

Aging and Ageism

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is going to cover the later years of life. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Aging
2. Reactions to Death
3. Ageism

1. Aging

Aging generally refers to the later years of life, approximately age 65 years old until a person's death. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development states that this is a period of time for reflection on a person's life. It is the time when they look back at the accomplishments that they've made over their entire lifespan. It's important to note, however, that this isn't solely a time to look back at the rest of their life and to not *do* anything.

Many people are still very active during this period of time in making significant contributions to the world around them. This is a time of change and personal growth in people's lives as well. It's a time when people realize the onset of death and try to accomplish more with the time that they have remaining.

There are several physical and psychological effects of aging. Physically, a person during this time might be losing muscle mass. Muscles tend to begin degenerating slowly, and certain abilities might be becoming a little bit more difficult for them to perform.

There is some mental or brain degeneration that occurs at this time as well. People start to have lower speeds of processing of information, especially in their working memories. They also experience a loss of long-term memory. Diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, can speed this process up.

It's important for a person to stay active and healthy during this period, especially to stay mentally sharp. This means staying physically active by going to a gym or working out. This can offset some of that loss of muscle mass and ability. It is also important to stay mentally active by engaging in intellectually stimulating activity. This can mean engaging in social activities or doing puzzles to keep the brain active.



TERM TO KNOW

Aging

Growing older, especially ages 65 until death

2. Reactions to Death

Because later adulthood is approaching the period where most people pass on, it is important to know what reactions people have to death during this time. Kubler-Ross, who is a thanatologist, noted that there are five different categories of reactions to death. These are not stages that everybody goes through. Not everybody will have all the same reactions to death, and a person's reaction to death will generally mirror the way that they live.

The five reactions are:

- *Denial and Isolation.* A person may think that the information is a mistake or try to deny or ignore information about death.
- *Anger.* A person may become angry at themselves or at death in general. This can also extend towards people that are living.
- *Bargaining.* A person starts to make deals with themselves, with God, or a higher power of some sort. They may say that they'll right past wrongs, live a better life, or dedicate themselves to doing some specific kind of task in exchange for survival.
- *Depression.* People start to realize the onset of death and feel the futility of it or the exhaustion that's involved with this. In addition, they generally feel an overall sadness for the onset of death.
- *Acceptance.* This is when a person comes to terms with their imminent death. They feel peaceful, or they feel a sense of resolution with their lives.

3. Ageism

The concept of **ageism** goes hand in hand with aging. This is a discrimination towards a person based on their age. This can manifest in ways like thinking that someone is too old or feeble, making them infirm. Patronizing language like talking too loudly and slowly to an older person can be a form of ageism. Changing behavior in some significant way because of a person's age, like being overly polite, can also be ageism.

It is important to note that older people lose certain types of mental and physical abilities. They're not necessarily as quick or changeable or flexible as they were before. However, this is often made up for with learned or routinized knowledge and skills. In other words, it offsets some of the effects of aging.

It is also important to know that ageism is culturally relative. In some cultures, age is seen as a sign of wisdom and elicits respect.

➦ **EXAMPLE** In Asian cultures, the elderly are assigned an elevated position in society.



TERM TO KNOW

Ageism

Discrimination or prejudice based on a person's age



SUMMARY

Aging refers to the later years of life. According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, this is a time for reflection on the life a person has lived. However, there is still a lot that a person in this stage of life has to contribute. Due to some degradation of muscle and cognitive abilities, it is important for an aging person to stay mentally and physically active.

People in this stage of life are also approaching death. There are five **reactions to death** a person may have. These include denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. **Ageism** is discrimination of a person based on their age and is culturally relative.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia Author Erick Taggart.



TERMS TO KNOW

Ageism

Discrimination or prejudice based on a person's age.

Aging

Growing older, especially ages 65 until death.