



DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE



INTRODUCTION

When an employee arrives to work, he or she should be treated with respect and professionalism. Discrimination occurs when these attributes are not present in the workplace. Employers cannot discriminate against someone based on characteristics or ideologies. Discrimination can take many forms and it is up to every employee to ensure that their working environment is free from discrimination.

WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

Discrimination can be defined as the treatment or consideration, or making a distinction in favor or against, a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit.

TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination can take many forms. Both federal and local laws have categories which an employee cannot be discriminated for, including:

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Skin color
- National origin
- Religion
- Mental or physical disability
- Genetic information
- Pregnancy or Parenthood
- **Harassment or retaliation can also be a form of discrimination.**



NOTE: Depending on the state in which you work, the state may have more categories for protection against discrimination compared to the federal government.

Laws are changing all the time, so employers need to ensure that any training or handbooks discussing discrimination are current or updated.



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HOW CAN YOU PREVENT DISCRIMINATION?

Employers and employees can prevent discrimination by:

- Providing handbooks that outline and discuss the company's policies in regard to behaviors and practices that will not be tolerated. Employees should carefully read and understand non-discrimination policies in the handbook. If an employee has questions, they should ask questions to their supervisor or human resources department.
- Providing anti-discrimination training to all management staff and regular employees. Employees should attend all required anti-discrimination training and take opportunities to attend additional training if it is offered.
- Encourage ideas of respect and professionalism.
- Grant reasonable accommodations when they have been requested.
- Encourage meetings between parties before issues escalate.

HOW CAN I TELL IF DISCRIMINATION IS TAKING PLACE?

There are some situations when an employee, manager, or supervisor is unsure about a behavior or action that may be an indicator of discrimination. Listed are some signs that may be indicators of discrimination:

- Hiring practices that disallow certain individuals or groups from applying for the job or from being offered the position in which they applied.
- When a rule or policy is not applied to everyone equally.
- When a reasonable accommodation for a disability or religious belief is not granted.
Unless it would cause undue hardship to the company.
- Jokes that are shared that might offend someone.
- Behavior that humiliates or degrades someone. This behavior might be repeated over and over again.
- Someone not getting a promotion or raise based on the fact that they belong to a protected category.

WHAT CAN AN EMPLOYEE DO IF THEY FEEL THAT THEY ARE BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST?

If an employee feels that they have been discriminated against, they should talk with or file a complaint with either their supervisor or human resources department. Should the behavior not be stopped or an employee becomes a target for retaliation (it is another form of discrimination), he or she can file a complaint with the local Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The EEOC can and will investigate all complaints about workplace discrimination and they can act as mediators between the parties involved.

CONCLUSION

Discrimination is something that should not be tolerated in any workplace. It is up to both employers and employees to ensure a safe work environment for everyone. Everyone needs to remember that people want to be treated with respect and professionalism. Discrimination is something that can and should be prevented. Discrimination laws are evolving all the time, so everyone needs to ensure that they are informed about any changes to all local and federal law.