**Unconscious Bias**

Unconscious biases are the implicit positive or negative preferences for things, individuals, or groups shaped through our individual experiences.

These snap judgments can have huge implications for the way we act. Unconscious bias makes us believe we are making decisions about an individual’s capabilities, potential, or ability based on rational details when in reality these decisions are based on our personal preferences.

Until recently, people tended to think that having biases made us bad people. But neuroscience research has shown that humans are hardwired to prefer those who resemble us or show similar features. We need to understand that unconscious bias is common and normal.

What makes biases “bad” is a lack of awareness of how they affect our decisions and impact others.

Watch the following video from the University of Texas.

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoBvzI-YZf4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoBvzI-YZf4)

**Countering our unconscious biases**

By knowing our own implicit, unconscious biases, we reflect on how these biases might influence the way we engage and make decisions and judgements about others.

**We can do this by asking ourselves:**

“What biases might I have?”

“How might this be affecting my attitude towards others?”

“What can I do about this?”

**Tips to try:**

**Reflect honestly on your own biases**

**Gain more knowledge.** Try to learn more about a person, an idea, or a group if you identify you have an unconscious bias towards them. Understand why and how it makes you feel uncomfortable. Do you avoid people who are different to you or do you make an effort to notice people who may be excluded? Learn about different groups of people to understand the impact of difference.

**Try slower decision making.** Take time to acknowledge and challenge your unconscious brain. Give yourself time to make a rational judgement based on objective reality not unconscious preferences.

**Widen your viewpoint.** Listen to the views of others, especially from those with different perspectives or backgrounds to your own. Actively seek and listen to feedback from others on whether you show any unconscious preferences or patterns in your decision making and don’t be defensive if these are pointed out**.**

**Increase your cultural awareness**. Understand that your perceptions of bias may result from a lack of understanding about cultural differences. Educate yourself about other cultures and groups, don’t always expect them to explain their culture to you. Be open to learning and changing, admit when you are unfamiliar or don’t know something, and apologise if you appear insensitive or offend someone.

**Understand the value of diversity.** In addition to creating more tolerance and understanding, increased diversity brings new skills, knowledge, and innovation to our organisations and societies. When individual differences are appreciated and valued, we all benefit from a richer life experience. Research shows diverse teams perform better, make better quality decisions, and make greater economic rewards. Recognising diversity and individual differences is the first step towards recognising different needs.

**Practice –** regularly challenge our own attitudes, values and behaviours in a constructive way. This will help to build a positive inclusive environment where everyone can flourish.

**Understanding Bias, Prejudice, Stereotyping, Discrimination and Harassment**

**Bias:** The collection of individual learning and experiences which shape our perceptions and give us our own personal, subjective understanding of ourselves and others.

**Prejudice:** Unfavourable opinion or feelings formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought or reason, preconceived opinion or attitude, especially of a hostile nature toward a particular group or groups.

**Stereotype:** A preconceived or oversimplified generalisation involving negative beliefs about a group. Negative stereotypes are frequently at the base of prejudice. The danger of stereotyping is that it not longer considers people as individuals but categorises them as members of a group who all think and behave the same way. We may pick these up from what we hear others say, what we read or see in the media, or what people around us believe.

**Discrimination**: is treating a person unfairly because of their characteristics. When we act on our prejudices we engage in discrimination. Discrimination often involves keeping people out of activities or places because of the group to which they belong.