

Implicit Disability Biases: Questions to Ask Yourself

- **Reflect on each of the questions below.**
- **Consider whether and to what extent your response may be influenced by stereotypes and biases about people with disabilities and/or informed by objective facts and evidence and actual experiences with them.**
- **Discuss.**

1. When you think of a person with a disability, do you focus on the things the person can do or cannot do? Where do you get the information on which you base your views? Did you ask or observe the person with a disability?
2. Do you think of a person with a disability as working in certain careers? If so, which careers and why?
3. When you think of a person with a disability, do you have sympathy or feel pity for the person?
4. When you meet a person with a disability, do you see the person's disability before you see the person?
5. Do you think about people with disabilities as a group or as individuals? If as a group, what characteristics do you think people with disabilities share?
6. Do you consider people with disabilities as different from people without disabilities? If so, how are they different?
7. Do you believe that the lives of people with disabilities are different from the lives of people without disabilities? If so, how are they different?
8. Do you use terms (e.g., "normal" or "able-bodied") to differentiate between people without disabilities and people with disabilities?
9. Do you speak to and interact with people with disabilities differently than you do with people without disabilities? If so, how and why?
10. Do you perceive people with disabilities as dependent compared to people without disabilities? Do you base your belief on personal experiences or other sources? If the latter, what are the sources?
11. Would you describe persons with disabilities as brave, courageous, inspirational, superhuman, and heroic? If so, why?
12. Do you perceive people with disabilities as productive or competent as people without disabilities? If so, why?

13. Do you view people with disabilities as too costly for employers to hire? If so, please explain.

14. Do you view disability as an abnormality or sickness or as a challenge that needs to be overcome or corrected? When you see a person with a disability, do you automatically want to help them?

15. Do you think workers with disabilities receive special advantages or are held to a lesser standard than workers without disabilities?

Specific Disabilities

1. Do you perceive persons with mental illness as violent or dangerous? If so, based on what information?

2. Do you view people with intellectual disabilities or developmental disabilities as being dependent on others to care for them? As being kind and generous? As being innocent and sweet-natured?

3. Do you think all blind people have a keener sense of smell and hearing?

4. Do you think people with cerebral palsy have cognitive impairments as well?

5. Do you view people with hidden impairments such as learning disabilities, arthritis, and heart conditions as having a disability?

6. Do you think all blind people read braille?

Scenarios For Discussion

Scenario 1

Nicole, who uses a wheelchair for mobility, is interviewing for an associate position in the litigation department at a “big law” firm. The partner asks Nicole whether she has considered working in other departments that do not involve going to court, and whether she is able to represent clients effectively in court. Nicole responds that her passion is litigation, pointing out that she won several moot court competitions and has courtroom experience through a pro bono project and a legal aid clinic. The partner informs Nicole that he would initially meet with her clients to ensure that they are comfortable being represented by an attorney in a wheelchair.

What implicit biases does the partner have about Nicole?

What message is the partner sending her?

What message is given to clients if the partner proceeds as he suggests?

What could the partner have done differently?

What questions are appropriate to ask in this situation?

Scenario 2

Robert, who has depression, works at a large public relations firm. At times, his depression worsens. When this occurs, he requests a flexible schedule—to arrive at work late rather than early morning—as an accommodation. Robert’s supervisor assembles a team to work on an important project for the firm. She decides, based on the long hours this will require, the numerous tight deadlines that need to be met, and the team meetings involved, not to assign Robert.

What assumptions did the supervisor make about Robert’s abilities?

Were the supervisor’s reasons for not including Robert on the team reasonable?

What questions should the supervisor have asked Robert before making her decision?

Scenario 3

Judge Thompson is presiding over a custody battle involving three-year-old Sean. The boy’s mother is blind, and his father does not have any disabilities. Judge Thompson must determine the best interests of Sean, namely what environment will foster and encourage his happiness, safety, mental health, and development.

What factors should the judge consider in making his decision?

Does being blind necessarily impact the mother’s parenting capacity? If so, how?

What types of evidence should Sean’s mother present?

What types of evidence should Sean’s father present?

Questions and scenarios provided by website from the American Bar Association.