

Age and Assumptions:

An Exercise for Domestic Violence Advocates

Highlighting how Ageist Assumptions Impact on Our Work

Purpose	This activity will enhance DV advocates ability to recognize ageist bias and its impact on our work with older survivors of abuse.
Time Needed	Approximately 20 minutes – depending on the size of the group and the length of the debrief discussion.
Target Audience	Domestic violence advocates.
Audience Size	More than 10 participants. No maximum size if facilitators use a microphone.
Pre-Training Preparation	Make five copies of the script; one for each speaking part and one for the facilitator. The older survivor does not need a script.
Equipment Needed	One chair; one or two microphones; five scripts.
Room Arrangement	Place chair in the front of the room. Have one or two microphones and the four scripts easily accessible. Participants can be seated in any format.
Slides	Slides of the directions and key messages can be found at www.ncall.us .
Variations	None.

Overview of the Exercise

This purpose of the scripted role play is to enhance DV advocates' ability to recognize ageist bias and its impact on our work with older survivors of abuse. The role play requires one older survivor who will sit on a chair without speaking and four other participants with speaking parts who represent staff positions at a domestic violence emergency shelter. In the first segment, the four staff people will be standing to the side having a discussion among themselves about Mabel, a 72-year old woman who came to the shelter the night before. In the second segment, the four staff members will go over and stand around the victim and make their statements directly to her.

Prior to Running the Exercise

Place one chair in the front of the room. Be sure to have four copies of the script for the volunteers with speaking parts. The volunteers only need the script, not the discussion questions. As the facilitator, you will need a copy of the script and the discussion questions. You can choose whether or not to use PowerPoint slides to set up the exercise.

Recruiting Participants and Giving Them Their Roles

Ask for five volunteers. Once you have five volunteers, ask one participant to sit in the chair. Ask the other four volunteers to stand in a half circle away from the volunteer in the chair. Be sure the audience can see each participant.

Take a moment to quietly give instructions to the four standing volunteers to set the stage for the activity. Assign each of the four standing volunteers a staff number and give them each a script.

Explain to the volunteers that this scenario involves a 72-year-old woman who has come to an emergency domestic violence shelter. The scene will start with the four staff members talking among themselves, and that next they will go over and talk directly to the older woman (volunteer sitting in chair). Request that the volunteers read their statements using the microphone and invite them to feel free to add some flair to their performance.

Setting Up the Exercise for the Audience

The facilitator will read the scenario of the 72-year old victim to the entire audience.

Facilitating the Exercise

Invite the volunteers to begin by reading their statements using a microphone, first #1, then #2, then #3, and then #4.

Once all statements in first section have been read, the four participants will move and stand in a half circle behind the woman in the chair so the audience can see everyone. Once in place, they will read the statements in the second segment.

Closing the Exercise and Leading a Debrief Discussion

Once all statements have been read, thank all the participants for helping and have them return to their seats. Invite the audience to clap for the participants. Begin large group discussion. Possible discussion questions can be found at the end of the script.

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Script

Facilitator to the audience: This scenario involves a 72-year-old woman who has come to an emergency domestic violence shelter. The scene will start with four staff members talking among themselves and then they will go over and talk to the older woman. While this scene takes place in a domestic violence program, these comments could be made in any agency.

Staff 1: (To the other advocates) We received a phone call from Mabel last night, a 72-year-old woman who is being abused and feeling threatened by her grandson. She was encouraged by her adult son to call us. Her son drove her to the shelter last night. Mabel has bruises on her neck from her adult grandson grabbing her during a fight. Mabel's grandson lives in her home with her.

Staff 2: She was abused by her grandson...she doesn't fit the definition of domestic abuse. You should call elder abuse services.

Staff 3: I talked with her last night. She seemed very confused and she just kept crying. Are you sure she doesn't have Alzheimer's disease?

Staff 4: Wow...72. She doesn't look that old.

Staff 2: She's probably not going to want to stay here.

Staff 3: We don't have anyone to provide care for her. Did you see all the medications she takes?

Staff 4: She is probably very wise.

Staff 2: I am sure she is set in her ways. She will never make any changes. She will just keep letting her grandson live with her.

Staff 3: I bet she is going to want to talk and talk. How are we ever going to find the time for her?

Staff 4: This will be great; she can help us take care of the kids. It would be nice for them to have a grandma.

Note to Facilitator: Invite the volunteers representing staff to move over to the older woman and stand around her in a half-circle. Be sure audience can still see and hear.

Staff 1: (Speak in a loud voice) “How are you today young lady? (Using baby talk say to victim) Did you eat your breakfast?”

Staff 2: There are not many services for someone your age.

Staff 3: To save some time, we have worked out this service plan for you.

Staff 4: “Wow...you don’t look 72. You look great for your age.”

Staff 1: I have called APS...they’re the ones who can help you.

Staff 2: I bet we can find a nice nursing home where others will take care of you. Wouldn’t you like that?

Staff 3: We have to hurry along now honey, or we’ll be late for our next appointment.

Staff 4: You are so cute! (Using a baby voice)

Facilitator: Thank you for your help with this exercise. (Start the applause for the volunteers.) Go ahead and take your seats so we can all discuss what this was like for each of us.

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Potential Discussion Questions/Talking Points

Note to Facilitator: Start this part of the discussion by asking the volunteer what it was like to play the part of an older victim. Give the volunteer time to respond and then continue the discussion.

- **How many of us have heard or said similar comments about older adults?**

Elicit: Most of us have made the same or similar comments about older individuals.

- **What kind of comments did you hear that may be meant as a compliment?**

Elicit: Statements like “she doesn’t look that old” or “you don’t look 72” may be meant as a compliment but are still ageist and may offend some older individuals.

- **What assumptions were made that would not have been made about a younger victim with similar circumstances?**

Elicit: The staff person wondered if the victim had dementia because she came into shelter feeling confused and crying. This would have been viewed as a normal trauma reaction in a younger victim. Raising awareness about ageism in our society will directly benefit the older victims seeking services through our agency.

Consider closing the discussion by pointing out that the subtle and not so subtle ageist views we heard in this exercise are perpetuated by the media, greeting card industry, cosmetic and fashion industries etc. Our job is to learn about factors that might be unique for older victims as a result of the aging process and to treat all survivors with respect and dignity.