

# Recognizing Diversity

## Learner Workbook



UPDATED JUNE 23, 2011



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## DIVERSITY IN ASSISTED LIVING/RESIDENTIAL CARE

Assisted Living/Residential Care (also known as Boarding Home Care) presents each of us with the opportunity to care for a diverse group of people. Our residents vary in beliefs, religious practices, and life history. They have many wonderful stories to share.

The resident's families are equally as diverse and bring even greater understanding of our wider world. Our co-workers bring together another wealth of opportunity to learn about diverse cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. Because of the intimate and home-like environment of boarding home care and residential care, our residents, families, and co-workers present us with rich opportunities to learn about others, challenge our prejudices, and embrace the diversity within our wider world.



### What is Diversity?

“The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect.” – *From the University of Oregon*

“It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.” – *From the University of Oregon*

“It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment.” – *from the University of Oregon*

“It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.” – *From the University of Oregon*

## Other Perspectives on Diversity

- “Diversity refers to the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance.”
- “Diversity is feeling OK to be yourself.”
- “Diversity means respecting and dealing with individuals as they are and not what you want them to be.”
- “Diversity is simple. It is pretty much a mixture of different things. Like many different types of people in a country, many different types of religions in a house, many different foods in one restaurant...”
- “Diversity is recognizing how we are alike, and respecting how we are different.”

## Categories of Diversity

Diversity is often discussed within categories of how people are different. Each of us is unique with our own talents and skills and experiences to offer. Thus, there are many ways that people may be different from you:

- Moral or spiritual beliefs
- Cultural background or ethnicity
- Intellectual or natural strengths and weaknesses (e.g., being better at math, musical, or artistic)
- Social skills and preferences (e.g., being shy, outgoing, social, or prefers alone time)
- Tastes, interests and hobbies (e.g., liking sports, arts, animals, cars, or boats)
- Physical features (e.g., gender, size, skin color, body shape, height, or hair color)
- Age
- Race
- Sexual orientation and gender identity
- Political beliefs
- Disabilities (e.g., physical disability, blind, deaf, mute)
- Socioeconomic background (e.g., rich, poor, middle class)
- Education and work skills (e.g., executive, farmer, mechanic, researcher)

We all benefit by being surrounded by people with different beliefs, skills and experiences. Sharing and communicating with others different than us is a way we expand our perspectives, understanding, empathy, and knowledge.

## **Differences**

The differences among us can also cause people to be targets of prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice can have some serious effects, but there are many things you can do to recognize and reduce prejudice in your own life. The first place to start is to understand and be able to define words like prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes.

Three terms important to understanding diversity are prejudice, stereotype, and discrimination. Each of these three terms are related, yet different. Let's take a detailed look into each of the three terms.

# PREJUDICE

Prejudice is a feeling. Prejudice is an inflexible or irrational attitude about an entire category of people. Prejudice is not merely a statement of opinion or belief, but includes strong feelings such as contempt, dislike, or loathing. The attitudes or opinions about a person or group are simply because the person belongs to a specific religion, race, nationality, or other group.

Prejudice is pre-judging, and it is irrational insofar as people hold inflexible attitudes supported by little or no direct evidence. Prejudice can either be positive or negative. A person who thinks, "I don't want (name of group) living in my neighborhood," is expressing a negative prejudice.

- "If you judge people you have no time to love them." –*Mother Teresa*
- "You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist." –*Attributed to both Golda Meir and Indira Gandhi*
- "Everyone is a prisoner of his own experiences. No one can eliminate prejudice – just recognize them." –*Edward Roscoe Murrow, 31 December 1955*
- "Prejudices are the chains forged by ignorance to keep men apart." –*Countess of Blessington*
- "Our thoughts are unseen hands shaping the people we meet. Whatever we truly think them to be, that's what they'll become for us." –*Richard Cowper*
- "Preconceived notions are the locks on the door to wisdom." *Merry Browne*

Prejudice is often based on stereotypes. It divides people into inferior and superior groups based on what one person thinks about another person or group.

# STEREOTYPES

A stereotype is a thought; a generalization. A stereotype is an oversimplified idea, thought, generalization, or image about a group of people in which identical characteristics are assigned to virtually all members of the group, regardless of actual variation among the members.

So, when you assume that all people of shared physical, religious, cultural or other characteristics have certain behavioral attributes, this is called a stereotype.

Some examples of stereotypes are:

- Men are more adventurous than women
- Women are more emotional than men
- Native Americans are all alcoholics

## **Are these stereotypes true? NO!**

**Both men and women can be adventurous and non adventurous.**

**Both men and women can be emotional and non-emotional.**

**All groups have individuals who are alcoholics and non-drinkers.**

## **Positive Stereotypes**

Even when a stereotype is a positive thought, such as when people in one racial group are thought to be superior athletes, the act of stereotyping is still evident and can be negative. Stereotypes are not necessarily emotionally laden and do not necessarily lead to discrimination. However, the potential abuse due to stereotyping can be blatant.

## **Who is Listening?**

Diversity includes an values differences that often are not visible. In today's more global economy, we no longer assume we know a person simply because we know that they look like. It is easy to be careful not to tell a black joke in the presence of an African American. But, can you tell who is Jewish? Who is gay? Who is lesbian?

Stereotypes are very evident in advertising and other media such as television. Although some improvements have been made, it is not difficult to find magazine ads and TV shows that depict some well-established stereotypes.

# DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is an action. Discrimination involves actions or behaviors directed against another group. When people act based on their prejudices or stereotypes, they are discriminating.

Discrimination may mean putting other people down, not allowing them to participate in activities, restricting their access to work or to live in certain neighborhoods, or denying them something they are entitled to by right and law. Discriminatory behaviors take many forms, but they all involve some form of exclusion or rejection.

Discrimination is behavior that is often protected by state and federal laws. For example, employers cannot discriminate based on race, sex, age, religion, marital status, disabilities, and others.

Here are some examples of discriminatory behaviors:

- A 50 year old woman is screened out of a job on the basis of age.
- A Muslim employee who is treated differently because of his attire.
- A gay employee who is constantly the target of gay jokes by other who think they are just being funny.
- An interracial couple who are ignored in restaurants by a waiter/waitress who disapproves.
- A female employee who is not listened to nor taken seriously when making suggestions simply because of her gender.
- A police officer keeping a closer watch on a black teenager than a white teenager hanging out in front of the store.
- A direct care staff does not respond as quickly to a call light of a resident because of her cultural background.





## CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING: DISCRIMINATION

Jane always serves dinner to her Muslim resident last because she dislikes his religion. Her behavior is an example of:

- A. Discrimination
- B. Stereotype
- C. Prejudice

**Explain your answer:**

# THE EFFECTS OF PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Prejudice can lead to harmful discriminatory behaviors that limit the opportunities of certain groups of people. Prejudice and discrimination can reduce or withhold access to people defined as inferior and increase or extend access to people defined as superior.

## Limitation of Opportunities

Prejudice and discrimination can limit an individual's opportunities in life, including:

- Approval , popularity, and acceptance
- Rights and privileges
- Power and authority
- Knowledge
- Employment and education
- Promotion and social status

## Social Risks

Prejudice and discrimination also leave people open to a variety of social risks including:

- Victimization (violence, abuse, theft and bullying)
- Suspicion (blame or assumed guilt for crimes and harmful actions)
- Rejection, alienation, and isolation (which all can lead to low self-esteem, self-hatred, and self-destruction)
- Exploitation and oppression

One of the worst things about prejudice is that over time people may come to believe what they hear and may start to believe that they are inferior. This can lead to:

- Emotional suffering
- Reduced self-esteem
- Sense of futility or lack of control
- Loss of hope in the future
- Fear/mistrust of others

## **Important Tips**

Here are some important tips to minimize discrimination in your Community.

- Respect other's choice of religion and spiritual practice.
- Do not use labels or stereotypes for others. Treat each person on his/her own merits.
- Avoid cultural, religious, or racial jokes.
- Do not tease another person, especially about their language differences, culture, sexual orientation, disability, or other potentially harmful characteristic.
- Treat other with the dignity and respect that you wish for yourself.

## **Are you Prejudice?**

Nearly everyone has a prejudice of some sort. For example:

- Would you care if your best friend married a person of another race?
- Would you care if you took your car for service and the auto mechanic was a blond female?
- Would you care if your spouse chose a different religious belief than you?

It is possible to be prejudice and not act upon the attitudes. Some people can recognize their own feelings, embrace the differences, and maintain respect in their dealings with others who are different from themselves.

## HOW TO MINIMIZE PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

It is everyone's responsibility to raise awareness and minimize prejudice and discrimination. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Get to know a person on an individual basis before you decide if you don't like him or her. You're not going to like everyone, but you do need to respect them as an individual and spend time with the person before you make a judgment. Judge people on their individual merits, not just because they are a member of a group.
2. Become aware of and confront your own prejudices by treating others like you want to be treated. You need to think how you would feel if you were treated the way you behave. You must look at your action from a different perspective.
3. Surround yourself with a diverse group of people. Seek to learn about different cultures and people to understand similarities and differences between yourself and others. As you learn more, you can relate to others better even when differences exist. Learn about the things out each may value such as respecting elders, family, children, spirituality, and celebrations.
4. Be respectful of differences. You need to be able to agree to disagree. Even if you do not see eye to eye with someone, you can respect their opinion. You must value each individual's right to make choices and to have free will.
5. When you are in a situation in which you are the minority, become aware of the experience to feel what it is like to be in that situation.
6. Do not participate in prejudiced discussions or discriminatory behavior. Refuse to laugh at racist or sexist jokes. Confront your friends or peers who express prejudiced or discriminatory beliefs. Many people may mean no harm and are unaware of their prejudices. You can help others become more aware.
7. Confront prejudice at work. Talk to your supervisor if you observe discriminatory policies or practices affecting you or others. It is everyone's responsibility to promote a positive work environment that is supportive of all staff, residents, and families.

Each of us is unique. You have learned how differences can be the target of someone else's prejudices. You have also learned how to minimize the damaging effects of prejudice and discrimination. Self-awareness is the first step. Become an advocate in your Community to honor the diversity of your residents, family, and staff.