

RESOURCE GUIDE

A YODA Primer: Tips from Youngers for Collaborating with Youngers

We know effective social movements catalyze culture change. We know they bring grassroots participants and influential stakeholders together. We know youngers tend to be more visible and have more cultural clout, while elders generally have more wealth and access to leadership roles. Talk about synergy! Yet because ageism segregates us and fuels generational stereotypes and resentment, mixed-age advocacy is rare.

How can we change that? By bringing elders and youngers together to talk about power. We've named these conversations **YODA**, for **Y**oungers + **O**lders **D**ismantling **A**geism. They mean talking about when age is an advantage (or the opposite), how age sustains hierarchies, and how to share power across age gaps in order to make change together.

These conversations are complicated! It takes skill and preparation to foster mutual respect, avoid accidentally causing harm, and make sure everyone is heard. This guide contains the hard-won wisdom of two younger leaders who've been combating ageism since their teens. They offer pro strategies, common pitfalls, and ways to begin partnering with younger advocates in purposeful, respectful, and genuinely inclusive ways.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Download this handout and find links to further reading at ctagewellcollaborative.org/yoda



Strategies for Sharing Power

Practice co-leadership

A true partnership is a relationship between peers. Younger collaborators (including minors) need to be represented equally everywhere: on planning committees, in decision-making, when it comes to speaking time, facilitation roles, etc.

Check your age assumptions

Who do you think would lead a collaboration? Do you think elders understand what young people are going through? Each person's experience of moving through life is unique. Elders know what it was like to be young, but not what it's like to be young *now*. Being open to learning from younger people is an advantage lifelong. No one knows everything!

Build trust and connection

There's a saying that social change builds at the speed of trust. Dedicate uninterrupted time to get to know the youngers you'll be partnering with. Ideally all participants alternate asking and responding to questions. Ask meaningful questions, and make sure you're willing to answer them too. Model vulnerability.

Balance representation

Notice the ages of people in your partnership. Too many representatives of one age group can affect group dynamics. Aim for at least two young people. Pay attention to other aspects of identity as well, such as race, class, gender, and ability. Each has its own dynamics that will intersect with age.

Name the power dynamics

Name it to tame it! Take time for everyone to share where they feel they have power, where they'd like to have more, and how they hope their partners might share it. (See Age and Power sidebar.)

Use those power dynamics

Once the group has gotten comfortable discussing social power and figured out where it resides, strategize! Decide together how to divide and assign tasks to achieve desired outcomes. Who should do the welcome? Make that social media post? Go on that radio show? Ask for more funding? This is how individual "power plays" become collective.

Ensure mutual benefit

Sharing power across age gaps needs to be mutually rewarding. It requires youngers and elders alike to be both teachers and learners, to give and receive, to challenge their peers and to respect them.

Consider legal and logistical constraints

Youngers experience ageism differently and encounter barriers that elders may have lost sight of. There are minimum age restrictions to work (14), drive (16), have a bank account (typically 18), vote (18), and rent a car (25). Because youth autonomy is so restricted, plan to accommodate schedules (school, work, extracurriculars), navigate legal barriers, (permission slips, chaperones), and provide financial support (stipends, reimbursements, etc.).

Pay attention to language

Young allies need to see themselves in anti-ageist framing. Be mindful of older-centric language. ("Ageism increases as you age." Not if you're 14!) Look out for unnecessary age qualifiers like "youth Interns," and for double standards that apply only to youngers. If it sounds ageist when you flip it—"Everyone over 60 will need a permission slip," for example—it's probably ageist.

Sharing power takes practice. If you think you've got this skill covered, you've got more work to do. Even seasoned practitioners can struggle with these very real and normal emotions:

- **Discomfort:** *This feels hard. I don't know what I'm doing.*
- **Insecurity:** *Am I doing this right? Am I overstepping?*
- **Aggravation:** *This isn't how I would have done it. My way would've worked better.*
- **Distrust:** *Why don't they trust my judgement? Will they come through?*
- **Impatience:** *It would be faster to do it my way. Why are they taking so long?*
- **Uncertainty:** *Is this going to work? Was this a good idea?*

Sharing power can also make people feel great:

- **Pride:** *Look what we've accomplished!*
- **Connection:** *I feel close to my collaborators.*
- **Relief:** *I'm not responsible for everything.*
- **Unity:** *I'm not in this alone.*

AGE & POWER

Social power is the ability to influence or control beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. It shapes what we talk about and who does the talking.

Like all prejudice, ageism pits people against each other who might otherwise join forces. It's understandable for youngers to resent being patronized and encountering barriers to self-determination. It's understandable for elders to resent being dismissed as incompetent, irrelevant, invisible. To partner effectively, all participants must be willing to reflect upon, acknowledge, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being a given age.

**As a younger/older person,
my age gives me the power
to _____
where other ages cannot.**

About the Presenters

RECOMMENDED READING

"Let's Come Together for YODA"

Ashton Applewhite

Why Aren't We Doing This! Collaborating with Minors in Major Ways

Wendy Schaetzel Lesko
and Denise Webb

A Kids Book About Ageism

The Connecticut Age Well
Collaborative

A Kids Book About Ageism Conversation Guide

The Connecticut Age Well
Collaborative

Old School Hub for Age Equity and Ageism Awareness

Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power and Privilege

Unlocking the Magic of Facilitation: 11 Key Concepts You Didn't Know You Didn't Know

Meg Bolger and Sam Killerman

Find links to these readings at
ctagewellcollaborative.org/yoda



Ashton Applewhite

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Ashton Applewhite is the author of *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism* and a co-founder of the Old School Hub. She speaks widely at venues that have included the United Nations and the TED mainstage, and is at the forefront of the emerging movement to raise awareness of ageism and make age a criterion for diversity.



Christina Gray

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Christina Gray began protesting at age 8, which blossomed into a career working for local, state, and national change. Specializing in movement-building strategy, identity awareness, intergroup dialogue, and leadership development, she now leads ageism and ableism disrupting initiatives as the Associate Director of the Connecticut Age Well Collaborative, including their Daring Dialogues, Community Leaders Fellowship, and *A Kids Book About Ageism*.



Denise Webb

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Denise Webb, a junior Biology and Conservation major at Berry College, is a passionate advocate for equity and justice. Since age 14, she's been active in policy and social change, currently serving as Senior Youth Staff at the Partnership for Southern Equity. Her work spans health, racial equity, climate, and legislative reform. A dynamic public speaker, Bonner Scholar, and Senior Fellow for CoGenerate, Denise champions youth inclusion in adult spaces through public speaking, blogging, and community action.