Aging and Elder Abuse Communications Guide

National Adult Protective Services Association
ANNUAL CONFERENCE SPEAKER TIPS

The NCEA and NAPSA know that ageism as well as fatalism regarding elder abuse solutions is pervasive in our society. The **Reframing Elder Abuse** project helped us understand that such negative perceptions create barriers to our elder justice advocacy efforts.

However, changing our communication with the lay public and our colleagues represents the first step toward eliminating these cultural barriers and effectively engaging audiences. This guide is designed to help avoid ageist perceptions and elder abuse fatalism. We provide tips to help the NAPSA constituency be more considerate of the language they use around aging and elder abuse during this year's National Association of Adult Protective Services [NAPSA] Annual Conference and throughout the year.

Illustrate the diversity of older adults through words and images.

Showing various individuals using assistive devices and those without visible physical disabilities empowers individuals by portraying the reality of the lived experience.

Avoid overemphasizing vulnerability regarding older adults.

Research shows people tend to think of older adults as inherently vulnerable even though this is not always accurate. This thinking activates paternalism which denies older adults' agency over their own lives and fuels fatalism toward solutions to elder abuse. Try removing the word "vulnerable" and instead describing the conditional factors behind elder abuse. Instead of using paternalistic or overwhelming photos, try using empowering photographs or graphic symbols to get your message across.

Avoid words or phrases that connote the institutionalization of older adults.

Words like "institution" or "facility" may "otherize" older populations and reinforce ideas of older adults as objects of care rather than participating members of our society. Instead of using "facility" or "institution", use "long-term care", "long-term care centers", "long-term care settings", "long-term care communities".

Explain systemic factors.

Focus the conversation on contributing factors impacting individual cases such as social isolation, insufficient training, research, and/or education.

Highlight multiple cross-disciplinary solutions to elder abuse.

When mentioning collective solutions to elder abuse, ensure you are explaining how they are going to prevent and address elder abuse. Example solutions may include education and training, research, person-centered care, forensic centers and/or multidisciplinary teams.

Use person-first language.

Person-first language can accurately describe someone's experiences while avoiding stigmatization and labels concerning older adults. Instead of using terms like "victim" or "disabled person". Use "person with disabilities" or "person experiencing abuse".

Avoid the phrase "aging issues."

This term describes aging as the issue itself when that is not true. Aging is not an issue; it is a natural state of life. Instead, describe what the real issue(s) are such as "elder abuse","lack of preparation for demographic shifts", "ageism", etc.

Use "we" language.

To avoid "otherizing" the experiences of aging and older adults, use inclusive language such as "as we age" or "what we need when we are older", instead of "they" or "them" language.

This guide is based on communications research on how the public thinks about aging and elder abuse conducted for the Reframing Elder Abuse project. Reframing Elder Abuse is a project to reframe the public's understanding of elder abuse. It is our hope that these resources strengthen all of our field's public communication skills by teaching us how to promote solutions and discuss the role of ageism, social isolation and other conditional factors in elder abuse more effectively.

For more information...

Reframing Elder Abuse: **bit.ly/ReframeEA**

Reframing Aging Project: **reframingaging.org**

Anti-Ageism Quickguide: **bit.ly/AntiAgeism**

NCEA
National Center on Elder Abuse

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