

CLASS DISCUSSION
DISABILITY: BIAS AND THE LAW
TIME ESTIMATED: 50 MINUTES

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

To gain a better understanding of disabilities and special education through discussion questions.

OVERVIEW

This activity offers a chance to consider how people with disabilities and special education are viewed in society. The following discussion questions are meant to help students consider the different issues involved with special education and disabilities.

ACTIVITY

Discuss the following in class:

- Recently, the definition of what constitutes a disability has been broadened, leading to reports that people with so-called “boutique” disabilities are now eligible for assistance under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). For example, the rise in the number of individuals with environmental disabilities who could be described as having a “multiple chemical sensitivity” have led the federal government to subsidize a special housing development in Marin County, California. Despite the fact that Ecology House, the builder, spent an extra \$9,000 per apartment on special hypoallergenic building materials, more than half of the residents still claim that the building is making them sick. The head of the Housing and Urban Development Department that is largely responsible for funding much of the Marin project responded that even if the problem is psychological, its victims are disabled and eligible for assistance. Do you think all individuals with psychologically based disabilities should be eligible for ADA assistance?
- What specific concerns may exist that compel many people to view special education as too costly, burdensome, and ineffective?
- What biases toward people with disabilities still exist today? What do you think would be necessary to eliminate these biases?
- Why do you think many people consider special education a civil rights issue?
- Identify reasons why some people believe that special education is a primary factor that increases the amount of disruption and violence in school settings.
- What factors should you consider when thinking about the least restrictive environment for a particular student with special needs?
- Discuss the statement made by President George H. W. Bush when he signed ADA into law on July 26, 1990, at a celebration at the White House Rose Garden, “Let the shameful walls of exclusion finally come tumbling down.”