

Conversation guide for the infographic

How systemic discrimination works

Introduction

This guide has been prepared to assist your group in exploring BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner's (BCOHRC) How Systemic Discrimination Works [infographic](#). This infographic provides a visual tool to explore how systemic discrimination develops, which groups it impacts and how it impacts these groups.

The infographic and conversation guide can be used in classrooms, organizations and community groups to complement human rights, equity, diversity and inclusion activities carried out in these settings. Additional resources exploring this topic are available on BCOHRC's [Systemic Discrimination webpage](#).

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The questions in this guide are numbered and colour coded to reflect the following key takeaways in the infographic:

- (1) Systemic discrimination occurs in a variety of organizations and systems.
- (2) Impacts include creating barriers to participation, harms and increased disadvantages for specific groups.
- (3) Systemic discrimination disproportionately impacts certain groups because of their identity. This often shows up as patterns of groups impacted.
- (4) Systemic discrimination attributes power to one group over another. It is often based on patterns of historical inequality and often developed by groups in positions of power.
- (5) Systemic discrimination may be unintentional. A lack of intention to discriminate does not prevent harm from occurring.
- (6) Systemic discrimination is based on attributed characteristics. Attributed characteristics are based on assumptions rather than facts. They are often the result of biases and stereotypes.
- (6) Biases and stereotypes often contribute to the development of discriminatory policies and practices. In turn, the presence of systemic discrimination often reinforces these biases and stereotypes. If unchecked, this can lead to the development of new policies and practices that discriminate systemically.
- (7) Systemic discrimination can be difficult to see. Groups not directly harmed by it may not notice it. It may become normalized over time. Reflecting on how we contribute to and benefit from it may make people uncomfortable.
- (8) Systemic discrimination negatively impacts all of society. It prevents some groups from contributing valuable skills and ideas. Those harmed may lose trust in systems so that these systems are unable to work effectively. It adds increased costs to society.

Before conducting a session, please consult the Conversation Guide Support Document to create a safe space for all participants.

Section 1

Pre-viewing activity

- Highlight that participants will all have different levels of understanding and experience with systemic discrimination. Everyone is welcome and everyone has something to share and to learn.
- Take five minutes to reflect individually and record on the Previewing Activity page of the Participant Handout.

Open the conversation

Choose the questions that work best for you.

- What stands out to you in the infographic? What is the first thing you take away from it?
- What feelings did you have while viewing the infographic?
- What information in the infographic is new to you? Did anything surprise you? Similarly, what information from the infographic is not new to you? How does the infographic confirm what you already understood?
- In what systems and organizations does this infographic show systemic discrimination taking place? Can you think of additional systems and organizations where systemic discrimination occurs? (1)
- What are some of the impacts of systemic discrimination shown in the infographic? (Hint: look at the boulders and text along path.) Can you think of examples from real life of barriers and harms created by systemic discrimination? (2)
- According to the infographic, what do the groups who create systemic discrimination have in common? What do those who are negatively impacted by it have in common? (Hint: look at the top of the infographic.) (4)
- Which groups do you think are negatively impacted? Which groups may be positively impacted? (Note: Refer to BCOHRC's Human Rights in B.C. webpage, at <https://bchumanrights.ca/human-rights/human-rights-in-bc/>, for description of groups.) (3)
- What does the infographic show about the intention of groups that develop systemically discriminatory policies and practices? Are the negative impacts of systemic discrimination always intentional? (5)
- How does systemic discrimination reinforce biases and stereotypes? How do these biases and stereotypes influence the creation of new policies, practices and behaviours that discriminate systemically? (Hint: Look at the three sets of text along the bottom half of the path.) (6)

Section 2

Delving deeper

Select the questions that will work for you and your group. You may wish to do this as a follow up session or share the full guide with participants so that they can consider questions that weren't brought up during the session. Questions are categorized into individual level, community and societal level and ideological questions.

Take breaks as needed.

Individual level

- Where have you seen systemic discrimination in your own experience, your friends' or family member's experiences, workplace, community or media? Think where it occurs (1), the group or groups impacted (3) and how it impacts those groups. (2)
- If you can't think of examples, why might that be? Why can noticing systemic discrimination be difficult? (7)
- Can we contribute to or benefit from systemic discrimination and at the same time be negatively impacted by it? Can you think of an example? (8)
- Now that we have considered how systemic discrimination can be difficult to see and is often put in place despite good intentions, take a minute to reflect on examples of how you may have contributed to or benefited from systemic discrimination or enabled it to continue. Would anyone like to share? (5)

Community and societal level

- We see examples in the infographic of how biases and stereotypes can contribute to systemic discrimination and how systemic discrimination can lead to increased biases and stereotypes. Can you think of some examples? (6)
- The infographic shows how people not impacted negatively by systemic discrimination often blame groups that are impacted. Sometimes those impacted even blame themselves. What really causes discrimination? Take a minute to reflect on how your understanding or attitude about what causes systemic discrimination may have changed during this conversation. Would anyone like to share? (4)
- Systemic discrimination has been developed throughout history through a variety of policies and practices. For example, colonization has led to the development of policies that create barriers and harms for Indigenous peoples. Can you think of some additional historical processes that have contributed to the systemic discrimination as we see it today? (4)
- Why do you think that the infographic doesn't identify the specific groups impacted by systemic discrimination? (6)

- How does systemic discrimination impact the development of a just, equitable and democratic society? How can addressing systemic discrimination improve society as a whole?
- While the infographic shows how systemic discrimination is created and impacts groups of people, it also can help us to identify places where we can take action to prevent it from occurring or address it. Can you identify some points on the infographic where action could be taken?

Ideological level

- Human rights are the idea that we deserve certain things just because we are alive. Everyone is born with the right to a life of equality, dignity and respect. Human rights are also a way of meeting our responsibilities to each other. How do you think systemic discrimination impacts your human rights or the human rights of others in your community?

Section 3

Bring the conversation to a close

- Before we discuss some final questions, let's do a quick check-in. How are you feeling? (Refer to list of support resources below.)
- Look at the What I Know section of the Participant Handout. Has your understanding of systemic discrimination changed since we explored and discussed the infographic? How?
- Look at the What I Wonder About section of the Participant Handout. Do you have any unanswered questions? (Share resources in the To Learn More section of this guide and in the Participant Handout.)
- Do you think it is important to address systemic discrimination? Why or why not? Have your thoughts about the importance of taking action changed since participating in today's conversation? Take five minutes to reflect on and answer the questions in the post viewing activity in the participant handout. Would anyone like to share their answers to the first set of questions? Would anyone like to share an action they commit to taking?

To learn more

BCOHRC has developed the following resources to support further learning about systemic discrimination.

BCOHRC Systemic discrimination [webpage](#)

In addition to hosting the systemic discrimination infographic and conversation guide, BCOHRC's systemic discrimination webpage includes an introductory video and conversation guide, as well as the definitions and examples of systemic discrimination.

BCOHRC Systemic discrimination [video](#)

This short video provides an introduction to systemic discrimination. The accompanying conversation can be used by groups to delve deeper into the topic and make connections with daily life.

Introduction to systemic discrimination [webinar](#)

Through real-life stories and examples, this free 90-minute session introduces the key characteristics of systemic discrimination, provides useful tools to identify it and explores its impacts.

Systemic discrimination: What we can do [webinar](#)

This session reviews key take-aways from the introductory webinar, shares examples of actions to address systemic discrimination and explores strategies to support successful actions.

Human Rights Code [webinar](#)

This free, 90-minute session explores B.C.'s human rights system and uses scenarios taken from real-life cases to explore our rights and responsibilities under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*.

Support resources

Today's discussion may bring up feelings now or in the days ahead. The following resources may be helpful:

Community supports

BCOHRC's [Who Can Help webpage](#) includes a list of community supports which may be helpful.

Connect with others

Reaching out to people who may have similar experiences with systemic discrimination can help you to process and work through these feelings and to consider collective actions.