very often, like as a salesperson at your local shop. Whoever the person is, it is a good idea to tell the person as soon as possible after you believe the discrimination has occurred. You might decide to tell them face to face, over the phone, or in writing.

It is unlikely that the person intended to make you feel bad. Telling them how you feel can still be difficult. It is okay to say this to the person you want to talk to. You can say something like, "I'd like to talk to you about something that has been making me feel uncomfortable."

Explain the situation from your point of view. Be honest and specific about the words or actions that hurt you. It is normal to feel nervous or scared while you are doing this.

It might help to explain to the person that you are simply trying to stop the situation from happening again, and offer suggestions for how they can improve.



"I would say that overall you will learn as you go how self-advocacy works for yourself."

"Be courageous in stepping up and speaking up for yourself, even if you feel nervous doing it."

- Jane



Fact Sheet

Be clear about what you would like to change

For example, you might ask the person to stop saying or doing something that has hurt you in the past. Or, you might ask a person to change their behaviour or the way they talk about something. Some examples are provided below:

“I’m sure you don’t mean it, but the jokes you have been making about my disability are hurtful to me.”

“I noticed that you booked laser tag for the staff party. Because of my disability, I won’t be able to enjoy myself there. Can we come up with a different plan together?”

“The other day I heard you refer to me as ‘the girl in the wheelchair’. I would prefer it if you called me by my name”.

Be prepared for their response

It is likely that the person will accept what you have said, but it is good to be prepared for different responses.

The person you talk to might feel sad and say sorry. This is normal and means that they understand what you have said. The next step is to talk about how you would like things to change.

The person might disagree with you, get angry or refuse to talk. If this happens, you can repeat the purpose of the conversation. For example, you might say “I am telling you this because I feel hurt and would like to prevent this from happening again”.

Take the next step - make a formal complaint

If the person still disagrees or refuses to have a gentle conversation, you can choose to make a formal complaint through one of the following services:

Australian Human Rights Commission

To make a formal complaint about discrimination, you can contact the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Phone 1300 656 419

Email: infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

Website:

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints>

1800RESPECT

If you are affected by violence, contact 1800RESPECT for help and support on [1800 737 732](tel:1800737732) or [chat online](#).

If the person becomes very angry or violent and you are afraid for your safety, call 000.

