

SPEAKOUT

THE MAGAZINE FOR AUSTRALIAN SPEECH PATHOLOGISTS

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Speechie Penny giving a demonstrated book reading at Nagambie Library (Victoria).

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Speech
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Workplace Relations | Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

CAN YOU SPOT **UNCONSCIOUS BIAS** IN YOUR PRACTICE?

As Australia's working landscape continues to evolve, compliance demands on speech pathologists and practice owners are increasing. For example, fostering DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) is no longer a 'nice to have' target—it's a requirement under the *Respect at Work Act*.

Workplace diversity means recognising the variety of differences between your employees and understanding the varied perspectives, approaches and talents that these differences bring to your workplace.

Workplace equity means all employees are provided with fair and equal opportunities based on their individual needs (sometimes referred to as EEO - Equal Employment Opportunity).

Workplace inclusion means understanding and respecting employees' differences, so that everyone feels valued in the workplace and can contribute to their full potential.

In order to foster DEI in your speech pathology practice, it's important to be able to identify unconscious biases in the workplace, challenge them, and learn about fair and equitable work practices.

Everyone has unconscious biases, it's part of being human. We are biologically hardwired to take mental shortcuts by aligning with the 'familiar' and rejecting anything 'different'.

Unfortunately, in the workplace, unconscious biases can affect individual and collective decision-making and create inequitable work practices which can ultimately result in unlawful discrimination.

Dozens of biases commonly occur in the workplace. Here's a snapshot of just a few:

The Horn Effect - Happens when you perceive something negative about a person and then cast them in a negative light permanently.

The Halo Effect - Happens when you perceive something positive about a person and then cast them in a positive light permanently.

The Anchoring Effect - Tendency to anchor onto the first piece of information you receive and base all subsequent judgments or opinions on this.

The Ostrich Effect - Only considering the information that matters to you and dismissing other factors.

Learning about unconscious biases reminds us to challenge our instincts, which is an important step towards championing diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace.

If you have any questions or require more information about your employer and employee obligations under anti-discrimination laws and the *Respect at Work Act 2022*, it is advisable to seek professional advice, whether this be through the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#), the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#), or an HR consultancy that works closely with the allied health sector such as [WorkPlacePLUS](#).

All SPA members receive special member benefits through WorkPlacePLUS for support with HR and IR issues. For more information, contact Anna on (03) 9492 0958 or visit www.WorkPlacePLUS.com.au.

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