



Youth@Work Employment Discrimination Vocabulary



The following chart provides an overview of commonly used equal employment opportunity terms and phrases. Additional information about these topics is available on the EEOC's website at www.eeoc.gov or the Youth@Work website at www.youth.eeoc.gov.

Age Discrimination

Treating a person who is forty or older differently, or less favorably, because of older age.

Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)

The federal law that prohibits discrimination and harassment in employment against a person who is age 40 or older because of older age. The law also prohibits retaliation.
(See definitions of "discrimination," "harassment," and "retaliation," below).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The federal law that prohibits discrimination and harassment in employment against persons with disabilities, and requires employers to provide "reasonable accommodations" to persons with disabilities, so long as the accommodation imposes no "undue hardship" on the employer. The ADA also prohibits retaliation.

The ADA only applies to private companies and state and local governments, not to the federal government. A separate law, the Rehabilitation Act, governs the federal government's treatment of persons with disabilities.

Charge of Discrimination

A "charge" is a formal, written, signed statement filed with EEOC by an individual who alleges a discriminatory employment action based on race, skin color, religion, sex [including pregnancy], national origin, age [age 40 and older], disability and/or genetic information.

Color Discrimination

Treating a person differently, or less favorably, based on his or her skin pigmentation (lightness or darkness of the skin), complexion, shade, or tone. Color discrimination can occur between persons of different races or ethnicities or between persons of the same race or ethnicity.

Disability

A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity, such as hearing, seeing, speaking, walking, etc. An impairment that substantially limits a major bodily function, such as the immune system, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, cardiovascular, etc. is also considered a disability.

Disability Discrimination

Treating a person differently because the person, or a friend, parent, or someone else the person associates with, has a disability, has a history of once having a disability, or is considered to have a disability.

Discrimination

Treating a person differently or less favorably because of a protected basis. The protected bases under EEOC-enforced federal laws are race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (age 40 or older), disability and genetic information.

EEOC

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is the federal agency that enforces the laws against job discrimination and harassment.

Equal Pay Act (EPA)

The federal law that makes it illegal to pay different wages to women and men if they perform substantially equal work in the same workplace. The law also prohibits retaliation.

Genetic Information
Nondiscrimination Act
(GINA)

The federal law that prohibits discrimination based on genetic information. GINA protects individuals who do not currently have an illness, disease or disorder, but who have the genetic predisposition to the disease or disorder. The law also prohibits retaliation.

Genetic Information

Information about an individual's genetic tests, the genetic tests of family members, or family medical history.

Harassment

Unwelcome conduct because of an employee's protected basis (such as race, sex, national origin, etc.). Workplace harassment is illegal if employment opportunities, such as promotions or continued employment, depend on the employee going along with the harassment, or the conduct creates a hostile work environment.

National Origin
Discrimination

Treating a person differently, or less favorably, because the person, or the person's friend, parent, or someone else the person associates with, comes from a particular place, has a particular accent, or appears to have a particular ethnic background.

Pervasive

Occurs frequently.

Protected Basis

The protected bases under federal law are race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (age 40 or older), disability and genetic information.

Race Discrimination

Treating a person differently, or less favorably, because the person, or the person's friend, parent, or someone else the person associates with, belongs to a particular racial group.

Reasonable Accommodation (Disability)

An employer must reasonably accommodate a known disability of a qualified applicant or employee unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer. A reasonable accommodation based on disability is an adjustment to the work environment or application process that permits a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job or to participate in the application process.

Religious Accommodation

An employer must reasonably accommodate an applicant or employee's sincerely held religious practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer. A reasonable religious accommodation is an adjustment to the work schedule, environment, or application process (such as a schedule change for an employment test that conflicts with a religious holiday) that allows an employee to practice his or her religion.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act)

The federal law that makes it illegal to discriminate against a person with a disability in the federal government.

Religious Discrimination

Treating a person differently, or less favorably, because the person, or the person's friend, parent, or someone else the person associates with, holds a particular religious belief (or non-belief).
Denying an individual a requested religious accommodation in the workplace when there is no undue hardship.

Retaliation

Punishing an employee, treating an employee differently, or harassing an employee because the employee complains about job discrimination or participates in a job discrimination investigation or complaint.

Severe

Very serious.

Sex Discrimination

Treating a person differently, or less favorably, because of the person's sex. Both women and men are protected from discrimination based on sex.

Sexual Harassment

Unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in the workplace that directly or indirectly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Stereotype

A belief or assumption that people within a group have the same characteristics.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII)

The federal law that prohibits employment discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The law also prohibits retaliation.

Youth@Work Initiative

An EEOC program designed to teach teens about their rights and responsibilities at work and to help employers create positive work experiences for young adults. Visit www.youth.eeoc.gov for more information.

Zero tolerance policies

Employer policies that prohibit inappropriate conduct, regardless of whether the conduct rises to the level of illegal discrimination or harassment.