

Exploring ageism through role-play workshops

This guide is for older people who are interested in using role-play to understand how ageism affects them and what action to take to improve their lives.

What is ageism?

The World Health Organization defines ageism as: *'Stereotyping and discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of their age; ageism can take many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices, or institutional policies and practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs.'*

This is not a definitive answer to the question of what ageism is. You may have your own understanding of ageism, which will come out through your discussions.

What is a role-play workshop?

A role-play workshop is a series of scenes in which people act out a real-life situation, followed by a discussion of their feelings and the action they can take.

A role-play workshop on ageism enables older people to explore how it feels to experience ageism and discuss how to challenge it. Watching a role-play on ageism helps us to empathise with those who have experienced ageism. Role-play helps us to recognise the different forms that ageism can take and allows us to explore its root causes. It gives us the opportunity to discover new ways to react to ageism.

The roles

Character 1: (older person)

Character 2: (person mainly interacting with the older person)

Character 3: (bystander, who might say/do something)

Character 4: (second bystander, who might say/do something)

For the three scenes described in this guide, you will need a minimum of four people to act these roles and as many people in your audience as you wish. It is a good idea to have a facilitator to lead the discussion at the end. You can choose to act out any or all of these scenes.

Role-play workshops have the potential to touch upon difficult topics or evoke painful memories. Before a workshop the facilitator should spend some time thinking about how the participants might be affected by the plays. If they think it is necessary, the facilitator should provide everyone with the contact details of any additional support services that participants can get in touch with. This should be done at the end of the workshop.

Discussion points

After the role-play is finished, you could discuss the following:

- How did it feel to watch this role-play?
- As a member of the audience watching, would you have wanted to change what Character 2 was saying or doing? If so, at what point?
- What could Character 1 have done differently?
- How did it feel to play Character 1, 2, 3 or 4?
- Why was Character 1 treated this way?
- What could Characters 3 and 4 have done differently?
- Was anyone in the wrong or in the right?
- Did you sympathise or disagree with any of the characters?
- Did age play a part in these scenes?
- Would Character 2 have treated someone else in the same way as Character 1?
- Have you been in a similar situation?

Scene 1: Transport

Character 1: You are an older person waiting in a queue at a bus stop. You are not very steady on your feet and you are leaning on a walking stick.

Character 2: You are a bus driver. It is a busy time of day and there are a lot of people on the bus. You are running late to meet your schedule. You can see that several people are waiting at the next stop, including an older person.

Character 3: You are queuing at the bus stop. An older person is in front of you. You are late for your evening shift at work and in a hurry to get there.

Character 4: You are sitting on the bus by the window. You are very tired because you've been at work all day. You are travelling back home.

The role-play

The bus driver pulls up at the bus stop. The bus driver is not happy about having to get down and help the older person onto the bus. The bus driver tells the older person that they should wait for the next bus so as not to cause a delay. The people on the bus begin to complain about being held up.

Think about how each of the characters in the scene would react to this situation. Allow everyone a chance to play their part. Act out the scene for up to 10 minutes.

Discuss it with the audience, using the discussion points listed above.

You can play the scene again and explore different ways to play the parts.



Scene 2: Healthcare

Character 1: You are an older person in a queue at the hospital and you are next in line to be seen by the doctor. You have a lot of pain in your joints and find it hard to stand. You have travelled far to get to the hospital. Your son dropped you off. He cannot come and fetch you for another three hours.

Character 2: You are a doctor in a busy hospital. A few people are queuing to be seen by you. They include a baby and their parent, and an older person ahead of them in the queue, who has to lean on a chair because they are having trouble standing. You are short-staffed because one of the nurses on your ward is off sick.

Character 3: You are the parent of a baby who is sick. Your baby is crying and the waiting room is crowded. You can see that there is an older person in front of you in the queue.

Character 4: You are working in the hospital trying to organise the busy waiting room. You are taking people's names and asking them what they need to see the doctor about. You are tired. It is well past lunchtime and you have not had your lunch break yet.

The role-play

The older person has been waiting to see the doctor. It is now their turn. They tell the doctor about the pain in their joints but the doctor doesn't seem to be listening. The doctor tells them that there are many other people to be seen, and their symptoms seem to be due to their old age. The doctor suggests they go away and come back another time when it's less busy. The baby's parent is agitated because their baby is not being seen. What do you all do?

Think about each of the characters and how they would react to this situation. Allow everyone in the scene a chance to speak and play their part.

Act out the scene for 10 minutes and then discuss with the audience.

You can role-play the scene again and explore different ways you can play the parts.

Scene 3: Topic of your choice

For the final scene we encourage you to create your own role-play based on any experiences of ageism that you or your audience have faced. Has there been a time when you felt you were being treated unfairly because of your age? Here are some examples of ageism that might help you choose a topic:

- Being unable to apply for a job because it has an upper age limit
- Being told that you are too old to wear something, making you change your clothes
- Being patronised because of your age, for example, if someone expresses surprise that you can use a computer

- Being blamed for something because of your age, such as being told you are taking a job from a younger person
- Being told you are not allowed to be a leader or have an opinion because of your age
- Being told that if you have forgotten something, it must be because of your age

Find out more

For more ideas for raising awareness of ageism, look at our consciousness-raising guide at www.helpage.org/agedemandsaction

Or visit author Ashton Applewhite's website at <https://thischairrocks.com>



Age Demands Action is a grassroots movement of campaigners in 60 countries. Older people meet with decision-makers and lobby their local and national governments to push for changes that are most important to them, including pensions and healthcare systems.

www.helpage.org/agedemandsaction

HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives. www.helpage.org

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