

Ageism

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Discrimination comes in all forms, shapes and sizes. Some demonstrations of discrimination and prejudice are overt and obvious but others, such as ageism can be veiled and insidious.

According to Wikipedia, “ageism refers to the stereotyping of and discrimination against individuals or groups because of their age.” The term was initially introduced to refer to prejudice and discrimination against older people but now has been used to describe unfair treatment to people of any age. In this article, I will address the problem of ageism as it applies to our senior population.

Recently, I escorted a client to a prominent doctor’s office in the Valley. We waited almost a half an hour for her to be taken into a room, even after being assured that as we were the first appointment after lunch, she would be received quickly. The doctor then plugged a few other patients into various rooms and proceeded to go through their care. This is fine; we understand that as eye drops have to have time to work and protocols have to be followed, a system like this is very efficient. When her visit was complete and she was dismissed, she was gathering her cane and purse, only to be told loudly by this same doctor, to “keep it moving.” A senior somewhat unsteady on her feet and having sat for more than an hour with eye drops dilating her pupils was rightly careful in rising to be sure she was safe. Both my client and I were shocked at this rude display of ageism by this professional and a man that very soon will be joining the senior ranks.

When researching this topic, I happened along an excellent article by the CNPEA – Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, for more information about this excellent organization – www.cnpea.ca. Below is a short version of the points in their document – “How Do We Get Past Ageism.”

1. Identify the myths and misinformation. *Challenge erroneous and baseless beliefs.*
2. Go beyond the stereotypes of aging. *Recognize labels that do nothing to properly describe a person.*
3. Learn more about aging. *Educate yourself to evaluate and resist inaccurate stereotypes.*
4. Learn more about ageism and discrimination. *Find out how some policies are not neutral to seniors.*
5. Listen to seniors who have experienced ageism. *Ask how they feel about what they have encountered.*
6. Monitor media and respond to ageist material. *Challenge the media to stop propagating myths.*
7. Speak up about ageism. *When a disparaging joke is told, educate those as they may not see how harmful it is.*
8. Watch our language. *Be careful of the terms and expressions we use so as not to generalize one age group.*
9. Talk openly about aging issues and ageism. *Openly discuss and share your knowledge about ageism.*
10. Build intergenerational bridges to promote better understanding. *Challenge all ages to know more.*
11. Provide support for organizations that address ageism. Join. *Be part of a positive solution.*
12. Push for changes from your elected representative. *Watch for ageism from your MP’s, etc.*

Ageism, like any other prejudice can’t flourish if it isn’t fed. Let’s all be more aware of how we either promote or discourage these old stereotypes and myths and do our part to dispel them.