

# businesscompanion

## trading standards law explained

### Introduction

In this section

Doing the right thing

Background

### Doing the right thing

While businesses have a responsibility to treat all consumers decently and fairly, it is particularly important that they are aware of their duties towards vulnerable consumers.

Many of us find ourselves in vulnerable situations at certain points in life, as do those we care about. During those times we would all wish to be treated with respect and understanding, and not to be taken advantage of by businesses seeking to sell us inappropriate or overpriced goods and services.

This guidance is intended to help you, as a business, identify and assist consumers who may be vulnerable.

It is important to be aware of these consumers because early identification often leads to more effective interventions and allows them to receive the appropriate help and support. There are also laws in place to ensure that consumers receive the information necessary to make informed purchasing decisions, and are not exploited.

Being aware of the issues around consumer vulnerability, and developing a policy to accommodate it, will help to ensure your customers are satisfied, everyone gets a fair deal, and those most in need of protection are safeguarded.

### Background

Consumer vulnerability is fluid and dynamic, and consumers can move in and out of periods of vulnerability. A consumer's circumstances - for example, going through a bereavement - can make them more vulnerable at a given time.

In a business context, consumer vulnerability refers to any situation in which an individual may be unable to engage fully or effectively in a market. As a result, they may be at a particularly high risk of not getting a fair deal or being exploited by criminals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made consumers potentially more vulnerable than before. Social isolation, increased anxiety and different ways of shopping all contribute to this.

In addition to general consumer protection law, in certain regulated sectors - for example financial

services, energy and telecoms - there are specific rules and guidance on dealing with vulnerable consumers that businesses in those sectors need to be aware of and abide by.

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