

# COMMUNITY DIALOGUE GUIDE

## *Prompting Discussion about Age and Ageism*

*“Dialogue...is a conversation  
with a center, not sides.”*

—William Isaacs,  
Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together

### **What is dialogue?**

Unlike debate, dialogue requires that participants listen for meaning by suspending personal opinions. The dialogue process invites participants to grow in understanding and perhaps decide to act together with common goals.

### **Resource:**

- [How to Develop Discussion Materials for Public Dialogue](#) by Everyday democracy

### **Exploratory questions for planners:**

- What’s going on in our organization/community that a dialogue on ageism would address?
- If there were a dialogue on ageism what would be its goals?
- Who should be in the dialogue?
- What format should we use?

### **Possible formats (for larger groups consider having co-facilitators representing different ages):**

- A few small groups meeting once or twice.
- A large public meeting with panelists and Q&A.
- A series of small groups meeting.
- A year-long, community-wide dialogue composed of multiple large meetings throughout the year.

### **Possible participants:**

- Residents, clients, and their family members.
- Staff members and volunteers representing roles throughout the organization.
- Members of the greater community.
- Vendors
- Representatives from partnering organizations.

**Dialogue components (for groups of 15 or more people, consider breaking into small groups for at least part of the time):**

- Welcome
- Introductions—invite participants to introduce themselves (have everyone wear nametags).
- Purpose—describe your hope for the time.
- Establish ground rules.
- Prompt discussion through questions and summarizing periodically.
- Summarize the entire session before wrapping up.
- Evaluate—wrap up the time by asking participants what worked and what didn't work (you might also create a paper/electronic evaluation)

**Possible ground rules (invite the group to make changes and suggestions):**

- Be here now—set phones and electronic devices aside.
- Listen and ask questions—take a curious stance, speak from your own experience, and ask each other questions.
- Respect confidentiality—at the end of the conversation, take the learning with you, but leave names and specifics behind.
- Participate to the fullest of your ability—if you hear your voice a lot, pause and listen. If you haven't heard your voice, speak up. Listening really well is participating, but community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.

**Possible discussion questions (starting with consciousness raising and moving toward action):**

- When do you recall first noticing age differences?
- What beliefs about age/aging do you carry with you?
- Where do you notice ageism in your life?
- Where do you notice ageism in your work?
- What can we do to make progress in our organization/community?
- If we had an age-inclusive culture what kinds of things would we see in our organization/community? Hear in the community? Feel?
- What are some of the helping/hindering forces in our organization/community?
- What have you seen that gives you hope?
- What is each of us personally willing to do to make a difference?
- How can we connect with others who share our concerns?

**Resources:**

- [This Chair Rocks Consciousness Raising Toolkit](#)
- [HelpAge International Tackling Ageism through Consciousness Raising](#)