



Intergenerational Playgroups and Projects

Developing Intergenerational Relationships

"Be happy in the moment, that's enough. Each moment is all we need, not more." - Mother Teresa

Talk about it.

How to discuss aging and encourage thoughtful conversation between the elderly and your children.

Background: In our society, there are many negative stereotypes about aging and the elderly, believing these individuals to lack competence. Through our playgroups we can demonstrate to our children that our "old friends" are just like us and have the ability to make change and do good in our community. For our children, at this age they look forward to the activities during the playgroup. Playing with the parachute, reading a book or signing the hello song are all important to them. What they don't know at this young age is that through these activities, their worlds are becoming larger, as they learn patience and respect for their elders. They learn that wrinkles aren't scary and that they can talk to and enjoy time with people that look different than they do. They learn that age is not a factor when it comes to joy and although in their egocentric years their plan is to play, play, play, it's the life lessons they learn and come to realize as they grow older that really take precedence here! For many of the residents in our playgroups, the joy they feel comes from simply watching our children. Whether the children are painting, reading or enjoying free play, the residents often comment on the smiles they see, the little clothes they wear or their awe in watching them learn.

Things to consider: *Consider the following, to facilitate a comfortable and respectful conversation.*

- Some residents do not have the ability to comprehend a conversation due to cognitive capacity such as *dementia*.
- Introduce yourself and your child at the beginning of each playgroup.
- Avoid questions that make the resident use too much brain power. (ex. "Do you remember my name?," "Do you remember my child from last month?").
- Do make statements, (ex. "It's nice to see you today, Don," "You sure look ready to play today, Don," "We are happy you have joined our group today, Don").
- Position yourself to the level of the resident by bending over or kneeling on a knee.

- Non-verbal communication such as a warm smile, a light touch and eye-to-eye contact is important to facilitate a comfortable conversation.
- Use a clear and normal tone of voice when speaking. If you discover the resident is hard of hearing, raise your volume at that point.
- It's okay to just let the residents sit quietly and watch the children!
- It's okay to let your child dictate what they want to do! Let them roam around, the residents experience joy by just watching them do their thing.

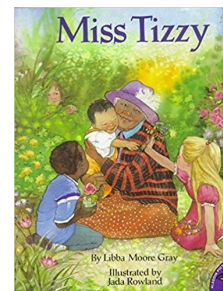
Conversation Starters:

- Interest or knowledge about the theme of the month (ex. Valentine's Day, Father's Day)
- Interests or hobbies
- Current weather
- Memories (ex. "Don, did you ever play with play doh or paint when you were a child?")

Read about it.

Thoughtful, well-written books on the topic of age or growing old may help your children. You may be able to find these at your local library.

- *Effie's Image* by N.L Sharp
- *Miss Tizzy* by Libby Moore Gray
- *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox



Do something about it.

- Be a model for your child by approaching a resident to engage in thoughtful conversation.
- Offer a helping hand during craft time to engage the resident with your child.
- Support your child's learning experience by encouraging free play with a resident.
- Sit beside a resident during story time.
- Show your children you can be friends with the elderly outside of playgroup! Talk to the elderly out in the community (ex. grocery store, post office).

Keep the conversation going – questions to ask.

- How did you feel when you were playing with our "old friends"?
- Do you think it is important to visit older people? Why?
- Where else in the community can we meet "old friends"?
- Do our old friends at our playgroup remind you of anyone you know?
Great grandma and grandpa?
- How would you feel if you had to use a walker or cane?

- Sometimes our older friends can feel lonely. Have you ever felt lonely?