



LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION QUICK GUIDE

Just as intergenerational friendships are an intervention to reduce ageism, so are the ways we talk about aging and older people. By reframing our ideas and speech about aging, it's possible to replace unproductive thinking, tell a more complete story of aging, and create a culture shift!

Try to use reference terms carefully:

Words like, “**senior**,” “**senior citizen**,” and “**elder**” are associated with long-held stereotypes and less perceived competency



Instead, the terms “**older adult**” and “**older people**” are associated with the most perceived competency, with “**older people**” implying a higher perceived median age in the mid-60s

Example: “LBFE serves Chicago **seniors** who are aging alone,” could become “LBFE serves **Chicagoans 70 and older** who are aging alone.”

Try to avoid othering: Identifying those who are older as “**other**” (separate or different) by using “**them**” or “**they**”



Instead, use “**we**” and “**us**” to focus on aging as a shared experience because the recognition that we’re all aging triggers more inclusive thinking

Example: “Older adults need different housing and transportation options as they age,” could become “As **we** age, **we** all may need different options for housing and transportation.”

Try to avoid using catastrophic metaphors: When talking about the growing population of older people, terminology like “**tidal wave**” or “**tsunami**” is fatalistic



Instead, it’s possible to **talk affirmatively** about changing demographics

Example: “As Americans live longer, and often healthier, lives...”

Try to avoid focusing on individual determinants of aging outcomes: Focusing on the individual by using words like, “**choice**,” “**planning**,” or “**control**” can make it seem like only our personal choices as we age affect the quality of our older adulthood, making it challenging to understand broader context and potential lack of support



Instead, **emphasize improving social contexts**

Example: “Let’s find **creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive** as we age.”

Try to define ageism when addressing the issue: Naming and defining ageism is a powerful way to remind others why it matters and how commonplace, and unchecked, it can be



Example: “Ageism is discrimination against people based on age due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes.”

Try to avoid using conflict-oriented words: When speaking about aging, words like, “**struggle**,” “**battle**,” or “**fight**” are associated with strife



Instead: Use language that helps to emphasize the **Building Momentum metaphor** — a metaphor for **people’s continuous growth** over the life course and older adults’ contributions

Example: “**Aging is a dynamic process** that leads to abilities and knowledge that we can share with our communities.”