

# Take a look at yourself

## 34 ways to build stronger, better relationships between people of all backgrounds

[www.helpmakeadifference.com](http://www.helpmakeadifference.com)

No matter what our background or personal characteristics, we all want to be treated fairly and with respect, and to be included and have the opportunity to participate fully in our communities and workplaces.

In order to build strong and welcoming communities and workplaces, we need to ensure people are not excluded or discriminated against because of their personal characteristics. Alberta's human rights legislation prohibits discrimination based on the following personal characteristics: race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status and sexual orientation.

Each one of us can help make a difference:

- We are each unique and need to understand, respect and value our differences.
- We each have a responsibility to build a society where people are valued and get along.
- We can all change the future of our communities and workplaces to be more welcoming and inclusive by treating each other with respect and fairness in our day-to-day lives.

There are many ways that you can make a difference in your community and in your workplace. These 34 tips are a starting point to build stronger, better relationships between people. Sometimes this may mean taking a step outside your comfort zone.

### Take a look at yourself

1. How much do you know about your own culture? How does it affect your beliefs, attitudes, customs and behaviour? In what ways is your culture different from the culture of other people you know? Even if you do not have an easy label to describe your cultural background, which may be quite a blend of cultures, it is an important part of who you are.
2. In addition to culture, what other characteristics influence your point of view? How do they affect your beliefs, attitudes, customs and behaviour? How do they interact with your cultural background to affect your beliefs and actions? How do these factors affect the customs and behaviour of people around you? The blend of many factors such as gender, culture and disabilities influences who we are.
3. Don't make assumptions about people. Give people a chance to demonstrate what they are really like. Stereotypes are assumptions that classify people in a narrow way, based on very little information. Catch yourself stereotyping people: jumping to conclusions or making assumptions about people based on their skin colour, gender, dress, accent, disability, lifestyle or other factor.

Recognize that first impressions are often based on stereotypes or past experiences and therefore may not be correct.

4. Remember that your views are simply one "take" or perspective on a subject. Realize that other people have different perspectives. Try to find common ground instead of assuming that you or the other person will have to give in.
5. Talk with family and friends about prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and racism. Encourage acceptance of differences. Help others learn how to respond to prejudice.

### **Look around you: Get to know your community**

6. Notice the diversity among people in your neighbourhood and compare it to the groups you belong to. Who do you see? Who is missing? If there are differences, think about why that is. Look at demographic and socio-economic information about your community. Visit:  
[http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/aboutalberta/ped\\_profiles/index.html](http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/aboutalberta/ped_profiles/index.html)
7. Learn about the countries immigrants come from. Look the countries up in an atlas or on the Internet.
8. Learn about various faith and spiritual groups in your community. Attend a bazaar, fair or festival that you've never been to before. Ask about having a tour of a local temple or mosque, for example.

### **Get involved in your community or neighbourhood**

9. Volunteer for a community group where you will help or work with people of diverse backgrounds. Ask about immigrant serving agencies or other organizations where you can help a newcomer learn about life in Canada and how to get settled in your community. For a list of immigrant serving agencies, visit:  
<http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/other/prognewcomer/immigrantagency.asp>
10. Meet your neighbours. Introduce yourself and have a conversation. Invite them to join you for coffee or a meal. If they are going away, offer to pick up any flyers that are delivered or to keep an eye on their place. Don't hold back from being neighbourly because they are from a different culture or background, or have a family composition that is different from your own.
11. If, as a family member, you stand on the sidelines watching your child play a sport, start a conversation with another bystander. Notice which people come alone and have no one else to talk to. Talking about the children or the game is a good conversation starter. You could suggest carpooling with them.
12. Invite a spiritual leader from another faith or spiritual group to speak to your community association or a group you belong to. This way you will add some diversity to your agenda and the dialogue may help you come up with new ideas and activities.

13. Encourage your community association and community facilities (libraries, swimming pool, fitness centres, etc.) to find ways to include members of different ethnic groups, people with disabilities, and others who might feel excluded in their meetings and activities. Suggest topics for newsletter articles that reflect the community's diversity. Offer to write an article or interview someone.
14. Take advantage of opportunities to promote positive media coverage of a wide range of people and events in your community. Spot negative or sensational media coverage of individuals or groups based on their backgrounds, gender, disabilities or other characteristics that encourages stereotypes and creates misunderstandings. Let the media outlet know you don't approve.

### **Learn something new**

15. Be open to learning about new ideas and ways of doing things. Encourage your friends, children, and other family members to do the same.
16. Try something new. Eat a new kind of food, go to a different grocery store or bakery, attend a foreign movie, or rent a foreign video or DVD.
17. Introduce yourself and your children to a wide variety of experiences—different kinds of stories, music, dance and art.
18. Read a Canadian novel. Ask at your local library for authors such as Rohinton Mistry, Kerri Sakamoto, Yann Martel, Austin Clarke, Shani Mootoo, and Carol Shields. The diverse perspectives of Canadian writers are all part of Canada's culture. If you belong to a book club, discuss what makes these authors "Canadian." For a list of libraries in Alberta, visit:  
[http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/building\\_communities/public\\_library/map\\_directory/index.asp](http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/building_communities/public_library/map_directory/index.asp).
19. Learn more about the celebration of different holidays (Chinese New Year, Hannukah, Divali, Kwanzaa, etc.) There may be public events or festivities in your community that you can attend. Don't just think about them as "fun" events. Try to find out about the teachings and beliefs that these celebrations recognize. You may learn about customs that you would like to incorporate into your own celebrations.
20. Try learning another language or at least a few words in the language of a friend, neighbour or co-worker. They will be impressed by your effort and interest. Even the simple act of trying to pronounce a person's name correctly is appreciated.
21. Participate in events to mark significant diversity and United Nations International Days, such as International Women's Day on March 8, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21, National Aboriginal Day on June 21, Canadian Multiculturalism Day on June 27, and Alberta Heritage Day on the first Monday each August. Also recognize Persons Day on October 18, the International Day of Disabled Persons on December 3 and International Human Rights Day on December 10. To learn about these and other significant days, and to plan an event for your workplace, community or school, visit:  
[http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/helping\\_albertans/helpmakeadifference/celebrate/in](http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/helping_albertans/helpmakeadifference/celebrate/in)

[dex.asp](#).

## **Talk with others**

22. Listen carefully to someone that you think has an accent. Don't assume he or she doesn't speak English just because the accent is different from yours. If you listen carefully, you can get accustomed to any accent.
23. Pay attention to your body language and the body language of others. Body language can communicate a lot about your interest in what another person is saying. How you sit, what you do with your hands, the expression on your face and your gaze send a stronger message than your words. How much do you know about cultural and gender differences in body language? Don't make assumptions about others' body language based on your own.
24. Get to know the people you meet. Ask them questions and show interest in the work they do, their customs, their language, their disability, etc.
25. Don't assume that every member of a visible cultural group is a recent immigrant. Many have lived in Canada for generations. If you ask the question "Where are you from?" you may find that the answer will be "Manitoba" or "Vancouver" and not the distant country you were assuming.
26. Share stories with someone you know. Tell about your upbringing and background and learn about theirs. Learn about other Albertans and their contributions. A conversation that starts about food or superstitions, for example, may develop into a discussion of beliefs and values.
27. Some people like to be asked how they prefer to be addressed (Mrs. Miss, Ms., Dr., etc.) Likewise, ask people how they wish to be described (Native, First Nations, etc.) rather than using your own labels. Think about whether you really need to use any label at all. After all people are individuals, not simply members of a particular group.
28. Avoid telling jokes that make fun of others or that make them look inferior or unintelligent. Ethnic jokes and jokes based on gender, disability or other personal characteristics put down or demean members of a group. The safest jokes are those you tell about yourself and something that happened to you.
29. Speak up if you hear remarks or jokes that are offensive or hurtful. Let others know that you are not interested in hearing jokes that put down or make fun of people. You can say "Please keep that kind of joke/comment to yourself." Or "I don't find that funny." Or "I don't appreciate that kind of humour."

## **Make a difference at work**

30. Ask yourself if you tend to avoid contact with people who have different backgrounds or characteristics than you, or whom you have difficulty understanding. Make an effort to talk to them and learn more about them. Taking the first step is often the hardest. Once you get to know people a bit, you will likely feel more at ease with them.

31. If you are having communication difficulties with another person, stop and analyze what interference or "static" may be getting in the way. Could it be because the person is from a different culture, is of a different gender, or has a disability? Is a combination of culture, disability, gender, and other differences causing the "static"? These factors may affect the way people react to situations but do not necessarily cause the problems themselves. Think of differences as only one piece of the puzzle.
32. Be open to new ways of solving problems and looking at issues. People of diverse backgrounds provide a broad range of solutions and can offer new ways of addressing concerns instead of the same old ways. Remember that a wider range of perspectives may challenge your thinking, but could lead to new solutions.
33. Is there anyone in your workplace who consistently gets left out, whether at work or in social situations, or whose comments are not really listened to? Try to figure out why that is and find ways to include that person. People who are in a minority in a workplace may not feel part of the larger group or may feel uncomfortable drawing attention to themselves and speaking up.
34. If you make a remark to a co-worker that you realize afterwards is insensitive or inappropriate, try to correct the situation by apologizing immediately. If you let the remark stand, it may continue to be a source of upset or annoyance. It could even affect the other person's performance or attitude about the workplace.

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