



MRS Guidance

Essential Safeguards series:

1. Dealing with discriminatory
comments

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1. Dealing with discriminatory comments

Many of us have witnessed or experienced discrimination at one time or another. Often people do not challenge this behaviour as they do not want to be a target of abuse themselves.

Discrimination can take many forms including:

- verbal and physical abuse
- bullying
- threatening behaviour
- online abuse

Standing up to discrimination can be a powerful sign of support. It can also make the perpetrator think twice about their actions. When responding, always assess the situation and never put yourself at risk. Your actions do not need to involve confrontation.

Legal and regulatory obligations

As per the [Public Order Act of 1986](#), it is a criminal offence for someone to deliberately stir up racial hatred by directing insulting language at an individual or exhibiting threatening behaviour.

[The Equality Act 2010](#) legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. It sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone.

Find out more about [who is protected](#) from discrimination, the [types of discrimination](#) under the law and [what action you can take](#) if you feel you've been unfairly discriminated against.

Rule 9 of the MRS Code of Conduct:

Members must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that participants are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities and ensure that there are measures in place to guard against potential harm.

This rule requires practitioners to make every reasonable effort to ensure that their professional activities do not cause harm either to those who have directly participated or, more broadly, to anyone affected by it. This includes taking reasonable action to ensure that others do not breach or cause a breach of the MRS Code.

Taking reasonable action

The example of data collection in a face to face qualitative research group setting is used in the following guidance, which would also apply to other data collection and professional activities.

- **keep an open mind** - discrimination situations are often very individual and what may, or may not, be felt to be discriminatory can change over time, and from person to person. However, immediate action should be taken if discriminatory comments have been directed at a member of the group.
- **be respectful and empathetic** to the person to whom the comment was directed and others in the group - it can be particularly upsetting and/or stressful to experience or witness discrimination. The use of discriminatory language can have a very harmful impact on the mental health of victims. Think about how you can support the target of the abuse. Go and sit or stand next to them and check if they wish to continue.
- **say something** – calling out discriminatory behaviour in front of other people lets the whole group know that behaviour is unacceptable. Be aware that people tend to be defensive when they are called out in front of others. Check with the other group members if they are willing to proceed with the perpetrator still present, if not the individual who used the discriminatory language should be to be asked to withdraw. The group can then continue if those remaining are willing to do so.
- **tell someone**

Report the incident to the appropriate person at your place of work. Call the police if you think that you or somebody else may be in danger.

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Useful information sources

[Show Racism the Red Card](#)

[Stop Hate UK](#)

[Citizens advice](#)

[Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)