



*Plain Language Edition*

# Fighting for Fairness:

## It Starts With You!

# Focus Group Editors

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- Taylor Terry
- Jeffrey Johnson
- Michael S. Tarr
- Lehana Guyette
- Carol Patenaude
- Nicole Villemaire
- David Frye
- Lisa Rudiakov

ASAN thanks all our focus group editors for their time and effort.

## To Start

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A big part of advocacy is working with lots of different people. You will meet people who are different from you. You will meet people with disabilities different from yours. You will meet people with races different from yours. You will meet people with genders different from yours. You will meet lots of different kinds of people.

People with disabilities have to advocate to get treated equally. So do people of color. So do women. Other people have to advocate to get treated equally, too. There are lots of reasons people get treated unfairly.

Everyone deserves to get treated equally. We should work together so we're all treated equally. But, we may sometimes be unfair to others without knowing.

This guide will help you be fair to others. We should try to treat everybody equally.

## Names and Pronouns

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Let's start with when you first meet someone.

When someone tells you their name, call them that name. If you don't know how to say their name, ask. You can practice saying their name. You can ask for help saying their name. But you have to say their name the right way. Don't ask to call them something else.

Sometimes, a person will change their name. You should always call that person by their new name. Do not call them by their old name.

You should use the **pronouns** that a person wants you to use. Pronouns are words like he or she. We use pronouns to talk about people without using names.

Women usually use the pronouns she, her, and hers. (But not always!)

**Example:** Tyisha lost her wallet. Can you call her to make sure she gets it back?

Men usually use the pronouns he, him, and his. (But not always!)

**Example:** Dave lost his wallet. Can you call him to make sure he gets it back?

But not everyone uses these pronouns. Some people use they, them, and theirs.

**Example:** Camila lost their wallet. Can you call them and make sure they get it back?

You may meet someone with pronouns you never heard before. You can still use those pronouns to talk about them. Use those pronouns in the place where you might use “he” “she” or “they” to talk about someone else.

For example, some people use the pronouns ze, hir, and hirs.

**Example:** Jorge lost hir wallet. Can you call hir and make sure ze gets it back?

There are many other pronouns, too. If you don't know how to use someone's pronouns, you can ask them for help. You can ask “can you give me an example of how to use your pronouns in a sentence?”

Respect the names and pronouns of everyone you meet.

# Learning About New People

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You might meet someone new and want to know more about them. There might be parts of who they are that you don't understand.

First, think about the questions you have. Could you find out the answers by yourself? A book or the internet could help you learn more. Here is one example:

Leroy meets Janna. Janna has cerebral palsy.

Leroy does not know what cerebral palsy is. Leroy wants to learn more about cerebral palsy. Leroy looks for websites that people with cerebral palsy wrote.

Leroy reads about cerebral palsy on the internet. He learns more about cerebral palsy.

Here is another example:

Jo meets Aasim. Aasim is Muslim. That means his religion is Islam.

Jo does not know a lot about Islam. Jo wants to learn more about Islam. Jo looks for websites by Muslim people. She learns more about Aasim's religion.

If you can't find the answers by yourself, try talking to the person. Ask if you can ask them some questions about their life. It is okay if the other person says no. It is okay for the person to answer some questions, but not others.

Sometimes, it can be hard for people to talk about themselves. It may remind them of times they got hurt by others. Other times, a question can be too private for them to want to answer.

Here is one example:

Leroy and Janna are talking about Janna's wheelchair.

Leroy says: How do you get on the bus with your wheelchair?

Janna says: The bus driver puts down a ramp. Then, I can roll on to the bus.

Leroy says: How do you go to the bathroom with your wheelchair?

Janna says: I don't want to talk about that.

Leroy says: Sorry! Should we talk about something else?

Here is another example:

Jo and Aasim are talking about holidays.

Jo says: I give presents at Christmas. Do Muslims have a holiday where they give presents?

Aasim says: Muslims have a holiday called Eid. We give presents on Eid.

Jo says: Are you sad that you don't celebrate Christmas?

Aasim says: I don't like that question.

Jo says: Sorry! Should we talk about something else?

You might ask a question or say something that hurts someone's feelings. You should say you're sorry. It doesn't matter if you didn't mean to hurt their feelings. Sometimes we hurt people's feelings by accident.

After you ask questions, you might still be confused. You might not understand why someone is different from you. You can keep working on it! But it is still important to be fair. You don't need to understand

everything. You can still be fair.

## People have different parts

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People's lives have lots of different parts. Race, gender, religion, and more are all parts of people's lives. Each part changes how we live our lives. It changes how other people treat us.

For example, Jacob has an intellectual disability. He is also a Black, gay man. All of these things affect how Jacob gets treated.

Every part of our lives works together to make us who we are. You can't separate one part from another. Every part of our lives is important.

Everyone should be safe to be their whole self. Don't try to change people to be more like somebody else. Let people know being a part of different groups is okay.

It's okay to share what you know about other groups. But remember: nothing about us, without us! That means people with disabilities should be in charge of what gets said about us.

It is the same for every other group of people.

For example:

Jo's friend, Gabby, wants to learn more about Islam.

Gabby asks Jo about Islam. Jo already talked to Aasim about Islam. Jo tells Gabby what she learned about Islam from Aasim. Jo tells Gabby to ask Aasim if she has more questions about Islam. But Aasim doesn't have to answer Gabby's questions. Aasim gets to choose if he wants to talk more about Islam with Gabby.

# What is discrimination?

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A **society** is a big group of communities. A society usually has rules and people in charge. The United States is one society. We all live in societies.

Society is supposed to help everyone get what they need. But society doesn't always do that. Sometimes, society treats groups of people badly because of who they are. Life for these groups is harder than the rest of society. These groups don't get the same chances to succeed in life.

Here is an example:

In the United States, white people have more power than other races. White people took control of the United States. They took land from Native Americans. They wrote laws and rules that make life easier for white people. These rules make life harder for people who are not white. They also made rules that hurt people that are not white.

Treating people badly because of who they are is called **discrimination**. Discrimination isn't just one person being mean to someone else. Discrimination is about groups. Discrimination is when society is unfair to a group of people in lots of ways. The powerful groups use their power to hurt the other groups. If one person is being mean to someone else, it can be discrimination. It is discrimination if society backs them up.

We learn to discriminate against people without realizing it. Society teaches us what is normal. This starts when we are kids. When our society is unfair to a group of people, it teaches us bad ideas about those people. We grow up thinking it is normal to be unfair to them. We might not even know that being fair is possible. Even if we grew up being told that everyone is equal, we can still learn to be unfair from



society. We learn this without knowing it.

For example, Nicholas' parents always told him to be fair to everyone. But in school, Nicholas' history teachers only talk about things white people did in history. They don't teach Nicholas about things that people of color did in history. By ignoring the history of people of color, the teachers are telling Nicholas that white people are more important than people of color.

The teachers might not know they are teaching Nicholas that bad idea. Nicholas might not know he is learning that bad idea. But he is learning a bad idea without knowing it.

It is not our fault that we learned bad ideas about people. But the ideas are still bad. We need to learn new ideas. We need to learn to treat people equally.

## Slurs and Stereotypes

There are certain words that hurt different groups of people. These words get used to discriminate. These are called **slurs**.

For example, people with intellectual disabilities get called the R-word.

People used the R-word to say that it was okay to discriminate against us. Some people still use the R-word that way.

It still hurts us to hear the R-word. It makes us feel bad about having an intellectual disability. It makes us feel scared that people will hurt us. You shouldn't use the R-word for any reason.

There are slurs for a lot of different groups. Don't use slurs when you talk about anyone. If someone says you used a slur, stop using that word. It doesn't matter if you didn't know it was a slur before.

Some people think everyone in a certain group is the same. This is called a **stereotype**.

A lot of people believe stereotypes. You might believe stereotypes without knowing. Stereotypes change how we treat people. They make us discriminate. We need to make sure that we don't discriminate.

Don't assume things about people because of who they are.

For example, some people say that all autistic people are good at math.

This is a stereotype. Really, some autistic people are bad at math. We have problems when people believe this stereotype. People might get mad at us if we aren't good at math. Or, they might not help us with math if we need help.

Even though this stereotype says a nice thing, it still hurts us.

## What are some kinds of discrimination?

Many different groups of people deal with discrimination. They face discrimination in big and small ways.

There are many different types of discrimination. We use different words to talk about them. We will talk more about those words here. We will talk about some kinds of discrimination each group faces.

For each kind of discrimination, we will give two examples. One example will be about how a person or group discriminates against someone. The other example will be about how society discriminates against someone. When society discriminates against a group of people, that is called **systemic discrimination**.

## **Ableism**

**Ableism** is discrimination against disabled people.

People discriminate against disabled people:

Shirley has a birthday party. She invites all her friends. Shirley's friend Asha uses a wheelchair.

Shirley wants to have her party at a restaurant. The restaurant does not have a ramp. Asha can't get in. Shirley decides to have the party there anyway.

Shirley was ableist, even if she didn't mean to be. She left Asha out because of Asha's disability.

Society discriminates against disabled people:

Some disabled people need help to live in the community. We may need services like a helper to do day-to-day tasks. Helpers cost a lot of money.

The government pays for helpers with the Medicaid program. But usually, people can only get Medicaid if they are very poor. If a disabled person needs Medicaid, they usually have to stay poor. This makes it harder for disabled people to live how we want to.

## **Racism**

**Racism** is discrimination because of someone's race. In the U.S., racism affects **people of color**. People of color are people who are not white.

In the U.S., people of color can be: Black people, Latinx people, Native people, Asian people, mixed-race people.

People discriminate against people of color:

Byron is Black. He wants to rent a house. Tyler is white. He owns a house, and wants to rent it out.

Byron comes to see Tyler's house. Tyler lies to Byron because Byron is Black. Tyler tells Byron that the house is not up for rent. Tyler only wants to rent his house to white people.

Tyler was being racist when he lied to Byron.

Society discriminates against people of color:

Let's say a Black person and a white person do the same crime. Usually, the Black person will go to jail for longer. The white person might not even go to jail!

The way our society deals with crime is racist. It is set up to hurt people of color.

When society discriminates against people of color, this is called **systemic racism**.

## **Transphobia**

**Transphobia** is discrimination against transgender and non-binary people.

There are lots of different genders. But some people think there are only 2. When people are born, the doctor usually says "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" The doctor says this based on what someone's body looks like. But sometimes the doctor is wrong. You don't have to be a boy or girl just because of what your body looks like.

Sometimes, a person who was told she was a boy is actually a girl. Sometimes, a person is not a boy or a girl. Sometimes, a person does not have a gender. Sometimes, a person feels like different genders at different times.

**Transgender** means that your gender is different than people thought when you were born. **Cisgender** means that your gender is the same as people thought when you were born.

For example:

Billy is transgender. When Billy was born, everyone thought he was a girl. But Billy knew he was a boy. Billy told people that he was a boy. Now, he lives his life as a man.

There are lots of different genders. Sometimes, a person is not a boy or a girl. Sometimes, a person does not have a gender. Sometimes, a person feels like different genders at different times. **Non-binary** means that someone isn't just a boy or a girl.

People discriminate against transgender and non-binary people:

Billy's pronouns are he, him, and his. He wants people to see him as the man that he is. Billy told his family that he is a man. But his family doesn't believe him. They call Billy she, her, and hers. They don't care that it hurts Billy to be called she.

Billy's family is transphobic against Billy.

Society discriminates against transgender and non-binary people:

Billy is transgender. He goes to high school. His school made rules about bathrooms. They think Billy is a girl. So they say Billy has to use the girl's room. They tell Billy he will get in trouble if he tries to use the boy's room.

Lots of schools have rules like this. Some states are trying to make laws about bathrooms, too. These rules discriminate against transgender and non-binary people.

## Sexism

**Sexism** is discrimination against women.

People discriminate against women:

A bank wants to hire two tellers. Mariana and Mark both apply to be tellers. Mariana and Mark have worked at banks for the same amount of time. They are both good at the job.

The bank hires both Mariana and Mark. But they pay Mark more money to do the same job. The bank is being sexist. Mark and Mariana should get paid the same amount for the same job.

Society discriminates against women:

The U.S. became a country in 1776. Back then, only men were allowed to vote. Women didn't get to vote.

Women fought for their right to vote. In 1920, women got the right to vote. They didn't get to vote for almost 150 years!

Sexism also happens to people that society thinks are women.

So some transgender and non-binary people also deal with sexism.

**For example:**

Billy gets a job at a bank. Billy is a transgender man. But the bank sees Billy as a woman.

The bank pays women less than men. So they pay Billy less than the other men who work at the bank. The bank is being sexist towards Billy, even though he is a man.

## *Homophobia*

**Homophobia** is discrimination against queer, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

It hurts anyone who loves someone that is the same gender they are.

People discriminate against queer, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people:

Greg goes to a gay bar to meet some friends. Some men see him come out of the gay bar. They think being gay is wrong. So they beat Greg up.

Society discriminates against queer, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people:

Theresa is a lesbian. Theresa lives in Texas. Her boss sees her holding hands with her girlfriend. The next day, Theresa's boss fires her from her job.

The law in Texas says it is okay to fire someone for being gay.

## *Classism*

**Classism** is discrimination against people who don't have a lot of money.

Poor people have a lot of trouble getting what they need. Classism makes it even harder for poor people to get the money they need.

People discriminate against poor people:

Harriet is homeless. She goes into a store to get some food. The store owners see Harriet. They see that she "looks homeless." So they assume she will try to steal something. They kick Harriet out of the store. The store owners are classist to Harriet because she is homeless.

Society discriminates against poor people:

SNAP is a program to help poor people buy food. Some people also call SNAP “food stamps”. The government only lets you use SNAP to buy some kinds of foods. The government says you can’t buy hot food with SNAP.

The government doesn’t tell anyone else what kind of food they can buy. The government gives poor people less choices than everyone else.

The government discriminates against poor people.

## ***Religious discrimination***

There is no one word to talk about discrimination because of someone’s religion. But it happens in a lot of ways.

In the U.S., Christianity is the biggest religion. People from other religions get discriminated against a lot.

People discriminate against others because of their religion:

Noreen is Muslim. Her religion says she needs to cover her hair. So she wears a hijab over her hair. She wants to play soccer for her school’s team. The coach says that she has to take off her hijab to play soccer.

Noreen’s religion is important to her. She wants to keep wearing her hijab. So the coach kicks her off the team.

The coach discriminated against Noreen because of her religion.



Society discriminates against others because of their religion:

On Christian holidays, like Christmas, schools and jobs close. Christians can celebrate with their friends and families.

Schools and jobs don't close on Jewish holidays, like Rosh Hashanah. They don't close on Muslim holidays, like Eid.

That makes it hard for people from other religions to celebrate holidays.

These are not the only kinds of discrimination. You will learn about more kinds in your advocacy.

## **Different Kinds of Discrimination**

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People usually don't face only one kind of discrimination.

For example, Jacob has an intellectual disability. He is also a Black, gay man. Jacob faces ableism, racism and homophobia.

Being part of one group may make it more likely for you to be in another group.

For example, ableism makes some disabled people stay poor. That means these disabled people face classism, too.

Racism makes people more likely to become disabled. That means some people of color face ableism, too.

Women of color will face both racism and sexism. But sexism looks different for women of color. Racism makes things worse for them than for white women.

For example:

A lot of doctors don't take women seriously when they say they are hurt. But doctors take Black women even less seriously than white women. That means Black women get even less help from doctors than white women.

Even if you are discriminated against, you can still discriminate against others. For example, white women may be racist to people of color. Or, cisgender gay people can be transphobic.

You shouldn't discriminate against any other group.

People can also discriminate against others from the same group they are from.

For example, Ron is Deaf. Some people treat him badly because he is Deaf. Ron wants to explain why people should not treat him badly. So he says, "It doesn't matter that I can't hear. My brain is fine!" He means that his disability is okay because it only changes his body.

What Ron said hurts people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It makes it seem like disabilities that change someone's brain are bad.

This is one way that disabled people can discriminate against each other.

Sometimes discrimination happens inside of ourselves.

For example:

Chaim is autistic. He has a hard time getting and keeping jobs. Chaim starts to think that he is bad because he is autistic. He thinks he will be bad at jobs. He thinks he doesn't deserve a job. Chaim has ableist thoughts about himself.

Some kinds of discrimination are against the law.

Remember when Tyler lied to Byron about his house? Tyler did not want Byron to live in his house because Byron is Black. So Tyler lied and said that the house was already rented. Lying about this is against the law!

People who own houses can't lie to someone about if they can rent it or not. But it can be hard to make people follow the law. It takes a lot of time and money to fight back. So a lot of people can't fight back.

The law isn't always right about discrimination.

For example:

Sometimes, the police shoot Black people. This happens because the police are racist against Black people.

When the police shoot a Black person, they usually don't get in trouble. They don't get fired. They don't go to jail. They get to keep being police. This isn't fair at all! But the law lets this keep happening.

The law lets police do this and not get in trouble.

# Being Proud

It is important to be proud of who you are. Pride helps people make friends. Pride helps people work together. For example, you can say you are proud of your disability. That shows other disabled people that they can be proud, too. You can help make a community with other disabled people.

Being proud of who you are isn't discrimination.

For example: Letitia is proud to be autistic. That doesn't mean she hates non-autistic people. She just likes her own brain!

Sometimes people do bad things. They discriminate against others. Then they say, "I'm just being proud of who I am!"

For example:

Bob is a **white supremacist**. That means Bob thinks white people are better than everyone else. Bob thinks white people are smarter than everyone else. Bob says only white people should get to live in the U.S.

Bob runs a store. He won't hire anyone to work there who is not white. Bob says he is proud to be white. But that's not true. He is discriminating against other people. That is not pride.

Pay attention to what people do. You can tell the difference between pride and discrimination.

For example:

Alice says she is proud to be Black. Alice's town doesn't have clean water. The government isn't helping Alice's town get clean water. They aren't helping because mostly Black people live there. The government is being racist.

Alice works with other Black people in her town. They work together to get clean water. Alice is proud of her community. She is proud to live with other Black people. Alice uses her pride to help her community. She fights back against racism.

## **Listening to people about discrimination**

You might not know something is discrimination at first. That is okay. Listen to people from different groups. They will tell you about the discrimination they go through. You will learn about what makes life harder for them. You can learn to stop doing those things. And you can learn to speak up when you see discrimination happening. You can teach others to not discriminate.

Not everyone from the same group feels the same way about everything. That is okay. It is important not to treat every person from a group in the same way. We are all different in our own ways. Respect how each person feels about themselves and society.

Remember that all discrimination comes from the same place. It comes from people in power that want to hurt us.

Discrimination makes all of our lives harder. Every group that faces discrimination has to work together. We shouldn't discriminate against each other.

People make society. People can change society. We can stop discrimination together.

# Words to Know

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## ***ableism***

Discrimination against disabled people.

## ***cisgender***

When your gender is the same as people thought when you were born.

## ***classism***

Discrimination against people who don't have a lot of money.

## ***discrimination***

Treating people badly because of who they are.

## ***homophobia***

Discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

## ***non-binary***

When someone's gender isn't just a boy or a girl.

## ***people of color***

People who are not white. For example, Black people, Latinx people, and Asian people.

## ***pronouns***

We use pronouns to talk about people without using names. For example, words like *he* or *she*.

## ***racism***

Discrimination against people of color.

## ***sexism***

Discrimination against women.

## ***slurs***

Words that get used to hurt people because those people are different.

## ***society***

A big group of communities. A society usually has rules and people in charge.

## ***stereotype***

An idea that everyone in a certain group is the same.

## ***systemic discrimination***

When society discriminates against a group of people.

## ***systemic racism***

When society discriminates against people of color.