

# Age and Discrimination

*“The key message I took away from the Ageism workshop, is that we need to stand up, be counted and refuse to be discriminated against.”*  
~ Senior Participant



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## Introduction

Ageism, like racism or sexism, it is a form of prejudice that discriminates against people based on age, describing them as ‘old or young’. As we age, we may notice people treating us differently, unfairly or not respecting our rights in society. This can negatively affect the lives of people, whether in public, the workplace or at home. Ageism can come in the form of language used, stereotypes, discrimination and abuse. By talking about it, raising awareness of ageism and taking appropriate action, we can begin to change society’s negative attitudes toward aging.

## Opening Discussion

Engage in discussion with your group by asking them the following questions:

**Have you ever been treated differently because of your age?**

**How did this experience make you feel?**

# Why Does Ageism Occur?

## DISCUSSIONS:

### *Why do you think ageism occurs?*

There are a number of cultural reasons why ageism or age discrimination occurs. One possible reason is our culture's capitalistic nature. Worth is tied to making money and as older persons leave the workforce, our society perceives them having 'less' value. In this way many of the important, past contributions older adults have made to family, community and society are overlooked. There is a lack of accurate information and fear of aging that feeds the harmful stereotypes leading us to believe aging is a negative experience.

### **Below are some examples of age discrimination:**

- Losing your job. (Mandatory retirement is not allowed in Ontario).
- Not being hired, because of your age.
- Refused club membership, because of age.
- Refused a referral from your Doctor, because of your age.
- Being refused or discouraged from taking workplace training, because of your age.
- Service providers, like transit drivers, not allowing extra time to accommodate your needs on buses or subways.
- Being evicted, because of your age.
- Landlords refusing to provide accessibility, ramps or visual fire alarms.

### **What about language?**

Many think that terms such as '*our* elderly' or '*your* elderly person' treat older adults as if they are someone's property or possessions, rather than individuals, capable of making decisions.

### *Do you think terms like 'your elderly person' or 'our seniors' are ageist? How do you wish to be referred to?*

## **You're Protected: The Ontario Human Rights Code**

The Ontario HR Code protects people from ageism. You cannot be discriminated against because of age, where you work or live. The Policy on Discrimination against Older Persons because of Age provides an in-depth look at all aspects of age discrimination.

To make a human rights complaint contact:

**Human Rights  
Tribunal of Ontario**

1 866 598 0322

[www.hrto.ca](http://www.hrto.ca)

# Ageims and Abuse: A Connection

## DISCUSSION:

*Do you think there is a connection between abuse and ageism? If so, why?*

The Ontario Human Rights Commission notes that abuse of older adults occurs largely in part due to the negative attitudes, towards older adults and their economic or social vulnerability. Abuse can be linked to stereotypes about aging. For example authority figures may not believe an older adult, when they say they have been taken advantage of or abused because they have misconceptions about their capacity. These perceptions and misconceptions about aging, contribute to the prevalence of elder abuse. It is important that people of all ages, be better informed about aging and the rights of older adults.

## Take the Quiz: Is this Statement Ageist, Yes or No?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
You don't need this training at your age, there is no benefit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Older people are so forgetful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You might be too mature for this position.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Older people get so many benefits and discounts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You look better than most people your age.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Older people don't understand how the world is changing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Older people are too trusting and naïve.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	As you get older you get set in your ways.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**All of these are ageist remarks and generalized statements that reflect an ageist attitude.**

## DISCUSSION:

*What are some misconceptions you had about aging? How have they changed, as you have gotten older?*

Here are **some common myths** about aging:

- Losing mental capacity is inevitable
- Exercise is near impossible if you did not do it as a younger person
- Sex ends as you age
- Getting older is depressing and you will get depressed

# Speaking Out Against Ageism

## DISCUSSION:

*In what ways do you think you could speak out against ageism?*

Age discrimination is not taken as seriously as other forms of discrimination. It can however, have the same economic, social and psychological impact. To combat ageism, it is important to raise public awareness about its existence and prevalence and to start challenging those myths about aging.

- **Go beyond stereotypes**~ Highlight an older adult's individual and lifelong contributions to our society.
- **Learn more about aging**~ Take an active role in learning about aging and encourage people of all ages, to do the same.
- **Listen**~ Be sure to listen to those around you who have experienced age discrimination and hear how it has affected their lives.
- **Promote intergenerational discussions**~ By encouraging younger generations to participate in discussions about age discrimination, you can help to reduce negative attitudes against young and old alike.
- **Speak up**~ Speak up against ageist language, images, jokes and comments. Engage others in the conversation of healthy attitudes towards aging.
- **Push for change and respond to ageism in the media**~ Write letters to your elected representative expressing your concerns. Write letters or e-mails to editors or producers of programs where you saw or heard ageist content.

## Who Do I Call if I Need Help?

**Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE)**

1 855 598 2656

[www.advocacycentreelderly.org](http://www.advocacycentreelderly.org)

**Egale Canada Human Rights Trust**

1 888 204 7777

[www.egale.ca](http://www.egale.ca)

**Elder Abuse Ontario**

416 916 6728

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

**Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario**

1 866 598 0322

[www.sjto.gov.on.ca/hrto](http://www.sjto.gov.on.ca/hrto)

## Get Involved!

Consider joining these organizations:

**Canadian Association of Retired Persons**

1 800 363 9736

[www.carp.ca](http://www.carp.ca)

**Older Adult Centre's Association of Ontario**

1 866 835 7693

[www.oacoa.org](http://www.oacoa.org)