

Challenging Discrimination

Some General Strategies

1. It is helpful if we all try to ensure that every service user, staff member and volunteer is aware of the organisation's strong, well-founded commitment to equal opportunities. Managers can find an opportunity to explain this to staff and volunteers during their induction. The commitment can be re-stated at meetings, training events or newsletters to pass the message on. This will help to ensure that:
 - Users, staff and volunteers understand the objectives and approach of the organisation
 - Managers have a basis for any challenge
 - Users and volunteers understand why staff hold certain positions and take certain actions.
2. Always make your disagreement apparent. Silence can be interpreted as agreement.
3. Try to pitch your response at an appropriate level. An overly strong reaction could alienate or destroy the confidence of a timid person whilst one that is too flippant could suggest that the issues are negligible. Remember that:
 - we all make mistakes
 - we all struggle to find appropriate words and actions.
4. Watch for anecdotal corroboration in debate. Counter with positive anecdotes if that feels appropriate and use substantive evidence if at all possible.
5. When confronting a prejudiced statement, try:
 - asking the speaker to repeat what was said
 - asking, 'do you really mean that?'
 - asking for other views...using it as a means of developing a wider discussion
 - referring back to the group's ground rules.
6. Be aware that people may try to avoid or defeat your arguments by being:
 - loud and intimidating
 - socially critical, maintaining that, 'it was only a joke' and that you are being inappropriately humourless
 - evasive and unspecific about the basis of their remarks.

7. Be clear about the basis of your own arguments and the reasons why you have challenged. The disagreement is *not* about vulgarity but because the statement was offensive, ill founded and perpetuates prejudice.
8. When confronting a remark directly label the comment and not the person, i.e. 'that's a racist remark' rather than, 'you're a racist.'
9. Try opening your response by describing how the remark makes you feel e.g. 'I feel uncomfortable when you talk about travellers in that way.' This may help to root the discussion and diffuse some of the tension on both sides.
10. Try rephrasing the remark beginning with, 'you seem to be saying that...' This ensures that you have understood it properly and it allows the other person to review the original statement.

11. You may find the following set of guidelines useful:

Hear	Don't ignore it. The speaker may regard this as agreement.
Respond	Make it clear that the statement is not acceptable.
Inform	Point out where the statement is untrue and give correct information.
Support	Let recipients of prejudiced remarks know that you care and give them support.
Act	Explain what was offensive and try to move things forward.
Plan	Devise strategies/projects that will help to improve understanding and promote action.