

Witnessing discrimination

1 . What you can do

If you think someone at work is being discriminated against, there are actions you can take.

You might feel able to step in and try to stop the discrimination happening, if you feel it's safe to do so.

Depending on the circumstances, other actions you can take are:

- offering emotional or practical support to the person who's been affected
- supporting a complaint made by the person who was discriminated against
- reporting what you've seen
- giving evidence as a witness, for example at a hearing
- making a harassment complaint yourself

The types of discrimination you might witness include direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation – [find out more about discrimination](#).

Deciding what to do

What you decide to do will depend on:

- your own view of what's happened
- what the person who's been discriminated against would like to happen next

You should talk to the person who's experienced the discrimination to see if they want your support or they want you to report it.

You might also want to talk with someone else to get advice and support about what to do. This could be:

- someone you trust at work, for example someone you work with or a manager
- a trade union representative, if you're a member
- someone at work who's been trained to advise people who are considering making this kind of complaint

Making a note of what's happened

Whatever you decide to do, you should make a note of what you've witnessed or the discrimination you think has taken place. This should include:

- what happened
- dates and times
- names, including any other witnesses

Making a note can be especially helpful if you would find talking about the experience distressing.

If you decide to report it

You need to make your own decision about whether to report the discrimination to someone else in your organisation.

You should take into account the wishes of the person who was discriminated against.

If you decide to report it, talk with your manager, HR or someone senior at work. You should tell them:

- what you witnessed
- who was involved
- any conversations you've had with the people involved

Making a harassment complaint yourself

If you've witnessed discrimination directed at someone else, it might also affect you personally.

If you have been affected, you might have experienced a form of discrimination called harassment.

You can make a complaint if what you've seen or heard has:

- violated your dignity
- created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for you

Find out more about:

- [harassment](#)
- [what to do if you've been discriminated against at work](#)

What your employer should do

Your employer should:

- take your report or complaint seriously
- handle it fairly and sensitively
- look into it as soon as possible

[Find out how employers should handle a discrimination complaint](#)

Get more advice and support

For help and advice, you can:

- [contact the Acas helpline](#)
- [contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service \(EASS\)](#)
- talk to your trade union representative, if you're a member

If you're struggling to cope and need someone to talk to, you can contact:

- [Samaritans](#)
- an employee assistance programme (EAP) if your employer has one

2. Supporting someone's complaint

Ways you could support someone else's discrimination complaint include:

- making a witness statement
- appearing as a witness at a grievance hearing
- [acting as a 'companion'](#) at a grievance hearing

Making a witness statement

If you're making a witness statement, you should:

- say what you have seen, heard or experienced
- give the facts clearly, including names, dates and times
- say if you're not sure about something
- not exaggerate or play down what's happened

How you make a witness statement will depend on your organisation's procedure. Usually this will involve someone interviewing you and writing down what you say.

If you're particularly worried about making a statement, you can ask for it to be anonymous. Your employer does not have to agree and there can be disadvantages.

For example, your evidence might not be taken as seriously. It might have to be backed up by someone else who's willing to be named.

Keeping your identity secret cannot be guaranteed. For example, if the case goes to an employment tribunal, you might be asked to give evidence in person.

Being a witness at a hearing

You might be asked to give evidence at a grievance hearing.

A 'hearing' is a meeting where your employer hears all the evidence to make a final decision.

If you're uncomfortable about giving evidence, the person managing the hearing should talk with you. They should try to resolve any concerns you have.

[Find out more about being a witness in a grievance procedure](#)

How the law protects you

Discrimination law (Equality Act 2010) protects you from being victimised because you've supported someone else's complaint. This means you must not be:

- stopped from giving evidence
- treated less favourably as a result of making a complaint, giving evidence or supporting a complaint

[Find out more about victimisation](#)

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