



Our inquiry into the harassment of disabled people

What we found out



Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

Easy read



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Commission

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About this report



The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** wrote this report.



We work to make sure everyone gets treated in a good and fair way.



This report is about **harassment of disabled people**.



Harassment is when someone hurts you or does bad things to you. For example, being nasty to you, hitting you or calling you names.



Sometimes people use the words **bullying** or **hate crime** when they talk about harassment.

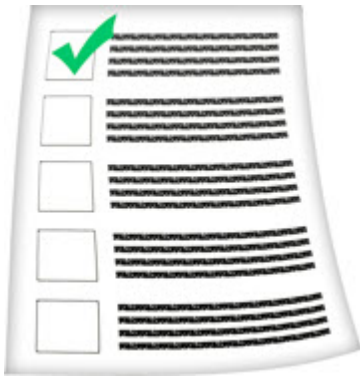


This report is about what we learnt from our **inquiry** to find out about harassment of disabled people.



It says:

- why we need to know more about harassment of disabled people



- how we did the inquiry



- what we found out



- what organisations can do to stop harassment of disabled people.

Why we need to know more



Newspapers and TV talk about what happens to some people but many other disabled people and their families also suffer harassment.



Often other people know it is happening but do nothing or do not treat it seriously.



Harassment is things like:

- calling you names
- saying nasty things or making fun of you





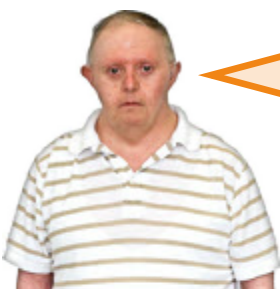
- hitting you



'I have been hit by a stranger and beaten up by young children... when someone tried to help me by putting me in their car, they started rocking the car'



- damaging your home, garden or car on purpose



'Local kids throwing eggs, bottles and beer cans into the back garden'



- stealing your money or making you spend it on people who pretend they are your friends



‘Some people I thought were my friends were just using me. I had that extra bit of benefit and they thought I was rich’



- sending you nasty emails or text messages or filming harassment on a mobile phone and putting it on the internet



- doing or saying something sexual to you that you do not want



'I think some disabled women think they are lucky to get anyone so will put up with anything'



- **domestic abuse** when the harassment is done by your partner or family carer



- **institutional abuse** when the harassment is done by someone who works in a service that is caring for you.



Disabled people are more afraid of crime than other people but often do not report harassment.



This may be because:

- they think no-one will believe them or take them seriously



- they are worried about what will happen



- they do not know who to talk to about it.



We did the inquiry to find out how many people this affects and how we can change things.

How we did the inquiry



What we looked at

The inquiry looked at harassment of disabled people in England, Scotland and Wales that stops them being respected, safe or in charge of their lives.



This included harassment of a disabled person's friends and family and harassment of someone people think is disabled.



We looked at harassment:

- by individuals or groups of people



- by strangers or by family or friends



- in public places and in the person's home.



We did not look at harassment at work as there are other rules and laws for this.



We wanted to find out:

- why disabled people suffer harassment



- how public services and transport can stop it happening.



‘I was bullied as soon as I got on the school bus every day... punched, kicked, spat at.’



Who we spoke to

- disabled people and their organisations



- local councils and social services



- organisations that run and check public services



- newspaper and TV companies



- police and other people who know about the law.

How we got the information



- papers and reports other people have written



- people who sent in information



- interviews



- questionnaires



- meetings in different parts of the country and interviews with disabled people



- formal meetings with people from the government and **public services**.

Public services are organisations like local councils, the police, schools, the NHS and public transport.



We looked at **10 cases**. These are 10 disabled people who were killed or seriously injured by harassment.



We held events about:

- serious violence and abuse



- how the newspapers and TV affect what people think about disabled people



- harassment using mobile phones and the internet.



Checking how we did things

2 advisory groups helped us plan and carry out the inquiry.



1 was independent and not involved with the Equality and Human Rights Commission.



The other group was people from our Disability Committee.

What we found out

What we found

We found that harassment of disabled people is a serious problem:



- we only hear about a small number of cases. Many disabled people do not report harassment and think it is just something they have to put up with



- disabled people are not sure how to report harassment or think they will not be listened to or believed



- public services and other people sometimes do not think it is happening



- public services do not realise how serious harassment is for disabled people and do not try to stop it



- before we can stop disabled people being harassed we need to change the way other people think about them and include them in society.

Why we think this is happening



- public services only look at each single case of harassment, instead of working together to find out if it is happening more often to certain people or in certain places



- the police and other public services do not always think bullying or other bad behaviour happens because a person is disabled.



This means they do not use the law properly to stop it



- public services are missing the chance to stop small things that can grow into more serious harassment



- public services sometimes think about changing the way the disabled person lives instead of dealing with the people who harass them



- different public services do not work together well



- we do not understand enough about why disabled people get picked on and how to stop it



- it is difficult for disabled people to report harassment and for public services to keep good records about it



- the law does not give enough support to disabled people or enough punishment to people who harass them



- we do not learn from really serious cases and understand how to stop things like this happening again.



Changing things

We think everyone could do much more to stop harassment of disabled people.



This includes governments and people who work in:

- local councils



- housing



- the NHS and social care services



- police



- courts



- schools



- transport.

We think 7 things need to happen:



- leaders in organisations take harassment of disabled people seriously and really want to stop it



- there is better information about how many disabled people and their families are affected, how serious this is and what organisations do about it



- it is easier for disabled people to report harassment and get the right support from all parts of the legal system



- we understand why and how people harass disabled people and know how to stop it



- everyone in the community has more respect for disabled people and understands how harassment affects them



- everyone shares good ideas about stopping harassment and supporting disabled people



- all staff who work with disabled people have training and information about what to do if someone is harassed.



The next section has our ideas about how to make these things happen.

What organisations can do to stop harassment of disabled people



The only way to stop harassment of disabled people is to make sure everyone understands that they need to get involved in changing things.



Governments in England, Scotland and Wales

Governments make the rules and laws that say how we should deal with harassment of disabled people.



Governments should:

- find out how these rules and laws work together and how to use them better to stop harassment of disabled people



- look at ways to make sure disabled people have the same rights and chances to be involved in their community, not just kept safe



- look at ways schools and colleges can get better at including disabled students to stop them being harassed.



They should also find out more about:

- harassment of disabled people and how the law deals with this



- whether some groups of people are picked on more than others.

Councils and other local organisations should:



- work together to stop harassment of disabled people and treat disabled people fairly.



The law says all public services have to do this but we did not find many services working well together.



- make sure disabled people know how to report harassment



- make sure disabled people have good advocacy support



- check that services give disabled people the right support when they report harassment



- make sure their staff are trained about harassment of disabled people and know how to deal with it.



People who run housing services should:

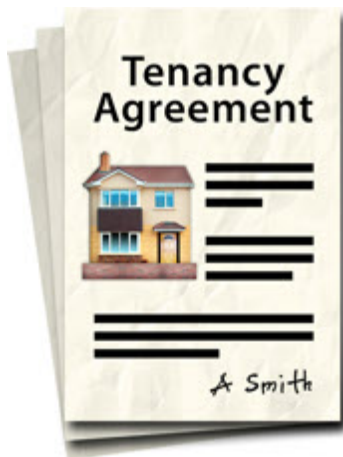
- involve disabled people in planning safe places to live



- find out how to stop harassment happening or getting worse



- make sure disabled people know how to report harassment to them or to other organisations



- make sure people who rent houses and flats agree not to harass disabled people and take action if people break these rules



- make sure it does not affect a disabled person's housing rights if they have to move out because of harassment.



NHS and social care services should make sure:



- they have good safe ways for people to report harassment in hospitals and care homes



- people know their rights and get advocacy support if they need it



- all services and staff know what to do if they think someone is being harassed.



Police, the courts and legal services should:

- make sure disabled people have the same chances as everyone else to use the law and be treated fairly



- find a way to describe harassment or hate crime so that everyone understands what this means and knows what to do about it.



The police should:

- keep better information about harassment of disabled people so they can act quickly if it happens more than once



- think about stopping the harassment, not just asking the disabled person to change how they do things



- make sure people know which police officer is dealing with it when they report harassment



- give people clear information in a way they can understand



- find out whether the person is disabled when they look at any crime as this might be harassment because of their disability



- find out as soon as possible whether the person needs extra support to say what has happened, talk to the police or go to court.

Courts and other legal services should:



- keep better information about harassment of disabled people and what happens if they report it



- train staff to understand how to deal with harassment of disabled people



- make sure disabled people have good advocacy support



- check disabled people are getting any other support they need to have the same chance as other people to report a crime and go to court



- treat harassment as a serious crime with proper punishment



- think about how harassment also affects the person's friends and family



- make sure everyone knows if the person is disabled and understand any extra support they might need



- make sure disabled people are treated fairly in court and no-one says they cannot understand things or be trusted because of their disability



- learn from disabled people who use the courts and use this to make them easier for other disabled people to use



- treat people very severely if they harass someone they know is disabled so that other people see this is a very serious crime.

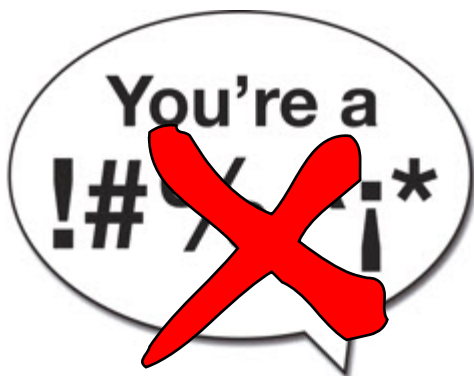


Schools and colleges should:

- help students understand and respect disabled people and know what to do if they see someone harassing them



- make sure all students and staff understand rules about dealing with harassment of students who need extra support



- have rules to stop things like name calling that can grow into harassment and make sure these rules are for staff and not just for students



- treat bullying with mobile phones and the internet as seriously as other harassment



- make sure disabled students and those who need extra support know how to report harassment

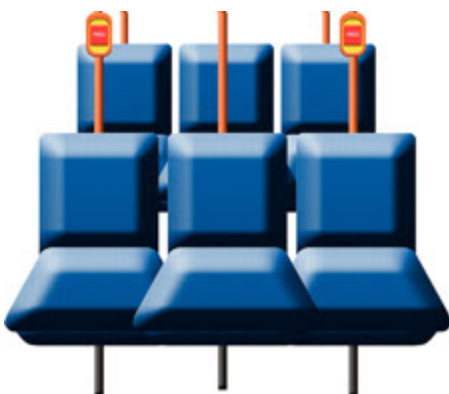


- make sure disabled students have the same chance to get involved in things as students who are not disabled.

People who run transport services should:



- make sure they design and plan things to try to stop problems between disabled people and other passengers



For example, disabled people and people with pushchairs who might both want extra space



- work together so people can report harassment on transport, stations or bus stops to anyone who works for a transport company



- ban someone from using any transport if they keep harassing disabled people



- train all staff about how to deal with and report harassment of disabled people before they start to work with the public



- involve disabled people in planning transport and work with the police to make sure transport is safe for disabled people



- keep information about times and places where harassment happens and use this to plan how to stop it.



Organisations that check services

These organisations have a really important part to play.



They decide which people can run public services and can use this to change the way public services think about harassment of disabled people.



They should:

- always get involved when someone in a service they check is really badly harassed



- make sure they check how services deal with harassment and have rules about this



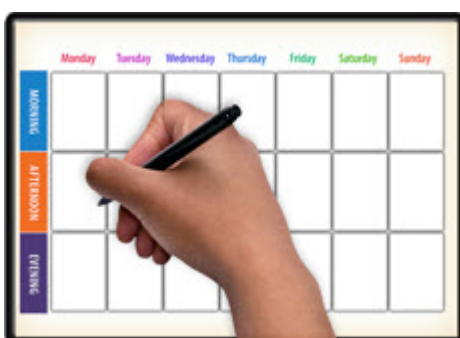
- share information about how to stop harassment happening and make sure services have rules and training about this



- work together and share information about services where disabled people are harassed.

What we will do next

Over the next 6 months we will ask what people think and look at ways to make sure people include these ideas when they plan services.



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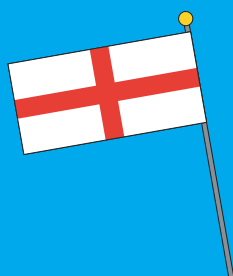


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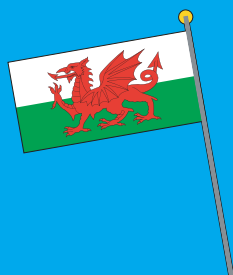
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- They are open Monday to Friday
8am to 6pm.



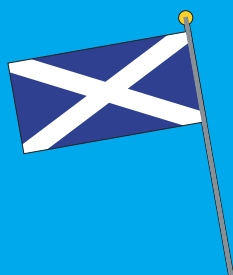
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