

What is unconscious bias?

Unconscious bias refers to the automatic assumptions our brains make without us realising. Everyone has unconscious bias, shaped over time by our experiences, habits, upbringing, and exposure to social norms. These mental shortcuts help our brains process information quickly, but they can influence everyday interactions and workplace decisions, often without us being aware.

Why unconscious bias exists?

Our brains absorb far more information than we can consciously process, so it relies on shortcuts to help us process information quickly.

These mental shortcuts are shaped by repeated messages and patterns we have seen over time. For example, who we have been shown as leaders, carers, experts, or decision-makers.

Even when we no longer agree with these messages, they can still influence our assumptions if we don't pause to notice them.

Unconscious bias shows up most when we are busy, rushed, or on autopilot

Noticing everyday patterns

We don't always notice our habits in the moment. These questions can help us pause and spot everyday patterns:

- Who usually speaks up in meetings? Who doesn't?
- Who do you naturally gravitate towards at work and why?
- Who is included by default, and who might be overlooked?
- Am I making an assumption or relying on facts?
- Who might be getting less visibility?
- Who might find workplace social events harder to attend?
- Who might feel like they are the only one like them in the room?
- Who might need to adapt more to fit in?
- Who might have reasons for their behaviour that we don't immediately see?

Everyday actions that help

Unconscious bias is a natural part of being human, but small everyday actions can help reduce bias having a negative impact on other people at work.

- **Acknowledge bias exists** - we all have unconscious bias. Noticing it is the first step.
- **Pause before deciding** - bias is more likely to show up in quick or gut-instinct decisions.
- **Be curious** - ask questions and seek context before jumping to conclusions.
- **Use fairness as a guide** - try to apply the same standards and expectations to everyone.
- **Listen to different perspectives** - hearing other viewpoints can help uncover blind spots.
- **Notice patterns over time** - pay attention to who gets opportunities, feedback, or visibility.
- **Use inclusive language and behaviour** - small everyday actions can help people feel included or excluded.
- **Create space for feedback** - support others to speak up if something doesn't feel fair.