



Disability Hate Crime

COVID 19 Factsheet

May 2020

Introduction

While there has been lots of community support and acts of kindness during the coronavirus crisis, sadly there has also been an increase in hate crime including disability hate crime. The disabled people's organisation Inclusion London has found that disability hate crime and abuse against Disabled people has increased during the crisis. They say that not being able to get support from family and other social networks and the social isolation caused by this has left people more exposed to hate crime.

Some Disabled people may look like they have the virus because their impairment means they cough or have breathing difficulties and this has also caused problems for some people.

This factsheet gives details of the help available to anyone who is either dealing with a disability hate crime or is a survivor of a disability hate crime in the past but still needs support with any issues that have come out of the experience.

Hate crime and disability hate crime

A hate crime is any criminal offence which is seen by the victim or any other person as being the result of hostility or prejudice based on disability, gender identity, race, religion or faith and sexual orientation.

For an incident to be treated as a disability hate crime, the victim must be a Disabled person as set out in the Equality Act. This is any who has a physical or mental impairment (disability) that significantly affects their daily lives on a long-term basis. For conditions such as HIV and cancer, the definition applies as soon as a person has a medical diagnosis from a doctor.

Examples of disability hate crime

- Verbal abuse, insults and harassment – this includes name-calling using offensive words and sexually abusive language.
- Harassment – this can include someone upsetting you, making you think they are going to hurt you (even if they don't actually do so), and unwanted contact such as someone keeping talking to you if you have asked them to leave alone. Harassment can happen when a person is with or it could be someone harassing you on the telephone, on the internet through social media or email or even by sending letters.
- Physical attacks – which can include acts like kicking away a person's crutches and attacks on assistance animals.
- Damage to property and homes, including graffiti (which can be a form of harassment).
- Deliberate actions that will affect a person's disability/impairment – such as making noise that will particularly affect a person with autism or using lights that in a way that would affect a person with autism.
- Obstructing access – repeatedly blocking Blue Badge or dumping rubbish where it will block access.
- Damaging equipment that assists a Disabled person such as wheelchairs, walking aids or a blind person's guide cane.

If someone is doing something that is upsetting you or causing you problems that relate to your disability/impairment, it might be considered to be a disability hate crime.

Taking action

In an emergency

If you feel you are in danger or are in a crisis, do not hesitate to call 999 for immediate help. If you are in a situation where you are unable to speak for any reason, dial 999 and then dial 55 and the police will respond.

If you have difficulty using the telephone because of a speech or hearing impairment you can contact 999 services by text, but you should be aware that this can take longer than speaking to 999. To use the text option you must register your phone here:

<https://www.relayuk.bt.com/how-to-use-relay-uk/contact-999-using-relay-uk.html>

At other times

You can contact the police in non-emergency situations by calling 101.

You can also report hate crimes to the police through the Report It facility on the True Vision website here:

https://www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force

Other ways to get help

There are several organisations in Merton to help you deal with disability hate crime. These organisations are known as third party reporting centres and will help your situation including reporting the issue to the police if you want to do this.

You can visit our useful information chapter on hate crime for a detailed list of organisations that can provide support - <https://www.mertoncil.org.uk/useful-information/chapter-4-hate-crime-informa/>

Merton CIL - Our hate crime service is temporarily closed but we can signpost you to an organisation that can support you or share relevant information.

0203 397 3119

Victim Support – 0808 1689 111

Safer Merton – www.merton.gov.uk/safermerton - 0208 545 4146

Polish Families Association - info@polishfamily.org.uk - 07938 104 461

Inner Strength Network – supports women and girls - 020 8274 5200

<http://innerstrengthnetwork.com/>

Merton LGBT+ Forum - <https://www.mertonlgbtforum.org.uk/>

Merton Voluntary Service Council - 020 8685 1771

<https://www.mvsc.co.uk/>

Hate Crime Surgeries

Merton Council runs hate crime surgeries on the second Tuesday of every month between 12 midday and 1.00 pm. The sessions offer a safe space to discuss any hate crime issues and there is a range of voluntary organisations at the sessions who can give specialist help.

During the coronavirus crisis, the sessions are available by telephone on 020 8545 4146.