



Practical tips to respond to ageism

Some practical tips to respond to ageism

These are just a few ideas about how to respond to ageism when you encounter it in different settings. No doubt, you will have many more ideas.

Please let us know your thoughts and the different practical ways that work for you to respond to ageist stereotypes and behaviours at info@everyagecounts.org.au

In workplace situations

Consider starting an affinity group

- If you are affected by ageism at work (e.g. ignored for promotions, left out of new opportunities, managers assume you can't learn new technology) it can be hard to establish if you are really being discriminated against based on your age.
- If you work at a large workplace you could consider setting up an 'affinity group' of older staff, to share experiences, support and advice.

Escalate your complaint sequentially

- If you work for a large organisation it makes sense to escalate your complaint step-by-step. You might raise your concerns with your manager, and, if unsuccessful with the manager above that. If that's unsatisfactory you might want to raise the matter with HR and/or your union.

Understand your work's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

- If your work has a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, read it — and if age isn't a criterion for diversity suggest that it should be.

Beware the 'subtle' hints about retiring.

- If you're not ready to, or not thinking about retiring, let people know. There are many who assume that because you have reached a certain age, you will automatically be planning to retire. So take every opportunity to affirm your role, skills and contribution, and let people know that you have no such plans. And if you do start planning to reduce your hours or work more flexibly try to be the one in control of this conversation with your employer.

For serious cases, consider taking your complaint to an anti-discrimination body

- If you are unable to make progress on your concern, states and territories have anti-discrimination authorities that can be contacted via phone or email. You could also consider making an inquiry or complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission. These bodies will consider your case and discuss it with you. In certain instances, they may consider conciliating the complaint or escalating it through the legal system.

In retail situations

Ageism can be hard to 'prove', so write an email or letter about your perspective

- It can be hard to speak up in the moment, and if you do, it may just be denied by retail workers. If this is the case, consider reflecting on what happened when you get home and writing an honest email about your experience to the retailer. You may not be able to 'prove' it was ageism, but you can certainly relate your perspective and describe why you thought you were being treated in an ageist way. After all, customer service matters!

In healthcare situations

Don't be afraid to question advice or get a second opinion

- Ageism can lead to older people not being presented with the full range of healthcare options and treatments. So don't be afraid to question advice or get a second opinion. Rarely, will 'you're just getting old' or 'it's just a sign of ageing' be a satisfactory explanation!

Make it clear advice should be directed to you

- Make sure you communicate clearly to your healthcare provider that you are the subject, and that advice should be directed to you and not your support person (e.g. relative, spouse). It's your health, so it's your decision!

In seeking work situations

It's probably not you!

- If you are over 50 and finding it hard to land a job, know that it's probably not you! We know ageism is rife in the job market.

Ask recruiters to get specific

- It's rare for people to be explicitly told they are too old for a position. But older people are often told 'you might be overqualified,' 'you'll get bored,' or that 'we're looking for an up-and-comer'. If you encounter these kind of comments, politely ask your potential employer to be more specific. Ask specifically what qualities they are seeking in a candidate – e.g. willingness to learn, tech skills, energy – and describe how you think you measure up in those areas.

Consider a specialised recruitment agency

- Consider using recruitment agencies that are specifically for older candidates.

In interpersonal situations

Drop 'you'll be in my shoes one day'

- If you encounter someone being ageist to you, you might be tempted to try and generate empathy and understanding by saying something like 'one day you'll be in my shoes.' But studies have found this is generally an ineffective way to change behaviour because people find it very difficult to imagine themselves in the future. You are probably better off describing how ageism affects you personally...and ask them to stop.

Avoid conflict by offering honest perspectives about your experience

- Most of us like to avoid conflict and it can be difficult and unpleasant to 'call someone out' for ageist behaviour. If that's the case, consider instead framing the issue in terms of your own feelings and perspective e.g. 'When you suggested in the meeting that I wouldn't be able to understand this new software it really made me feel awful and I think you might have only

said it because of my age.' Or 'when you ignored me and served that other customer who came in after me you made me feel terrible, and I feel like that happened just because I look older.'

- Often people might suggest their ageism was 'just a joke'. Instead of getting sucked into a debate about what jokes are acceptable, explain how the joke made you feel personally (or how you think it makes other older people feel).

Arm yourself with facts

- Arm yourself with the facts about ageism and be prepared to have a clear conversation about why it's important to you. To find out more go to https://www.everyagecounts.org.au/the_real_old

Generally

Be age proud!

- Try to be age proud in whatever ways you are comfortable with. There's no reason to be coy about your age, for example, if you don't want to be!

Don't accept being told you're too old for something

- Reject notions that you are 'too old' for a piece of clothing, or a venue, or an experience. This could also relate to the things you are telling yourself!

Become an anti-ageism advocate

- Register for EveryAGE Counts training (at www.everyagecounts.org.au) and become a part of the EveryAGE Counts advocates network.

Your ideas/notes: