

Discriminatory Abuse

Discriminatory abuse is often hidden and not readily recognised. There is a very low reporting rate for discriminatory abuse across England and this is reflected in Redbridge data where this form of abuse accounts for less than 1% of safeguarding referrals received in 2024 – 2025. This 7 Minute Briefing aims to support practitioners in developing their understanding of what is meant by discriminatory abuse of adults at risk, and how to shape their responses.

What is Discriminatory Abuse?

Discriminatory abuse refers to forms of abuse motivated by prejudice or bias, including against those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2020 e.g. age, race, disability, religion or sexual orientation. Sometimes a person's individual characteristics may combine to create multiple discrimination and privilege (intersectionality). In the context of adult safeguarding, discriminatory abuse focuses on adults with care and support needs. This type of abuse violates an individual's right to be treated equally and with dignity.

What does it look like?

It can manifest in various ways, including unequal treatment, verbal abuse, bullying and harassment, or exclusion from services or opportunities. It is often a feature of another form of abuse e.g. neglect arising from ageism. Discriminatory abuse links with hate crime or hate crime and social context e.g. poor housing, neighbour safety, and deprivation. If you see this in your workplace, do consult your organisation's Whistleblowing Policy and speak to your Designated Safeguarding Lead or Manager about making a safeguarding referral.

Resources & Useful Links

- Making a safeguarding referral - [London Borough of Redbridge – Safeguarding Adults Referral Form](#)
- [London MA Adult Safeguarding Policy, Procedures & Guidance 2025](#)
- Redbridge Safeguarding Adults Board (RSAB) – [Discriminatory Abuse](#)
- [SCIE – Discriminatory Abuse](#)
- [Ann Craft Trust – What is Discriminatory Abuse?](#)
- [RiP Podcast – Discriminatory abuse – developing practice responses](#)
- [LGA Discriminatory abuse: a briefing for practitioners](#) (based on the literature review Journal of Adult Protection, March 2022)
- [LGA Discriminatory abuse self-assessment tool: safeguarding adults](#)
- Case Reviews with a theme of Discriminatory Abuse – e.g. [Steven Hoskin](#); [Gemma Hayter](#); [Peter Farquhar](#); and [Winterbourne View](#)



Practice Guidance 1: See the person

Be mindful of unconscious bias and avoid assumptions. Ensure sight of the person, their history and current context including consideration of the impact of trauma and marginalisation in creating trust. This enables the right service provision and rights being upheld. Check out [the CQC guide on Culturally appropriate care](#) and [Appendix 4](#) of the London Safeguarding Adults Policy, Procedure and Guidance 2025.

Practice Guidance 2: Communication

Talking to someone about their protected characteristics can be difficult and a sensitive topic. Recognise any barriers to conversations inc. language, stigma, embarrassment or shame. Practitioners may be worried about causing offence. Think through the approach in advance, demonstrate compassionate care, empathy and build rapport. Refer to the [London MA Adult Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance 2025 \(1.12\)](#).

Practice Guidance 3: Reflective Practice

Reflection provides an opportunity to review practice experiences and the impact these have had on staff. This can be undertaken in 1-2-1s, safeguarding or group supervision or within team meetings. Discriminatory abuse requires thinking about power, rights and inclusion and therefore links to ethics, values and assumptions. Reflecting on our practice in discriminatory abuse involves professional curiosity and a willingness to challenge familiar ways of working and consider unconscious bias.

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Redbridge Safeguarding Adults