

02.2 — Misconceptions and unconscious bias.

Challenging misconceptions and unconscious bias.



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There have been significant inroads to understand cultural differences but talking about disability and accessibility is not always commonplace. Stigma and stereotypes still prevail in many sporting clubs.

Many stigmas and stereotypes we see around disability and accessibility are born from a lack of education and people's misconceptions.

Here's some examples of how we might reframe the way we see people with disability and those with access needs:



X COMMON MISCONCEPTION

People with disability are all similar with the same kinds of needs and interests.

✓ NEW PERCEPTION

No two disabilities are the same, and everyone's experience and needs are different, so a 'one size fits all' approach isn't ideal.



X COMMON MISCONCEPTION

All disabilities are visible.

✓ NEW PERCEPTION

While the global symbol for disability is a wheelchair, there is a large proportion of people living with an invisible disability. An invisible disability isn't always obvious, so it's always important to be respectful, open and caring to the person and their accessibility requirements. Examples of an invisible disability can include:

- Neurodiverse
- Chronic illness
- Cognitive and learning disability
- Low vision
- Hard of hearing

X COMMON MISCONCEPTION

A person with disability cannot participate in a sporting club because of their disability.



✓ NEW PERCEPTION

People with disability can participate in sporting clubs in a range of different roles including playing, coaching and assisting, team manager, board member, scorer, drinks runner, social media manager, canteen volunteer or just being a part of the club cheer squad. Participation can vary so be open to ask how the person would like to be involved in your club.

X COMMON MISCONCEPTION

Things like access ramps and accessible bathrooms cost clubs a fortune and there isn't much that is gained in return.

✓ NEW PERCEPTION

Access ramps and accessible bathrooms are a great investment to your club and a clear symbol of inclusion. They don't just benefit people with disability but can be great for parents with prams, elderly spectators and injured members. Making accessibility a priority is catering to the greatest number of people in the community to access your facilities. You can benefit by increasing your members and your revenue.

Handy tip: Government grants can be available to make accessibility upgrades:

<https://www.vic.gov.au/grants>

X COMMON MISCONCEPTION

People with disability are brave, courageous and inspirational for living with disability.

✓ NEW PERCEPTION

People with disability are just people like everyone else and are generally content to live an 'ordinary life' with as much independence as possible. For example, a person with disability is not an inspiration for ordering a coffee but they may be inspiration for winning a premiership just like a person without disability.



X COMMON MISCONCEPTION

People with access needs are a nuisance and always need help that I don't have time for.

✓ NEW PERCEPTION

People with access needs can often do a lot on their own. It's usually the design of an environment or information that excludes them from participating (see Medical vs Social Model resource).

Ask in a genuine way if the person requires assistance and provide support when necessary.





X COMMON MISCONCEPTION

People with disabilities are victims e.g.
'People are afflicted with or suffering from...'

✓ NEW PERCEPTION

People with disabilities are not pity cases. They are people like everyone else who find ways to manage their own abilities to participate in society in a fulfilling way.



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Understanding misconceptions and unconscious bias.



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Starting at a new club is exciting, but it can be a little stressful for anyone – there are new environments and new people to meet. It can be even more challenging for a person with disability or accessibility challenges; because of stigma and stereotypes.

It's important when a new person with disability joins your club to be positive and welcoming by removing existing misconceptions of their ability to participate.

This go-to guide is designed to help you understand unconscious bias and remove misconceptions to ensure that a person with disability feels comfortable, confident and a valued part of the club.

Understanding unconscious bias.



Unconscious bias is when people are unfair in the way that they treat other people. It has particular social significance when it leads to systematic negative treatment of people based on factors like disability, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual attraction or social orientation.

Unconscious bias may not always be obvious, but it does fundamentally represent our beliefs and values.

Misconceptions can unfairly impact our judgements.

Many misconceptions can affect how we perceive and judge people with disability. When getting to know a person with disability remember to be open minded and free of judgement on what the person can or cannot do.

Don't make assumptions on people's abilities.

Don't make assumptions or focus on the things a person may not be able to do; focus on the persons' abilities and strengths they can bring to the club. Like everyone, people with disability have a diverse range of abilities and ways to participate e.g. a person with communication difficulties might not be your best coach but might be excellent in an administration role. A person who is Autistic might not feel comfortable taking part in a team huddle but is a great team player on the field.





Say G'day.

Encourage the club community to get to know new members with disability in the same way they would get to know anyone, e.g. by saying hello, introducing yourself and inviting the new member to be part of club activities or social events.

Communicate naturally.

There's no need to tiptoe around things or temper the way we communicate when speaking with a person with disability. It's ok to ask questions in context about the persons disability in a genuine and caring way.

Communication shouldn't change when talking with someone who has a disability. Just be natural.



Just ask.

People with disability can often feel scared or embarrassed asking for additional support or an adjustment because it looks like they're not capable. Take the time to be proactive and check-in with the person to see if there is anything you can do to help. It should not matter if someone has a disability or not; everyone tends to work better when adjustments are made, so make the conversation apart of the club norm e.g. Green printing paper could be the difference between a person with low vision joining your admin team or not.



Not all disabilities are the same.

Every disability is different so there's no cookie-cutter approach. Individuals may require extra information, flexibility and adjustments to help them participate and be involved in the club.


Not all people want help.

It's ok if someone with disability declines your help, not everyone wants or needs help, so there's no need to get offended.



Listen and learn

Everyone makes mistakes along the way, be willing to actively learn from experiences. A good way to learn is by checking-in with a person with disability and asking for feedback e.g. you might accidentally slip up at training and say to someone “are you blind?” when they miss a catch, recognise that you made a mistake and try not to do it again.





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Everyone is welcome.



When you keep an open mind, you can create an inclusive and diverse club that makes people feel valued for their unique characteristics, comfortable sharing their ideas and their true and authentic selves.





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