

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Dealing with Discrimination

Discrimination is a violation of human rights resulting in unfair treatment of people because they are members of a specific group. Discriminatory treatment may be based on:

- race
- religion
- age
- gender
- disability
- ·national origin
- pregnancy
- sexual orientation, gender identity and expression
- actions or beliefs

We are all entitled to human rights based upon the common values we share. Even though the values we exhibit could differ from time to time, we all have a responsibility to treat one another with respect and dignity. When someone violates this responsibility, they may be doing so by:

- denying someone’s equal access to things like employment opportunities or housing
- harassing someone in the form of ethnic jokes, slurs, innuendo, or intimidation
- making decisions made on a basis other than merit, such as being denied a loan approval or favourable credit rate

Discrimination can arise in any setting or situation, including the following:

- ·one's place of employment
- lending and credit institutions
- educational institutions
- housing
- law enforcement or police agencies
- ·voting
- places of public accommodation, such as hotels, restaurants, and entertainment venues
- familial relationships/friendships

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Recognizing discrimination

Sometimes discrimination is bold—for example, verbal racism or the posting of objectionable material. There are also instances that may be subtle and hidden. For example, a manager might choose not to send a pregnant employee for a management training course because they assume that employee might not be able to return to their job after a parenting leave, creating a barrier to promotion based upon discriminatory practices.

To determine if you are a victim of discrimination, ask yourself these questions:

- What makes me believe that I have been treated differently? Were there specific things said or done that clearly suggest improper treatment?
- What are noticeable and/or documented differences to the experiences of my peers in similar situations?
- How are others who are not in a group I belong to treated in similar situations?
- Do others know that I'm a member of a protected class (for example, that I have a disability or that I am gay)?

General guidance on responding to discrimination

If you believe you have been discriminated against or you have witnessed an act of discrimination, it's important for you to think through the situation and then take appropriate action. Don't assume that discriminatory action will stop if ignored or that you'll "only make it worse" if you speak up. There are federal and local laws against discrimination in every setting, such as the workplace, school, and in the community.

Whether you a victim of or witness to discrimination, it is important to remember to turn on the C.A.R.

- **C**heck your biases
- **A**ssess your thoughts
- **R**espond accordingly

Here are some next best steps you might take:

Assess and process the situation. Thoroughly examine the situation by looking inward at own your biases and accountability, then looking at other aspects. Determine the costs and benefits of self-expression. Try completing the sentence, “This was difficult because….” to get you started.

Speak up face-to-face or write it out. Tell the offender in a rational, objective way that their behaviour is objectionable and, if appropriate, explain why: "I don't enjoy jokes about religion/race/nationalities/ sexual orientation. Please don't tell such jokes when I'm around." If you find it easier, put your concerns in writing.

Ask for action to correct the situation. For example, if a bank refuses to process a loan application based on your membership in a protected class, you could ask the bank to reconsider the loan application.

Start at the most immediate level. Then move up the "chain of command" if necessary. For example, if you feel that your bank has discriminated against you, it would be appropriate to refer your concern to a bank manager. If the bank manager does not satisfactorily resolve your concern, you could submit a complaint to the commissioner of banking in your state.

Get help if the situation is serious or if you feel threatened. If confronted with a serious incident such as racist or bigoted name-calling or an act of hatred, do not try to respond alone or immediately. It's best to seek help from professionals like counsellors, therapists, perhaps even police.

Document the acts of discrimination in writing. Document every incident in detail, from the beginning. Your notes should include the following:

- the date, time, location, people involved, and description of what happened
- what was said or done by whom
- witnesses to the incident
- witnesses to prior, similar incidents, if you believe there is a pattern of discriminatory behavior

You may eventually decide to file a formal complaint and if you do, you will need to show evidence of discrimination. Notes taken at the time of each incident could themselves serve as evidence and will help you and investigators locate additional evidence, such as a witness's account of what happened.

Responding to discrimination at work

Here are guidelines for responding to discrimination in the workplace

Review your company's personnel handbook, policy manual, and cultural diversity rules or anti-discrimination policies. These may give you guidelines for resolving the issue.

Talk with your manager or your human resources (HR) representative.

Contact your organization's assistance program. These services are confidential and a professional consultant can help guide you.

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Responding to discrimination at school

If your child experiences discrimination at school, here are additional steps to take.

Be proactive about discrimination even before it occurs. Talk with your child about prejudice, bullying, and harassment, and make sure they understand that they must avoid confrontations—no matter how hard it is to walk away.

Encourage your child to find allies. Teachers, administrators, and other adults can help children navigate conflict or bullying with classmates. Having your child enlist an adult's help can help prevent or improve a situation.

If a situation does occur, get the details from your child, write them down, and contact the school immediately. You might begin by talking with your school guidance counsellor or the school principal. Check your school's parent handbook or policy manual to make sure you are following the right procedure. If you're still in doubt, call the principal's office and explain the situation.

Your assistance program can help guide you on what to do if your child has experienced discrimination at school.

If you need additional information on responding to discrimination at school, search online for your child's school board. In the wake of protests, many schools and school boards are making their bullying policies and punishments available. You may also want to get in touch with the Parent Teacher Association or Organization at your child's school. The PTA or PTO may be able to tell you about helpful resources or put you in touch with other parents who have successfully resolved the type of concerns you have.