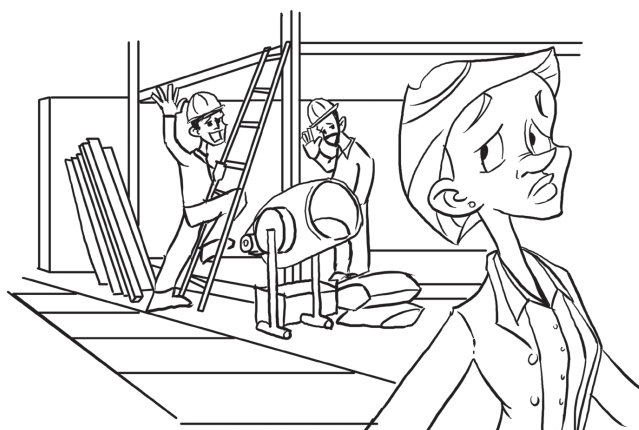


# Discrimination in the workplace

The Bible enables us to understand the following about discrimination:

- It is always wrong to treat people as less than human beings. All people should be treated as people made in the image of God
- It is wrong to discriminate against people on the basis of their gender, their ethnicity or their disability. All people are to be valued.
- It is right to discriminate between right and wrong attitudes and behaviours, but still treat the person with dignity and respect.



Unfortunately, jobs don't always go to the most qualified person or the best candidate. Discrimination exists in the workplace and it comes in many different forms. Regrettably, discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy and religion are experienced by workers throughout Australia, despite the establishment of anti-discrimination laws over twenty years ago.

In New South Wales, the Anti-Discrimination Board has two roles, to address all discrimination complaints and to educate all people on equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation and policies. Their website can be found at [www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/ADB](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/ADB).



## LITERACY ACTIVITY

Read the two discrimination case studies and answer the questions that follow.

Deborah started full-time work as an office administrator with a small training consultancy company. Three months later, she advised the company director that she was pregnant and was suffering from a pregnancy-related illness. She claimed that the director responded with words to the effect: 'Look, this will jeopardise your position'.

Deborah said that a few weeks later when she told the director that she was ill again, he said 'that's it. I've had enough. Pack your stuff and go', and terminated her employment. She claimed that the company signed a separation certificate that indicated her employment was terminated due to her pregnancy and frequent illness.

In response, the company said that it had accommodated Deborah's medical appointments and had allowed her to take sick leave. It denied that Deborah's employment had been terminated and claimed that she had resigned. The company stated that the details on the separation certificate had been completed by Deborah, prior to a signature given by the company.

The complaint was resolved by conciliation with the company agreeing to provide the complainant with written and verbal references, and an ex-gratia payment of \$6000.

1 What form of discrimination took place?

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2 What discriminatory comments were made to Deborah, and why are these unacceptable?

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3 Why are anti-discrimination laws so important?

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4 Can you list any other common types of workplace discrimination?

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5 Using one of the types of discrimination you have listed, create you own scenario of discrimination in the workplace.

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In considering the influences on your decision-making, the ‘trust, talk, take control’ model can be used to deal with risky situations or with situations where you feel conflicted. It can be applied to a range of situations where action needs to be taken to maintain safety and manage risk.

In any risky or challenging situation, remember to:

**TRUST**—your thoughts and feelings about a situation.

**TALK**—to a trusted adult or somebody else in your support network.

**TAKE CONTROL**—develop and follow your own plan. This plan may differ according to the situation and the environment you find yourself in.

6 How could you apply the ‘trust, talk, take control’ model to your scenario?

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Murray, who is Indigenous, said a form entitled ‘Aboriginal application for employment’, was placed on the staff notice-board. He claimed that the mock application form reinforced negative stereotypes about Indigenous Australians. For example, a section entitled ‘Income’, included ‘theft; unemployment; armed robbery’ and a section entitled ‘Abilities’ included ‘rapist; VD spreader; pub fighter’. Murray said another copy of the document was found in the storeroom, but when he raised it with management he was told not to worry about it.

The company said that it did not formally investigate the incident, as the area where the document was posted was accessible to all employees and contractors. It did, however, place a notice on all notice-boards stating that the document was racist and unacceptable. The notice also stated that if an employee was found to be responsible, they would be banned from attending the site. The company confirmed that another copy of the document was found and immediately destroyed. It claimed it acted appropriately and took all reasonable steps to address the incident.

The complaint was resolved by conciliation. Murray agreed to withdraw his complaint on the basis that the company would revise its EEO policies and procedures, appoint Harassment Contact Officers, implement cultural awareness training for all staff and provide him with a statement of regret.

7 What form of discrimination took place?

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8 What steps should the company have taken when the notice was discovered?

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9 How can this type of racism be curbed in the future so that others do not fall victim to discrimination in the workplace?

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### Inclusive and exclusive language

Inclusive language is the use of words and terms that includes all people and supports diversity. Exclusive language is when terms used exclude some people based on their gender, religion, race, sexual orientation, age or disability.

Inclusive language should be used to avoid discrimination. This means avoiding using specific identifying terms unless it is required of or relevant to the topic. The aim of inclusive language is to maintain personal dignity, instead of labelling people based on differences.

### How can I avoid exclusive language?

- Use gender neutral terminology, for example, ‘police officer’ instead of ‘policeman/woman’.
- Emphasise the person rather than a disability, for example, ‘person with epilepsy’ rather than an ‘epileptic’.
- Avoid using words that imply victimisation, for example, ‘victim’ or ‘sufferer’.
- Avoid the pronoun ‘he’ when both sexes are included. Instead, use ‘they’.


**LITERACY ACTIVITY**

Read the table below for examples of terms to avoid and alternates that can be used. Complete the table by providing terms appropriate for the remaining examples.

avoid	try to use
policeman	police officer
chairman	chair or chairperson
Christian name	
cameraman	camera operator
cleaning lady	housekeeper
craftsman	artisan
fireman	
fisherman	angler
housewife	
sportsmanship	
businessman	
mankind	



## Recognising and challenging inequalities

God commands us to take care of the sick and those who are less fortunate than ourselves. To feed the hungry, to look after the sick and clothe the needy. Perhaps the most marked example of inequality in Australia can be seen when investigating the standard of health of Indigenous Australians. The gaps in health and life expectancy appear to be widening between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians, pointing to a health crisis that has widened over the past twenty years.

**1 1/2 x 2** **NUMERACY ACTIVITY**

- 1 Use the following information to complete a column graph of life expectancy in Australia.

population	males	females
Indigenous Australians	67	73
All Australians	79	83



- 2 What is the difference in life expectancy for Indigenous males compared to all non-Indigenous Australian males?

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- 3 What is the difference in life expectancy for Indigenous females compared to all non-Indigenous Australian females?

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4 Suggest reasons for the inequity in life expectancy in Australia.

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5 Read Matthew 25:31-46. Outline the ways in which this inequality can be addressed according to the words of Jesus.

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# Supporting others

Community groups and not-for-profit organisations work together to overcome differences or inequities within society. They focus on a societal minority that is disadvantaged or discriminated against.

Inequality is a feature of every society and is most prominently realised in issues of income, access, opportunities and expectations. Access to affordable housing, good schools, quality health services and employment opportunities, can all substantially reduce inequality. However, when these fundamental services are unavailable or unaffordable, inequality increases.

## language tip...

**Inequality** means injustice or unfairness. **Discrimination** means treating people differently because of a perceived or real difference.

Supporting others to improve the welfare of disadvantaged groups often involves:

- recognising unfairness
- challenging assumptions and inequities
- working together to find solutions
- empowering people to make changes in their own lives.

## Examples

- The government is responsible for providing education for children. This means that people who have life experience and education themselves (i.e. ministers and politicians) are responsible for ensuring that future generations also have these opportunities.
- Businesses support worthwhile causes in local communities, including breakfast programs for disadvantaged primary schools and sports equipment for high schools. Sometimes these businesses provide financial support or they may donate goods and equipment.
- Lawyers work 'pro bono' (without charge) for cases where the plaintiff can't afford legal representation.
- Alcoholics Anonymous is a support group for people who are trying to overcome alcoholism.
- Each year around the holidays, many people donate gifts for children in poor families, volunteer their time to assist at homeless shelters or make donations to charities.





**LITERACY ACTIVITY**

Match each of the following groups with the correct description of their aims.



- Centrelink      Gamblers Anonymous
- Kids Helpline      Rotary      Red Cross
- Meals on Wheels      Outback Nannies
- RADD (Recording Artists, Actors & Athletes Against Drink Driving)

group	description of aims
	A worldwide organisation of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian service, encourage high ethical standards in vocations and help build goodwill and peace in the world.
	This organisation aims to provide a network for nannies and governesses in rural Australia to access information, advice and support.
	An Australian government agency that assists people to become self-sufficient and supports those in need.
	This organisation works to provide meals, comfort and security to elderly, infirm and disabled members of the community.
	The primary purpose of this group is to stop gambling and to help compulsive gamblers quit.
	A free, anonymous and confidential telephone counselling service for young people aged 5 to 18 years.
	An organisation that utilises celebrities to create positive attitudes about road safety.
	A group that among its many functions, manages blood supplies, administers first aid training and provides emergency relief.

List any other community groups, businesses or charitable organisations you have heard of that support the welfare and interests of others.

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