

# Anti-Ageism Quick Guide: Changing the Conversation



**A**geism perpetuates powerful and pervasive stereotypes that demean the individual and impact quality of life. We all can contribute to positively influence perceptions of aging, and aging services professionals and their allies are in the forefront of effecting that change.

This Quick Guide is designed to help organizations and individuals be mindful of the language and messaging they use around aging. These insights will help you contribute to the elimination of ageist attitudes, behaviors, and words from our collective vocabulary.

## Terms

At LeadingAge we believe in promoting the individuality and worth of older adults through our language and actions. We do this by shifting the way we communicate about older adults and the aging experience with a focus on person-centered values.

- **Ageism:** Stereotyping and discriminating against individuals, or groups, on the basis of their age; a tendency to view older adults as debilitated, unworthy of attention, or unsuitable for employment.
- **Person-Centeredness:** A way of thinking and doing things that strives to put the person first. Person-centeredness, or person-directedness, represents a shift from a medical model to a relationship-based model.

When we adopt person-centered language, it is important to reflect not only on the words we use, but also on our attitudes and behaviors toward older adults to ensure we are being inclusive and honoring the individuality, wisdom, abilities, and dignity of each person.

## Quick Tips

- Avoid stereotypes and generalizations, both in the negative and positive extremes, in language and images (e.g., image of a 100-year-old running a marathon).
- When describing individuals, use the noun before the adjective (e.g., person with a disability vs. disabled person).
- Avoid language and images that equate young with positive and old with negative (e.g., she's 70 years young).
- Embrace the entire spectrum of the lived experience through words and images (e.g., show people using assistive devices and those without visible physical disabilities).

## Be Mindful

Person-centeredness requires us to be mindful of the ways we choose to see and connect with others. The more mindful we become, the better we are able to identify and interrupt ageism in our professional and personal lives. So, rather than offering a long list of dos and don'ts, we invite you to pause and consider how your words influence beliefs and behavior.

When we are striving for person-centeredness, we ask ourselves:

- How is what we are doing/ saying inclusive and accessible for all?
- How are we honoring the dignity in others?
- How are we valuing/honoring the unique qualities and experiences of individuals? Conversely, how are we feeding into stereotypes and blanket assumptions, including that all older adults are frail or have disabilities?
- How are we (ensuring that we are) open to the lessons that live within all who are around us?

## Taking Steps Toward a Vision

Ageism challenges the daily work of LeadingAge by creating barriers to advocacy, inhibiting workforce recruitment, and negatively impacting the quality of life of older adults. That's why the LeadingAge Board of Directors adopted the vision, *An America Freed from Ageism*.

This aspirational vision doesn't change our work, but rather offered a new lens through which to see what we do every day.

## Language Guidance



### PREFERRED

Aging services  
Sector, field  
Organization, community  
Caregiving professionals,  
professional caregivers  
Older adults



### AVOID

Aged care  
Industry, market  
Facility, company  
Care workers, unskilled workers, frontline  
workers  
The elderly

See the [LeadingAge Language Guide](#) to learn the preferred terms in aging services.

Please join us in taking steps toward *An America Freed from Ageism*.  
Visit our website to learn more at [LeadingAge.org/ageism](https://www.leadingage.org/ageism)