

Understanding disability

There are about 10 million disabled adults in Britain covered by the Disability Discrimination Act. Their impairments are wide-ranging and they face different barriers in employment and in accessing goods and services. This factsheet provides some information about different types of impairment, practical steps you can take to make your business accessible to disabled people and ways of providing good customer service.

Type of impairment	Accessibility issue	Customer service issue
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Width of doorways and aisles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consider width required for wheelchair access Height of counters and handles Evenness of flooring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inside and out Accessibility of WC facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a seat for someone who cannot stand for long and bring things to them Sit down to talk to a wheelchair user so they do not have to crane their neck to see you Do not lean on their wheelchair. It is part of their personal space
Sight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colour contrast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on signs - between floors, walls, ceilings and doors Literature and signage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - size of print - use of Braille and other tactile alternatives Clutter and hazards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - keep floors and aisles clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify yourself when first speaking to a blind person Stand still so a person with partial sight can maintain eye contact with you If guiding someone, allow them to hold your arm, rather than vice versa, so they are in control Do not move away without telling them
Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have pen and paper handy to write messages Additional auxiliary aids <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - eg. a hearing aid loop Alarm systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have a visual as well as audible alarm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always maintain eye contact with someone who is lip-reading Make sure your face is well lit, keep hands away from your mouth and speak normally and clearly Minimise background noise
Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability awareness training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to help staff communicate more effectively Clear signage and labelling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some people with a speech impairment will avoid asking for help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak slowly and clearly Be patient and listen – do not correct or speak for the person If you do not understand, ask them to repeat themselves Ask questions that require yes or no answers if possible Don't put the phone down if you hear a few seconds silence at first
Learning disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clear, concise and consistent Write in plain language and use pictures and images Disability awareness training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to make staff aware of different behaviours and how to react 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be patient and listen If you do not understand, ask the person to repeat themselves Speak slowly and clearly Use pictures, symbols and simple written information where possible
'Hidden' impairments, eg: arthritis, asthma, dyslexia, epilepsy and mental illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't make assumptions about what anyone can or cannot do, their impairment may not be obvious and they may require additional assistance 	

Further information

www.drc-gb.org Comprehensive information from the Disability Rights Commission on the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, including useful publications for small businesses.

www.radar.org.uk RADAR (the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation). Its site is a useful portal for links to an extensive range of other disability websites.

<http://fast-forward.scope.org.uk/employers/etiquette> For guidelines on the practical issues of working with disabled people.