



Altenheim Resource Services

Timely Resources DEEPER DIVE



Ageism

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“Frail”, “Old”, “Boring”, “Slow”, “Disabled”, “Grumpy”, “Forgetful”, “Smelly”, “Mean”, “Demanding” – These are just a few words that are often used to describe older adults. These words reflect the growing problem of ageism. October 9 was designated as [Ageism Awareness Day](#). Ageism refers to stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel), and discrimination (how we act) toward others or ourselves based on age. It negatively impacts our health and well-being, our financial security, and the economy. Ageism is not just a problem for older adults. It impacts people at all ages.

Breaking down the stereotypes takes effort. We easily use the stereotypes when we talk about age groups. For example, we assume that older adults can't use modern technology. How often have we said, “I'll get my grandchild to set up my phone.” We just assume that older adults are not capable of using technology. It's not just about older adults. We assume that young people are lazy and inconsiderate. Changing our attitudes toward various age groups takes some effort. All people deserve respect and dignity. The [American Society on Aging](#) has an excellent fact sheet that helps us explore our stereotypes and the ways we describe and talk about older adults.

Fighting ageism isn't easy when we are bombarded by media messages featuring older adults in negative ways. Think about the commercials you have seen on television this week. How many of them feature older adults in positive ways? How many of them even feature older adults? [AARP](#) points out that the lack of age diversity in advertising agencies may be one reason for stereotypes. “The average age of a manager in America's advertising agencies is 37. The average age of a creative person in the industry is only 28.” Add to this all the messages you see on social media. The [American Society on Aging](#) has developed social media messages that you can post that bring awareness to the issues of ageism.

We also get messages about trying to avoid getting older. There's the myth that we would be happier and healthier if we avoid aging. [Negative self-perceptions of aging](#) decrease the quality of life and can shorten lifespan by five years. In an article for the American Psychological Association, [Kristen Weir](#), points out that “happiness sinks to a low-water mark in middle age before increasing again through later adulthood.”

What can we do about these negative effects of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination based on aging? In an article for *Psychology Today*, [Susan Krauss Whitbourne](#) writes that first we must recognize its existence. Next, stop others when they demonstrate either internalized or other forms of everyday ageism. Finally, boycott ageist birthday cards or images and challenge those who make snide comments about age. ASA concludes their [Ageism Fact Sheet](#), with ways to Break the Stereotypes About Older Adults by knowing the facts.

A positive step we can all take is to [change our words](#) to describe older adults as “Joyful”, “Kind”, “Intelligent”, “Wise”, “Energetic”, “Adventurous”, “Generous”, “Thoughtful”, “Healthy”.