

What can you do?  
Personal awareness

### **What is meant by discrimination?**

DISCRIMINATION is the denial of equality based on personal characteristics, such as race, color, religion, national origin, place of origin or ancestry, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, etc. Discrimination is usually based on prejudice and stereotypes.

### **What is meant by stereotypes?**

STEREOTYPE means "set image". The word comes from the process of making metal plates for printing. When applied to people, stereotyping refers to forming an instant or fixed picture of a group of people, usually based on false or incomplete information. Stereotypes are often negative.

### **What is meant by prejudice?**

PREJUDICE literally means to "prejudge" based on preconceived ideas about others. No law can prevent prejudiced attitudes. However, the law can prohibit discriminatory practices and behaviors flowing from prejudice.

*The New Brunswick Human Rights Commission*

### **Our prejudice**

Prejudice is a major problem in human relations. Almost anything in social and personal life which we now deplore was somewhere, and at some time, acceptance. Times and things are changing. In our effort to avoid change, we may be addicted to attending community meetings devoted to keeping things as they are. People do, in fact, change their minds and there is nothing wrong with that. It is a sign of growth and vitality.

### **Where prejudice comes from**

People are not born with prejudice. You can tell by watching a group of young children at play. As they grow older, children come to realize that discrimination exists in their families, schools, communities, and almost every sector of their lives. Many conform to the discriminating patterns of their groups, not because they themselves are prejudiced but because it is easier to discriminate than to resist the groups' demands for conformity. To counteract this, it is necessary to unlearn prejudices.

### **Whose problem is it?**

Many of our prejudices are due to the unquestioning acceptance of beliefs commonly held by members of our group, but in the end prejudice is a personal thing! Envy is the cause of much prejudicial thinking. The person who cannot improve his or her own situation is tempted to do what he or she can to impair another's. But in the long run, our prejudices do not hurt others as much as they do ourselves.

### **Always learning**

None of us knows enough. Knowledge allows us to see things from the smallest detail to the broadest perspective. In our quest for a non-prejudiced society, we need to think of the circumstances that surrounded people or groups and the ambitions that moved them. Think also of the desires that the group had and the methods taken to acquaint you with them. Walk a mile in another person's shoes.

### **Open Mindedness**

Having an open mind is both positive and healthy. When we approach choices, judgements, and opinions with open minds, we are likely to find that nothing is altogether good or true and nothing is altogether bad or false. When we reject contradictions or refuse to hear the other side of a story, we are closing our minds. It is very difficult to convince prejudiced people that their beliefs are not true. Often these people will register triumph over your argument by pointing out one particular case where their beliefs have been upheld. This makes it impossible to reason with them.

### **Understanding and realizing differences**

Our thinking habits are often geared toward putting things into categories based on similarities. It is hard to wrestle with a world in which no two things are alike. These are similarities, but we must not overlook the differences. When we look for the good in others, we will find that it far outweighs the bad. And, the ability to understand difference is to recognize, sympathetically, the beliefs and differences of others without necessarily embracing them.

*Cultural Diversity Resource Book,*  
WSU Cooperative Extension, September 1992.

### **PERSONAL AWARENESS SURVEY**

**Attitude Towards Others** Personal awareness survey to evaluate your attitude towards people who differ from you.

1. List any thoughts and feelings you have when you are exposed to people different from yourself and

2. When you were growing up, what were your parents' attitudes toward other racial groups, people with

(a) Open and friendly

(b) Indifferent

(c) prejudiced and unfriendly

Is your attitude toward these diverse groups of people different from that of your parents?  
If yes, explain how.

3. How does your attitude toward others compare with the views held by your friends?

(a) same

(b) slightly different

(c) different

(d) very different

4. Which one of the following items do you feel now has the greatest influence on your attitude?

(a) your upbringing

(b) personal philosophy or religious ideology

(c) news media, commentators, or writers, special friends

5. Have you had honest discussions about social issues with people who have views different from you?  
If so, what did you learn? If not, why?

6. Do you subscribe to and/or read publications written by or about people of other cultures? If no, why

Bias is a learned behavior. We all grow up with bias and prejudices. It takes effort to see them as clear

Source: The Spokane Task Force on Race Relations