

## Is It Discrimination?

Often we see and hear things that may be size discrimination—on television, in magazines, in school, and in our neighborhoods. Can you tell if something is discrimination? Here are some examples and what we think about them. What do you think?

1. Every time the gym teachers let the kids pick teams, Mary (who is fat) gets picked last. Is it discrimination?

Maybe. When kids pick teams they usually pick the best players and their friends first. If Mary is bad at the game, no wonder she gets picked last. But if Mary is a good player and she gets picked last, it may be because the team captains are thinking about her size and not her playing skills. This hurts larger kids, and often makes them feel like not playing at all. A better idea is for the teacher to find other ways to pick teams so everyone feels like playing.

2. Your very fat aunt is coming to Thanksgiving at your house. Your mother or father gets a sturdy armless chair and places it at the dinner table for her. Is it discrimination?

No. Giving your aunt a special chair is not discrimination. Your parents are trying to make her comfortable and that's good.

3. There is a fat girl on your school bus. Every time she gets on, some boys make oink noises, and no one wants to sit next to her. Is it discrimination?

Yes. Making fun of someone because of their appearance is wrong. Oinking noises are based on the stereotype that fat people are messy pigs who eat too much. The fact is that you can't tell how much someone eats just by looking at their size. (We all know thin people who eat a lot and never gain weight.) And being a slob has nothing to do with your size. Slobs come in all sizes and so do neat, clean people.

4. Joe is the fattest boy in school. The other kids tease him, so he punches one of them in the arm. He gets sent to the principal's office, but not the other kids. Is it discrimination?

Yes and no. The principal should speak to the kids who were picking on Joe. They need to learn that you can hurt people with words, too. However, Joe crossed the line when he expressed his anger with violence. He deserved special punishment.

5. Jane, a fat student, is a terrific singer. The school is putting on a musical play and she is great in her audition. But she only gets picked to paint scenery because the teacher says she "doesn't look right for the part." Is it discrimination?

Yes. Even though how you look is important on stage, there is probably a part for Jane to play if the teacher tries to include her. If there isn't a part, the teacher should find a play that has roles for all the talented kids who want to participate.

6. Even though Barbara likes gym class, she has trouble keeping up because she is very fat. The teachers decide to give her a special pass to skip gym. Instead, she has to go to the guidance counselor to talk about her body image. Is this discrimination?

Yes and no. Learning about body image is good, but it's good for kids of all sizes, not just the larger ones. Barbara likes gym and doesn't ask to be excused. Like all kids, she needs physical activity. Math teachers deal with the fact that some kids are good at math and others have a harder time keeping up. They find ways to teach math to everyone. Gym should be handled the same way.

7. The principal announces that every kid who is more than 10 pounds overweight has to stay after school every Tuesday for a special weight loss class with the school nurse. Thin and average-sized kids don't have to stay after school. Is that discrimination?

Yes. It singles out one group of kids based on a physical characteristic and says they are not okay. A better way would be to teach all kids nutrition and good exercise habits.

8. There's a "Help Wanted" sign in the window of the local store. Of the people who apply for the job, Betty has the most experience. The store owner says he thinks she would be very good at the job, but he doesn't hire her. He says that she weighs too much. He hires someone thinner with less experience and tells Betty that if she loses weight, she should try again next time he has a job opening. Is this discrimination?

Yes. The store owner made it clear that the only reason he didn't hire Betty was because of her weight. This is wrong, just as wrong as if he refused to hire her because of her skin color, age, gender, religion, or ethnic background.

Is it discrimination?

If you see or hear something that seems to be size discrimination, but you're not sure, here's an easy way to tell: Imagine the same situation, but instead of a fat person, imagine the person is black, or speaks with a foreign accent, or is in a wheel chair. If you think it would be discrimination against any of those people, it's probably discrimination against the fat person, too.