

This month, the EDI Group is focussing its "Let's Talk" article on another protected characteristic, Age

Let's talk about ... Age and how we can be more inclusive in the workplace

An employee is protected against discrimination because of age. This includes protection against unfair treatment because a job applicant or employee may be: a different age, or in a different age group to another job applicant or employee. Age discrimination is not always about a 'young person' being preferred over an 'old person' because of their age, which is a common misconception. There are many ways in which age can be discriminated against. It is important to note that there are exceptions when age is not classed as being discriminatory e.g. an under 18 year old being paid less or not being allowed to serve alcohol, etc.

Age discrimination, also commonly called ageism, is one of the most common forms of unfair treatment at work, as the age gap between co-workers can be 50 years or more.

According to Age UK (<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/discrimination-rights/ageism/ageism-at-work/>) age discrimination in the workplace can take the form of

- direct discrimination
- indirect discrimination
- harassment
- victimisation

When it is not a legal requirement, age discrimination should be removed from the workplace, and it is a necessity to ensure all workplaces are inclusive resulting in a more positive working environment.

It is the responsibility of employers and employees to eliminate age discrimination from the workplace, here are a few examples of discrimination in the workplace.

- Training opportunities are offered to younger employees — not older ones. This can include professional training, access to continuing education and conference attendance, etc.
- Being given fewer challenging assignments. This may also look like an unfair share of unpleasant or tedious assignments given to older employees.
- A spoken or unspoken assumption that you are not entitled to take time off for family commitments, as your family are deemed to be 'older'.
- Derogatory remarks about age. This could be framed as 'banter', with others joking about your age, or retirement plans, etc. Or, it could be downright aggressive (e.g. pointed and/or cornering comments that pressure you to retire and free up the position for another professional).
- Being passed over for wage increases and promotions.
- Being excluded from workplace social events i.e. under 18s not being allowed to go to 'over 18' venues, or less mobile elders not being able to part take in vigorous activities.

What can I do if I experience age discrimination?

If you experience any form of discrimination due to age, consult your company's Equality and Diversity policy. This will outline what plan of action you can take within your company to address the issue. Directly address any remarks that you may find are discriminatory against you based on age.

If after addressing the issue and the situation does not improve, there will be procedures in place within your organisation to escalate the grievance.

What can an organisation and managers do to prevent age discrimination?

- Encourage career development at all ages.
- Create an age-positive culture.
- Keep all policies up to date and ensure all employees are aware of these.
- Ensure there is no segregation based on age.
- Reduce age bias at recruitment.
- Highlighting discrimination and resolving issues.
- Consider flexible working patterns.
- Ensure management receive EDI training.

How co-workers can be more inclusive

Challenge: if you experience any ageism behaviour, please challenge this, either directly or indirectly to your manager.

Educate: each one of us has a commitment to keep up with current information surrounding age discrimination and we should always strive to have the knowledge to enable us to be inclusive.

Read what the current equality and diversity policies are.

Inclusiveness: always think of ways of including everyone in activities that are held both in and out of the workplace.

Awareness: try and spot co-workers who may become withdrawn or unusually quiet and offer a friendly ear.

Support:

www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/discrimination-rights/ageism/ageism-at-work

www.acas.org.uk/acas-guide-on-age-discrimination



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