



British Columbia's  
**Office of the Human Rights  
Commissioner**

Introduction to human rights series

# Systemic discrimination

## Educator pack

### Introduction

This guide has been prepared to assist classrooms from grades 4 to 9 to explore themes in BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner's "Introducing Human Rights" video series. In this video, we are introduced to Systemic Discrimination. These questions touch on subjects that may bring up difficult emotions for students who have had similar experiences. You may wish to use some of the questions as journal prompts, so that students can reflect on them individually before discussing them.

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# Section 1

## Pre-viewing activity

### Begin the conversation with your class

We are going to watch a video on an important issue in our world: systemic discrimination. Many people don't understand what SD is. What do you think systemic discrimination is? Take some time to think about it and talk to your neighbour about what you think it is.

Bring the group together and share answers, brainstorming any new ideas that emerge from the discussion.



## Key points and terms from the video

The following are some questions you may want to pose to your class:

1. **Which one of these is an example of interacting with a system:**

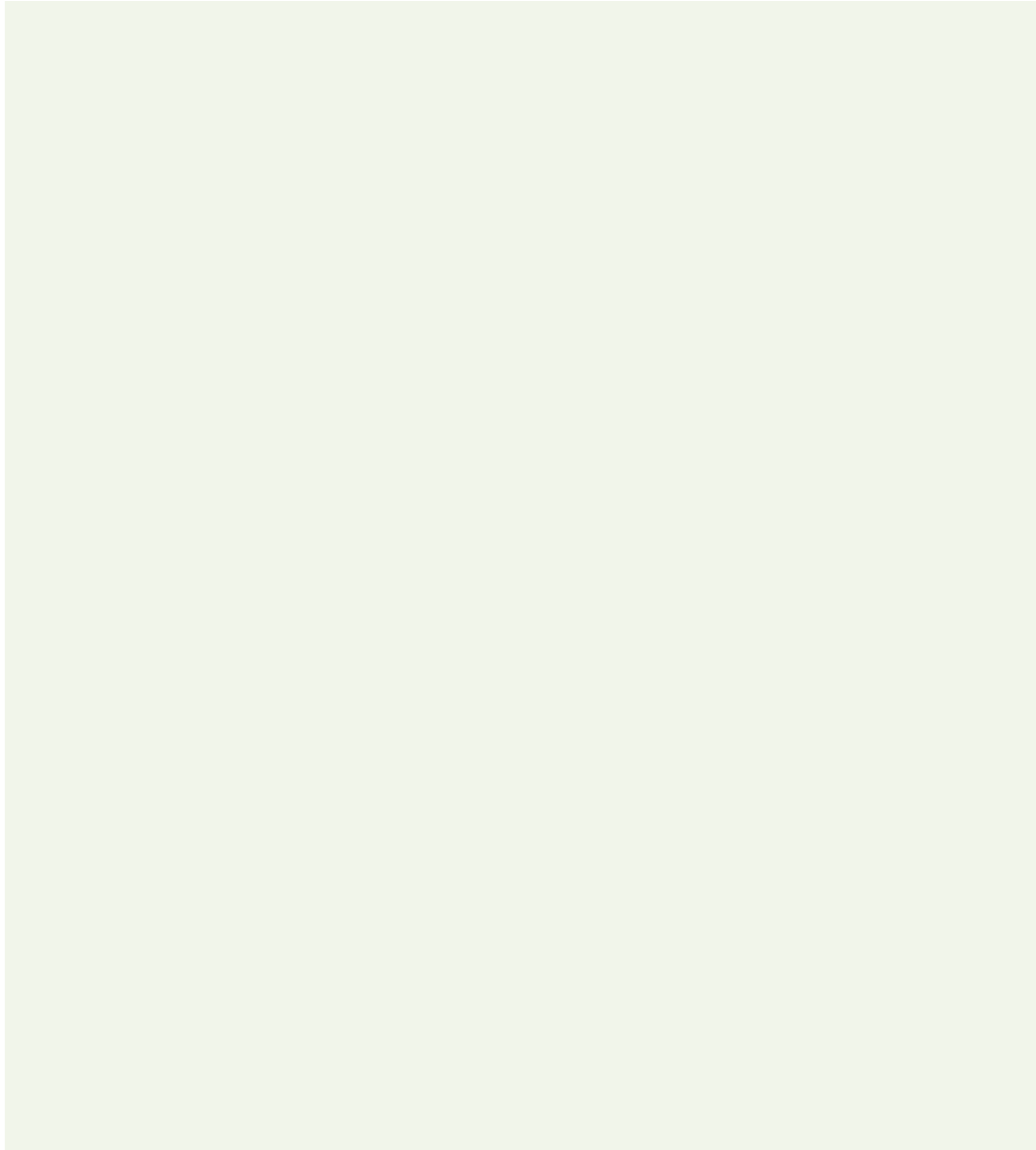
- a. Going to Emergency for a broken arm
- b. Taking the bus home
- c. Buying a snack at the store
- d. Putting your books in your locker
- e. Celebrating a family member's birthday at a restaurant
- f. None of the above
- g. A & C
- h. All of the above

2. Human rights are the basic rights that every person has from the day they are born, and some of these rights are protected by the law. We all have the human right to be treated equally and respectfully. But sometimes we are not treated equally and are disrespected for who we are. This is called discrimination. Discrimination means treating people badly or unfairly because they are different from others, on the basis of certain parts of who they are, like having brown skin.

**Discrimination and Systemic Discrimination are the same thing.**

- a. True
- b. False

**Prompt:** Systemic discrimination is one type of discrimination – but how are they same, and how are they different?



**Follow-up:** Use the flowchart below and work through two examples inspired by the video.

Was a person or group treated badly or unfairly because of who they are?



**Not  
Discrimination**



Did this happen once? Was it connected to other times or anything else?



**Interpersonal  
Discrimination**

Are only one or a few members of a group affected?



Is this a pattern? Has it happened again and again over time?

Are all or most members of a group affected?



**Systemic  
Discrimination**

Is the bad treatment made to seem normal, and/or supported by “the way things are done”

In the past and now, have those who have been treated badly had less opportunity to make changes that would help?

**Follow-up:** Sometimes interpersonal discrimination can be one example of a pattern of systemic discrimination. What is one example (from the video, or a class brainstorm) you can think of?

**Prompt**

- A man and a woman work the same job at the same company. They both do a great job, though the woman gets paid less. Looking at the whole company, this is a pattern. Looking at the whole province, this is a pattern.

3. In your own words, what is systemic discrimination? How would you explain it to someone who hasn't seen the video?

## Section 3

# Open-ended questions for critical self-reflection or group discussion

- 1. The video named and showed several examples of systems. What systems did you see in the video? What systems are part of your life?**
  - a. Possible prompts: Infrastructure, health care, employment
  - b. Possible prompts: Sports teams, extracurricular activities, part time jobs, school, health care
- 2. Systemic discrimination “builds a world of injustice and inequity”. This means that systemic discrimination leads to the world being unfair. What examples of unfairness did you see in the video? How would that unfairness impact the people involved?**
  - a. Possible prompts: Road & Bridge: It being much harder to get anywhere, much harder to get to the hospital – might not get the care they need in good time, might be late for appointments and looked down upon at the hospital
  - b. Possible prompts: Toll booth: The other lanes are getting through much faster and without waiting – having to put so much more time and effort in to get through, and likely still being blamed for taking longer
  - c. Elevator: not paid as much – housing, lifestyle, health, family, food

3. **The video says that Systemic Discrimination “benefits some, and harms others.” The word *harm* is often used to describe when a person’s body is hurt. What other meanings could harm have?**

- a. Possible prompts: Emotional harm, exclusion, punishment
- b. Possible prompts: denial of access, loss of an opportunity, detainment

4. **The video mentions that it can be hard to see or sometimes even believe that systemic discrimination occurs. What do you think might stand in the way of seeing and believing? What do you think we could do to learn, think, and talk about difficult topics?**

- a. Possible prompts: No personal experience, no one has ever named it for you before or pointed it out. The topic is uncomfortable, change is uncomfortable
- b. Possible prompts: Read, listen, watch, hear – art, stories, film, books. See something, say something. Ask questions.

5. **If group discussion: Write “Belong” in the middle of the board. Remind students that “We all play a role in creating the world we want to build together. We can listen to voices that are left out, and we have the power to challenge and change these systems.” Ask students to name 3 roles they have, and prompt them to brainstorm and share 1 action for each role.**

- a. Possible prompts: Soccer player, student, band member, employee at the mall, movie lover, sister/ brother
- b. Possible prompts: ask about school policies, support Canada’s women’s soccer team, speaking up when someone makes a discriminatory joke, raising your own awareness through reading about current events in your community and far away, volunteering at community organizations