SPRINGBOARDS FOR DISCUSSING STIGMA

This page contains springboards for you to dive into a discussion of stigmas old and new. Feel free to discuss the questions in any order or create springboards of your own. The key thing is not to answer all the questions, but to have a good discussion in which everyone participates fully.

1. Do you consider yourself prejudiced toward people with stigmatized attributes such as obesity, short stature, and physical or mental disabilities? If not, why not? And if so, in what respect would you say you're prejudiced?

2. If you've behaved in a biased way toward stigmatized people, what caused the bias, and how did other people respond?

3. Why do you suppose that being overweight is so stigmatized in the United States? Being overweight is seen as attractive and a sign of wealth in many other countries (as it was a century ago in the United States).

4. If you're not attracted to fat people, does this mean that you're prejudiced toward them? How is a lack of attraction toward fat people similar or different from seeing people of a certain race as unattractive?

5. Why are expressions of anti-fat prejudice more socially acceptable than racism, sexism, and other common forms of prejudice?

6. When we think about behaving in an unprejudiced way toward people with a disability, a common approach is to treat them as though they're not disabled, but that approach denies of part of their identity. What do you think about this—is it generally better to ignore other people's disabilities or to acknowledge them?

7. If it's unprejudiced to treat disabled people as able-bodied, is it also unprejudiced to treat women as though they're men, Asian people as White, gay people as straight, and Jews as Christian?

8. Could you be the romantic partner of someone who is blind, has dwarfism, or needs a wheelchair to get around? If not, why not?

9. Do you have any close friends who are disabled? If not, does that suggest you're prejudiced toward people with disabilities?

10. If you were with a group of friends and someone made fun of a person who was stigmatized, would you object? Why or why not?

11. What are the most effective ways to reduce biases toward stigmatized individuals?

12. At a psychological level, what are the common denominators that link all forms of stigma and prejudice?

[From UnderstandingPrejudice.org]