

The Aging Population

Older Adults: Perspectives

Dr. Amy D'Aprix:

So when we think about, you know, how do we not be accidentally ageist, I think that's the thing we all want to do. So if we want to take this message and think, "How do I take this to my day to day life?" I think some of the things we can do are not have assumptions that everybody who is older has a hearing loss; that everyone who is older is - has some cognitive deficit; and if we see someone who has, for example, a vision loss or a hearing loss that we don't then also layer onto that that they have lots of other losses. So my mother had a massive stroke, and she had it fairly young; she was only 69. And my mom lost the ability to speak in that stroke; she lost some of her cognitive ability; and she was in a wheelchair. And I used to watch healthcare workers interact with my mother, and they would get very close to her - my mother's name was Alice - and they'd say, "HI ALICE - HOW ARE YOU TODAY?" in this booming voice. And my mother would sort of back up because my mother had no hearing loss, and I would say, "You know, my mom can understand everything you're saying. You can just chat with her like you'd chat with me", and I'd joke cause my mom did lose speech, and I'd say, "You know, Mom, I know you can't answer as well as you used to, but that's okay. You talked plenty in your first 69 years" and my mom would laugh, and you know, and then I'd watch the faces of the healthcare worker, and they'd go, oh, and then they'd totally shift and talk to my mother like an adult.

And here's what I'd watch would happen: when they did that my mother sat up a little bit more, and she rose to the occasion because she was treated with that dignity and respect. So when we're out in the world, I'd say, you know, if you see an older person, yes, we do have sensory changes that occur, so there are hearing and vision loss - that doesn't make a person lose their cognitive ability. So adapt, and I always say to people on the hearing loss side, we should really go through the world as if everybody has a hearing loss, because you don't need to shout; you simply need to slow down; make eye contact; lower your voice into the range where people can hear if they've lost the upper ranges, so use the lower, deeper voice; and make sure that you're facing someone so that they can lip read - really we can do that for everybody. So if we check our behaviour around - if we see somebody moving slowly, not assume that they've lost cognitive ability. And

they may have, and then we have to adjust and still treat them with dignity and respect, and talk to them like you'd talk to anyone else. So you don't have to change your voice; calm down, slow down, make the world a safe place for them because being startled can be very difficult. But the assumption that people have these things we have to check, and then we have to learn the skills to deal with if someone does have these losses. And those are important skills that I think everyone needs. If you work in a fast food restaurant you need to know how to deal with older adults who have some deficits.