

Our attitudes - definitions

Equal Opportunities Policy Statement

The MND Association is committed to treating people fairly and without discrimination. The Association's actions and policies will be governed by this commitment, both in its treatment of staff and volunteers, and in its work with and on behalf of people affected by motor neurone disease.

Definition of Equal Opportunity

"Treating every individual according to their needs and not in a stereotypical way according to any group to which the individual might belong and challenging any others you see behaving in discriminatory way".

Prejudice

This means 'pre-judging' something or someone. It is making an assumption based on ignorance and stereotypes. Ignorance is simply not knowing all the facts or information. None of us are free from prejudice or the effects of oppression because we are all products of our social conditioning and the influences of our surroundings since birth. In our early years and childhood, we are susceptible to the values and opinions of our parents; family; friends; schoolteachers; church and so on. Throughout adult life other influences become more important – work; media and political thoughts.

All of the messages we receive through these channels are powerful, but we are able to challenge or accept these views through our own life experience and maturity. We have to be sure; however, that our life experiences are sufficient to enable us to make a judgement based on as much and as broad knowledge about things as possible.

Stereotypes

This means lumping people or objects together and classifying them as if they were all the same. Stereotyping usually operates negatively and relies upon unfavourable, distorted and unbalanced images and representations. Stereotypes are consequently damaging, harmful and limiting of people's life chances. Stereotyping can prevent individuals from developing and displaying the full range of their human potential because it imposes restrictions on their potential abilities and behaviour. Negative stereotypes are regularly used to describe different groups in society who, to some extent, suffer discrimination.

Discrimination

Discrimination simply means the ability to choose, consider and evaluate alternatives. It is therefore, in itself, a neutral word; it can be used both positively and negatively. At its simplest it involves making choices in everyday settings, e.g. what to eat, what to wear etc.

Discrimination is generally considered to be a negative practice. Negative discrimination means "acting on prejudice", i.e. making choices based on prejudice. Racial discrimination, sexual discrimination and age discrimination are the best-known examples of this, but discrimination exists for all groups in society who do not have power, i.e. poor; lone parents; gay; homeless; disabled people; travellers and so on.

It is difficult to be non-discriminatory in your practice if you have strong prejudices about different groups in society. One of the ways in which we may, possibly unwittingly, demonstrate discrimination is the language we use to refer to 'minority' groups. Inappropriate language can be offensive and distressing, so we need to be clear about the appropriate language to use.

There are four main areas where language can cause offence:

Race/Colour

Acceptable terms are

- Black (to refer to anyone with an African or Caribbean origin)
- Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan
- Asian (for anyone whose origins are in the other regions of Asia)
- Dual Heritage (where someone has more than one ethnic origin)

Unacceptable

- Coloured, Mixed Race; Half-Caste

Disability

Acceptable terms are:

- People/person with learning difficulties
- People/person with physical difficulties
- People/person with sensory impairment (sight/hearing)
- Disabled People
- Wheelchair user

Unacceptable:

- Mentally handicapped; crippled; invalid, Wheelchair-bound

Sexuality

Acceptable terms are:

- Gay (to refer to a homosexual man)
- Lesbian (to refer to a homosexual woman)

Unacceptable:

- queer; dyke; homo; poof; bent etc

Terminal/Degenerative Illness

Acceptable terms are:

- People/person living with (usually shortened to PLW...)
- People/person affected by...

Unacceptable:

- Sufferer; Victim, Patient

The Association

Acceptable terms are:

- Motor Neurone Disease Association
- MND Association

Unacceptable:

- MNDA