



Age-Friendly
RHODE ISLAND

Let's Talk About Aging in a New Way.

We all share a common humanity and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity — regardless of our age. But we may not realize that despite good intentions our behavior and language toward older people may unintentionally be inappropriate, hurtful and exemplify ageism.

As more of our population reaches the age of 65 and beyond, it's even more important that we speak and act in a way that respects their vitality and individuality. Here are some suggestions on how best to achieve those goals.

Avoid “othering”: If you see an older person and think their age is a liability or handicap, you are unconsciously labeling them as an “other.” Avoiding this “us versus them” attitude can reduce prejudices that dehumanize all older people. Instead promote the practice of tolerance and acceptance of our differences.

Don't patronize: Nobody likes to feel they aren't valued or taken seriously. Instead of addressing an older person as “dear” or speaking in a childish voice, speak to them as you would like to be spoken to. And don't assume terms like “golden years” or phrases like “with age comes wisdom” are welcome.

Be positive: Just because people are aging doesn't mean they are elderly. Don't address them as “The Elderly” or “The Seniors” which implies decline, infirmity, or that they are all alike. The preferred term is “older adult.” Although they may be older, they are still active and productive members of their community.

Use specifics: We are not just numbers in a chart. We are individuals, with specific attributes and differences that should be celebrated. Instead of saying “elders” or “seniors” say “adults over 60” or something similar. (Exceptions do apply, such as “elder” in indigenous cultures and “senior” as an adjective preceding a noun like “Center.”) Be specific when mentioning age. Avoid demographic terms like “boomers” because they are reductive and don't reflect the diverse experiences of this large group that spans almost two decades.

Emphasize similarities: Yes, we are different. But our differences should unite instead of separate us. We can all benefit from sharing our knowledge and experiences.

Join the conversation at agefriendlyri.org