

**Dealing with racially-motivated abuse
in a bookshop**

Introduction

The BA has pulled together some advice from a few different sources – retailTRUST, the police, the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Association of Convenience Stores and Creative Spirits – to give booksellers a simple digest of how to handle racially-motivated abuse from customers and members of the public. If you have any questions or comments, do email us mail@booksellers.org.uk

When might racially-motivated abuse happen in a bookshop?

Occasionally, some interactions with customers or members of the public will become aggressive or result in violence against you or a colleague. Sometimes, the cause of the aggression may be racially-motivated. For example, some booksellers have received abuse from the public after creating window and table displays for Black History Month or Black Lives Matter.

Violence can be either physical or verbal abuse. It can also include written threats or harassment, physical violence as well as incidents related to bullying or sexual harassment. Being subject to violence can be unsettling and impact on your own wellbeing.

Depending on the incident, the abuse may be deemed antisocial behaviour, harassment, a hate incident or a hate crime by the police.

How should I respond to the customer or member of the public?

1. Stay Calm
2. Be Polite
3. Be Constructive

Things to consider:

- Stay calm. If they are using offensive language or being verbally abusive, by all means, calmly remind them that their approach isn't appreciated but don't expect them to back down. In fact, responding in any tone other than one which is calm will only escalate the situation.
- Remember that the customer is a human being with their own problems. For example, someone in their life may have recently died or their child could be seriously ill. Granted, a difficult life experience doesn't excuse anyone to treat others badly, but keeping other factors in mind may help you to reframe the situation.
- Don't get personal, even if the customer does. If a customer does use personal insults or offensive language during the interaction, it's essential to ask that they refrain from repeating such language to avoid causing further offence.
- Become conscious of your tone. If confronted by a customer who is speaking loudly, purposely respond in a lower tone and watch the pace of your speech. This will help them to settle down even if they're unaware of it. It's difficult to continue shouting at someone who is replying in a calm and measured way.

Some suggested follow-up responses to racially-motivated abuse are:

- Convey your feelings: gently let them know how the comment or joke makes you feel.
- Convey disapproval or discomfort, without provoking a defensive reaction.
- Question their use of the words or action so you can gauge their intent: "Why do you say/do that?"

- Consider them "learners". Remember that they might be less enlightened and tolerant than you are. They might not even know that their comment or action is racist.
- Avoid calling someone a 'racist'.
- Don't get triggered. Some people want to push your button to get you angry.
- Don't waste your energy. Some people give racist comments for the sole reason of getting attention.
- Avoid preaching. Unless you see some indication that the person is willing to listen and to dialogue, don't try to change their beliefs.
- Compliment them on something as they leave. Kill their anger with kindness.

Reporting the abuse

1. #AlwaysReportAbuse
 - In an emergency: report the incident to the police by calling **999** immediately
 - In a non-emergency: report the incident to the police by calling **101**
 - If you want to stay anonymous: report the incident to Crimestoppers on **0800 555 111**
2. It is important to remember and note down as much detail about what you saw or heard and the date, time and location of the incident. Such information may be vital in ensuring a future prosecution, and also means that you are able to refer to your record of the incident when reporting it to the Police.
3. When reporting the incident or crime you should say if you think it was motivated by hostility or prejudice based on race or religion.
4. If you're being repeatedly harassed by the same person or group of people it's best to report all the incidents to help the police get the full picture. It may be a good idea to keep a record of the incidents to help you when you contact the police.
5. Make sure you get a crime number or a log number.
6. If you're in doubt about whether to report the abuse, call 101 and the police can help you make the decision.

If you're worried about the police not taking you seriously

You may be unsure whether the incident is a criminal offence, or you may think it's not serious enough to be reported. However, if you are distressed and want something done about what happened, it's always best to report it. Although, the police can only charge and prosecute someone when the law has been broken, there are other things the police can do to help you deal with the incident.

It's also important to keep in mind that some hate crimes start as smaller incidents which may escalate into more serious and frequent attacks - so it's always best to act early.

Dealing with trauma from the abuse

Handling aggressive customers and members of the public can be traumatic and upsetting.

retailTRUST can help you and your staff with emotional support, counselling and critical incident support with a trauma specialist. This is all provided free of charge.

- Call the retailTRUST helpline on **0808 801 0808** or email helpline@retailtrust.org.uk and they can provide you and your staff with the right level of support.

Getting further support

- Tell the Booksellers Association. We can help point you to other useful resources and support.
- Talk to colleagues, family, friends and other booksellers. We can't just expect people who have been shouted at to walk away from the exchange and get on with their day. Ask for time to step away from your duties so that you can go for a short walk, get a coffee or tea, take some deep breaths, chat through what happened and discuss a way forward.

Useful links

<https://www.myrtwellbeing.org.uk/dealing-with-a-critical-incident/managing-violence-in-stores/573.article>

<https://www.myrtwellbeing.org.uk/managing-anger/dealing-with-difficult-customers/531.article>

<https://www.acs.org.uk/lobbying/encouraging-retailers-and-colleagues-alwaysreportabuse>

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

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/hate-crime/what-are-hate-incidents-and-hate-crime/>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/hate-crime/racist-and-religious-hate-crime/>

https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/how-to-deal-with-racist-people#React_calmly

Appendix

What is a hate incident?

The police and Crown Prosecution Service have agreed a common definition of hate incidents.

They say something is a hate incident if the victim or anyone else think it was motivated by hostility or prejudice based on one of the following things:

- disability
- race
- religion
- transgender identity
- sexual orientation.

This means that if you believe something is a hate incident it should be recorded as such by the person you are reporting it to. All police forces record hate incidents based on these five personal characteristics.

Anyone can be the victim of a hate incident. For example, you may have been targeted because someone thought you were gay even though you're not, or because you have a disabled child.

Something is a racist or religious hate incident if the victim or anyone else thinks it was carried out because of hostility or prejudice based on race or religion. Anyone can be the victim of a racist or religious hate incident. For example, someone may wrongly believe you're part of a certain racial group. Or someone may target you because of your partner's religion.

What type of incidents can be a hate incident?

Hate incidents can take many forms. Here are examples of hate incidents:

- verbal abuse like name-calling and offensive jokes
- harassment
- bullying or intimidation by children, adults, neighbours or strangers
- physical attacks such as hitting, punching, pushing, spitting
- threats of violence
- hoax calls, abusive phone or text messages, hate mail
- online abuse for example on Facebook or Twitter
- displaying or circulating discriminatory literature or posters
- harm or damage to things such as your home, pet, vehicle
- graffiti
- arson
- throwing rubbish into a garden
- malicious complaints for example over parking, smells or noise.

Hate incidents are not only carried out by strangers. It could be carried out by a carer, a neighbour, a teacher or someone you consider a friend.

When is a hate incident also a hate crime?

- When hate incidents become criminal offences they are known as hate crimes. A criminal offence is something which breaks the law of the land.

- Any criminal offence can be a hate crime if it was carried out because of hostility or prejudice based on disability, race, religion, transgender identity or sexual orientation.
- When something is classed as a hate crime, the judge can impose a tougher sentence on the offender under the Criminal Justice Act 2003.
- Incidents which are based on other personal characteristics, such as age and belonging to an alternative subculture, are not considered to be hate crimes under the law. You can still report these, but they will not be prosecuted specifically as hate crimes by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Examples of hate crimes

Here are examples of hate crimes:

- assaults
- criminal damage
- harassment
- murder
- sexual assault
- theft
- fraud
- burglary
- hate mail (Malicious Communications Act 1988)
- causing harassment, alarm or distress (Public Order Act 1986).

When reporting the incident or crime you should say whether you think it was because of disability, race, religion, transgender identity, sexual orientation or a combination of these things. This is important because it makes sure the police record it as a hate incident or crime.