TEACHING ASSISTANT

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in Work with Children & Young Individuals
Explain how to challenge discrimination

Challenging and dealing with discrimination in the most fair way possible is a very good skill, and is one that you will learn better if you apply reflective practice to it. As mentioned in AC2.3, journaling is a good way to initiate your own reflective practices, and you can learn lessons and learn how to approach situations differently this way.

- Be fair (to all sides)
- Be clear (don’t give mixed signals)
- Find alternative solutions (not all discrimination is deliberate)
- Be quick (immediacy has greater effect)
- Be knowledgeable (explain why it’s wrong)

Challenging discrimination.

**Challenging direct discrimination**

Direct discrimination is the most obvious type of discrimination, and can happen in the playground, classroom, dining hall, or after school. If you witness direct discrimination between children, you must immediately challenge it, so that they understand what has happened, what their involvement has been, and why it is not acceptable.

For example, you may hear name calling in the playground, or a child may complain that he or she has been stopped from joining in with a game or activity. To deal with the issue immediately, it may be necessary to bring the two parties together, to ask questions about why the names are being called, what they actually mean, and to ask them why it might be wrong to do so. The same could apply to the activity or game. If children cite irreconcilable differences as being the issue, you may need to come up with a few different reasons why those differences are unimportant, and how the children can practically get round the problem.
For example, if a child who is partially-sighted complains that the other children will not play football with him, you may need to examine whether the other children's concerns are more to do with their fear that the sight-impaired child will be hurt, or that their game will not be as 'good' if they have to be careful on his behalf. Discrimination does not always happen because of bad intentions, and you should be aware of that, especially when handling a situation with children or young people.

You could then suggest that he plays in goal, that he works in tandem with another child, passing only to that person, or that they modify their game so that he can be involved more easily; for example, holding a dribbling competition instead of a full-on soccer game.

Showing children that they can adapt their situation to suit less able students can be a good way to demonstrate to them that change does not have to be bad, and that they can get something out of the situation themselves by adapting to differences instead of rejecting them.

It is also really important not to be unfair towards the children who display discriminative actions. One reason for this is as mentioned above: that their intentions may not be to exclude another, but because of safety reasoning or similar. Another reason is that with every interaction you have with a child or with a group of children, you model the behaviour you expect to see. It can be very confusing for a child to be told that they were acting unfairly and then for them to be treated unfairly by the very same person. It is far more straightforward for them to see how fairness works and how it is applied to them and to the person they were being unfair towards.

**Did you know?**

Although the Equality Act helps people deal with prejudice on the grounds of several major areas of disadvantage, it doesn't represent help for those who are discriminated against on other grounds that they cannot help. For example, in 2009, the UK Government sponsored a report into the discrimination experienced by children in care, and found that there were organisations that are supposed to help children, who were guilty of discriminating against those who were looked after children. See report in external links at the end of this course.

**Challenging indirect discrimination**

Indirect discrimination tends to be more difficult to spot, and is likely to be more related to the policies or practices of the school, than to individuals. If you notice that a particular policy or activity that the school or class does tend to disadvantage children or parents from certain backgrounds or abilities, bring up your issues with your line manager and request that it be looked at and amended.