

# WORDS are POWERFUL

## Tips for Writing & Speaking with Older Adults

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| <p><b>Aging</b> ★</p> <p>Aging is a highly individual experience!</p> <p><b>Assumptions based on age don't work!</b></p> <p>Language that makes generalizations and assumptions based on age alone can be inaccurate and even insulting.</p>              | <p><b>DANGER!</b> ⚠️<br/><b>Tempting Adjectives</b></p> <p>Do I need to use this adjective?<br/>Does it add to the story?</p> <p><i>Little, sweet, adorable, spry, frail, eccentric, elderly, ancient, cute</i> are examples of adjectives that can demean and/or infantilize an older person.</p> <p>"Jane W. is a feisty, spry little lady who bustles about the room as she serves tea."</p> | <p><b>Person-Centered Language</b> ✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes the impact of language on thoughts and actions.</li> <li>Does not diminish the uniqueness and intrinsic value of each person.</li> </ul> <p>Older adults are NOT "one size fits all".</p> <p>"Jane W is an energetic 85 year old who is pleased to welcome visitors to her home."</p> | <p><b>Young Forever?</b> ❤️</p> <p>Recognize the reality of aging – everyone will show and feel bodily signs of age.</p> <p>To try to compliment an older person by referring to them as 'young' demonstrates that young is desirable, old is not.</p> <p>Advertising often uses youth-centric language such as <i>young at heart</i>. Some ads even blatantly claim to "stop aging" by using their product.</p> | <p><b>Elder vs Elderly</b> 👍</p> <p><i>Elderly</i> carries with it the connotation of frailty and weakness. Use carefully.</p> <p><i>Elder</i>, especially as used in indigenous communities, is a term of respect, seen as a vibrant source of wisdom.</p>  |
| <p><b>Ageist</b> 🗑️</p> <p>"You can't teach old dogs new tricks!"</p> <p>"Seniors don't use social media."</p> <p>"Change freaks them out."</p> <p>"Dr. Frank Martinez, a senior citizen, continues to maintain a vigorous practice despite his age."</p> | <p><b>Age Positive</b> 👍</p> <p>"People who are not familiar with technology face challenges as they learn how to use tools such as computers and smart phones."</p> <p>"Dr. Frank Martinez, now seventy years old, continues to maintain a vigorous practice."</p>   | <p><b>How do YOU Speak to an older adult?</b> ★</p> <p><i>Sweetie, honey, dear, darling, young lady</i> are seemingly kind but offensive endearments.</p> <p>Older adults deserve respect. Instead of calling them what they're not, call them by their names: Ms. Smith or just plain Judith.</p>   | <p><b>Ageist</b> 🗑️</p> <p>"Even though he turned 80 he is forever young."</p> <p>"I can't believe you are 78!"</p> <p>"You could pass for much younger."</p> <p>"Oh, you're not old!"</p>   | <p><b>Humour</b> 😄</p> <p><b>Every joke contains a grain of truth.</b></p> <p>"Grandma is so wrinkled she needs a bookmark to find her mouth."</p> <p>"My old Uncle Ed still whistles at girls but can't remember why."</p> <p>Humour can be ageist if directed at another age group. It can spread cultural stereotypes about older adults. Use it carefully.</p> |

