

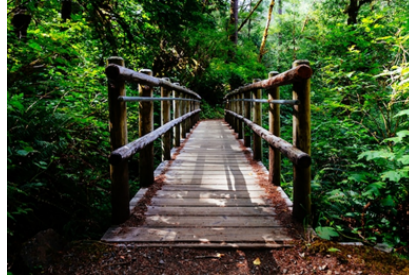
BRINGING GENERATIONS TOGETHER

By

ALEXIS BENTZ AND SUE JEWELER



Introduction: Bridging the Gap



Alexis: Ever since I was born, I have lived a mere two minutes away from my maternal grandparents. Consequently, they have played a major role in my life. Sprinkled throughout my youth are memories of swaying to my grandfather’s favorite Judy Garland record, listening wide-eyed to my grandmother’s childhood stories, and going on outings to the theater with my grandparents by my side. My grandparents were beacons of knowledge, wisdom, advice, and love. Yet, much to my surprise, my friends did not hold such high opinions of their grandparents or older adults in general. They described senior citizens as out of touch, boring, slow, and grumpy. They refused to interact with popular culture from before they were born. And they used expressions like “Okay, boomer” to indicate a blanket dismissal of older generations. As my connection with my grandparents grew, so did my dismay at my peers’ lack of regard for their elders...and so did my desire to change that.

As a twelve-year-old, I wrote to the editor of *The Beacon*, a newspaper targeted toward older adults and circulated around the DC-metro area, explaining my desire to bridge the generational gap. The publication’s incredible editor, Stuart Rosenthal, decided to take a chance on a young girl with a vision. He hired me as a monthly columnist and, from age twelve to 18, I penned articles proposing bonding opportunities for teenagers and senior citizens.

To reach those my own age, I started a club called Generations Together at my middle and high school. Members frequented a local retirement community and, over art projects, games, and baking, forged meaningful connections with its residents. From learning about popular culture as a resident described a favorite film from the 1940’s to gaining insight into the meaning of sacrifice while another resident described life during the Great Depression, I became more aware than ever that teens had much to learn from older adults. And as residents offered thank you’s for exposing them to contemporary culture and offering fresh perspectives, I became more aware than ever that older adults had much to learn from teens.

One of the best parts of bonding with someone from the “opposite generation” is that you can challenge and expand each other's points of view. For example, conversing with my grandmother who lived through Cold War air drills and the Civil Rights movement adds depth and historical perspective to my understanding of current events like active shooter drills and the Black Lives Matter movement. Since my grandma, as she likes to say, “has gray hairs,” she also gives the best advice, informed by her own personal experience. Meanwhile, I may introduce my

grandma to unfamiliar ideas discussed in my Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies coursework or expand her interests by sharing a favorite recent book or film.

It is my hope that other teens and seniors may benefit from an intergenerational bond, equipped with the open-mindedness and creativity that this book aims to inspire.

Sue: *The Psychology Dictionary* states that “modelling occurs when a behavior is deliberately displayed by a role model to a learner or observer who then may learn that behavior and carry it on.” This book “models” for the reader how the collaboration of two generations can result in the creation of a meaningful project. As a teacher, mother, and grandmother, I have always been conscious of the importance of modeling behavior for youngsters. Since Alexis was a little girl, we have brainstormed project ideas together. Once she decided what she wished to pursue, we began the process of building a framework for the completion of each project from its beginning to the final product.

The purpose of *Bringing Generations Together* is to create an awareness of the benefits of intergenerational relationships. This book will provide research that illustrates the value of making connections between young people and older adults and offer a variety of activities that can be used to ignite exciting, meaningful relationships between the generations. We believe that this book will inspire others to embark on this adventure together – just as we have!

Generations Together: Research



Historically, multiple generations lived together. Today, due to the changes in the way we work and live, we have become segregated. Grandparents, parents, and children are no longer under one roof. This separation has been linked to a decline in life satisfaction among the older generation. Chronic social isolation among senior citizens has been found to contribute to increased hospital and doctor costs (“Social Isolation”). Segregation of the generations has widened the “generation gap” which has been compounded by our society’s marginalization of older adults (“Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”).

In this environment, stereotypes and biases about the “other” generation have grown. Young people have misconceptions about aging and the capabilities of older adults. Some fear seniors who have disabilities and may refrain from opening up to older folks because they fear

criticism (“10 Benefits of Connecting Youth and Seniors”). At the same time, seniors fear being judged by youngsters and feel unappreciated (“Anxiety and Older Adults”).

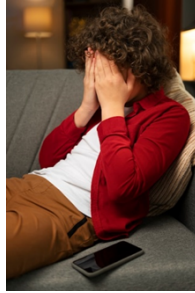
Research shows, however, that establishing links between older adults and young people provides advantages for both groups. According to Erik Erikson (“The Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships”), these relationships not only enable each generation to learn new skills, but also create a sense of purpose, invigorate and energize seniors, reduce depression and feelings of isolation, keep family history and stories alive, aid in cognitive stimulation, and broaden social circles (“Engage at Every Age”). Intergenerational bonding fosters emotional connections and, according to research from Washington University in St. Louis and the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, when older adults interact with youngsters, their physical and mental health are positively impacted (“Researchers Find Sustained Improvement in Health”). One research study compared young people with an older mentor with youngsters who did not have one. The results of that study showed that there was a 46% difference in drug use, a 50% difference in school truancy, and a 33% difference in violent behavior (“What Happens When Old and Young Connect”) between the two groups. The conclusion of the research team was: “Relationships with adults matter in young people’s lives.” (“The Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships”)

Topics and Suggested Activities

This section includes Alexis’ “Generations Together” columns published in *The Beacon Newspapers*. They propose specific topics that the generations can explore when they interact. In each, there are suggestions of activities for youngsters and seniors to do related to each topic. These columns will enable pre-teens, teens, and older adults to recognize shared experiences and find meaningful ways to connect. Although they were printed in *The Beacon*, a newspaper targeted toward older adults living in the DC-metro area, youngsters and those living all around the United States and beyond can also find valuable takeaways from the following pieces.

We have chosen to include the columns written by Alexis from the time she was twelve years old until she was 18 to allow her “voice” to come through in her writing. Only minor edits have been made to the columns in an attempt to preserve the original writing as much as possible. We want to make clear that these ideas came from Alexis as a child and teenager, not as an adult, conveying that kids have the power to unite the generations!

LACK OF CONTROL: WHAT OLD AND YOUNG SHARE



The generations have nothing in common. Or, at least, that's what some people think. The truth is that the generations have more in common than meets the eye. Sure, they may have different interests and goals in life, and their experiences are also unique, but there are still several things that older and younger age groups share.

"Please! Pretty, pretty please! Please with a cherry on top!" These words are all too familiar because we have all said them. At one point or another, we have all desired something enough that we have used the "beg and plead strategy." But even with our best puppy dog eyes and quivering lips, there are times when the answer is just plain "no." This is when you just aren't allowed to do something or decide things for yourself no matter how much you plead. Others make decisions for you. This lack of control is an issue that affects both generations.

Think about it: Kids don't have many privileges. They can't drive, go places by themselves, stay at home alone, own certain things, or handle specific content until they mature. For seniors, as their age increases, they often lose many of their privileges. They may no longer be able to drive or get around by themselves. They also may not be able to work or do certain things because of their age, just like kids. However, even though this huge and frequently occurring issue creeps its way into both kids' and seniors' lives, they still fail to recognize that it is just one of the many things that they, as generations, have in common.

Now that this shared experience has been recognized, it is time to act on it. A great way to do so is to set up a time to chat with a younger buddy (a relative, kid from a local school, a neighbor etc.), or have a multi-generational discussion group.

During your discussion, you can talk about the lack of control you each feel, and then brainstorm ideas on how to positively react in these frustrating situations. Maybe you could try some calming techniques such as counting to ten or taking deep breaths, recognize that the person who is telling you "no" is only doing so for your safety or well-being, and then do something that you enjoy that you are allowed to do to make you feel better. This is a great way to both solve a bothersome problem, and to bond with your younger pal. Just keep in mind that when people say things like, "This isn't fair! You just don't understand," the opposite generation just might.

TECHNOLOGY TAKES TOLL ON YOUNG AND OLD



When you hear the word technology, what do you think of? Probably not the same thing as someone my age thinks. The fact is that the generations may look at technology in very different ways. Many kids think that technology is "cool" because not only does it make them more popular, it allows them to access games, contact others, and express themselves all in the form of a tiny, electronic rectangle. At the same time, there are plenty of kids with no access to technology whatsoever or who find it unnecessary. Meanwhile, some senior citizens don't own, approve of or even understand anything technology-related, while other seniors own a laptop and smartphone and iPad. The point is that people of every age have an opinion on technology whether it is good, bad, ugly, or addictive, and, no matter what that opinion is, technology takes a toll on everyone in some way.

Many kids spend a lot of time on smartphones and computers. I am no exception...I wrote this column on my very own laptop while listening to music on my phone! Technology allows you to contact others in emergencies, get your work done anywhere you want, and allows you to have some fun! Meanwhile, many people feel that although smartphones and computers are beneficial, it means that, no matter where they are, their work and contacts follow them. Not only that, but it can also be dangerous! Texting while driving can lead to serious accidents. Technology can affect relationships too. When my family dines out, I hate seeing other families sitting around the table together spending time on a mobile device when they should really be spending time with each other.

There is also "good progress" vs. "bad progress" to think of. Some believe that technology is great because we are moving forward and getting bigger and better each time. Others argue that all of the production and use of technology has a negative impact on the Earth. It is good to remember that no matter what you believe, you should always be a responsible citizen and turn off your technology when it isn't in use.

Now, a great thing to do would be to host a discussion group at a nearby school or local library and see what different generations think on the subject! You can share your opinion as well. This would be a great way to get to know the kids and learn about their points of view. As you can see, although "technology" is a simple word, it isn't at all simple!

A PEN PAL CAN BRING A LIFETIME OF BENEFITS



Time travel back to 1948. Where were you in that year? My grandfather was six years old and in the first grade at the time. You might be wondering, what is so special about 1948? 1948 just so happened to be the year that my grandfather's teacher assigned him a pen pal – a person that he could keep in touch with, even though they lived thousands of miles apart. Literally! A town called Taunton in the British Isles was where my grandpa's pen pal, Cynthia, made her home, while my grandpa made his in Maryland. And yet, despite the great difference in their daily lives (not to mention the distance), they kept in touch, writing back and forth repeatedly.

Now, step out of your time machine and return to the now. My grandfather isn't in first grade anymore, of course, but he still keeps in touch with his old pen pal...that's 66 years of writing letters to a girl he was assigned to write to all the way back in the first grade! 66 years! They even grew so close that my grandpa, his wife (my grandmother), and their daughter (my mom) went to England to meet her and her family years later – all because of a single assignment from ages ago.

“It was very exciting after all of these years of writing to actually meet Cynthia and her parents for the first time in 1963,” said my grandpa. “I remember that her parents had never seen a movie camera! The second time I visited her in 1981, I took my wife and daughter to their dairy farm. My fondest memory of that visit was watching my daughter in hip boots traipsing through the muck.” My grandmother recalls, “One of my favorite things was that Cynthia spent all day preparing a typical English dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Both families sat around the table and had a great conversation.”

This is only one example of the kind of friendship that can be formed by simply printing, “Dear Pen Pal,” on a sheet of paper, and that is exactly why you should do it with a buddy from the opposite generation! Your pal can be a grandchild, student from a local school, or even a neighbor! Having this relationship is the perfect opportunity to get to know your new younger pal, even if you happen to live right next to them.

Thanks to new technology, you can also form a relationship through the Internet and have an email pal if this is more convenient. Don't know how to email? Seniors can learn from others, from courses offered by organizations in the community, or from the public library. However, an even better idea is to use this dilemma to your advantage! This is a great chance for some bonding time with your younger buddy: have them teach you how to email! Maybe you will be able to keep in touch with your new buddy longer than my grandpa and break year 67!

TERMINAL ILLNESS TESTS US, YOUNG AND OLD



Are you or a loved one suffering from a terminal illness such as cancer? If you answered yes, you are not alone. After heart disease, cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States. One out of every four deaths is due to this illness.

Cancer and other terminal illnesses are often associated with the elderly; but it is important to remember that kids can get them too. I love to read, and one of the many books that I read last year was, *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. This book is about Hazel, a 16-year-old girl who has thyroid cancer that spread to her lungs. This story was a real eye-opener for me, showing me how much of an impact cancer has on people's lives. Hazel has to wheel an oxygen tank around with her wherever she goes; she can't go to school or do any extreme physical activity. Even walking up a flight of stairs can be too much for her. She also has to frequently go to the hospital when things get really bad. And the cancer doesn't just impact her; it also has effects on everyone in her life, mainly her parents. But what amazes me about cancer patients like Hazel (whose character was inspired by a real person) is not how little they can do, but how much they can do. Kids with cancer are strong. There is no denying it. In the story, despite her battle with cancer, Hazel is still a typical teenage girl in many ways. She loves her parents, though they drive her crazy; she loves going to the mall and hanging out with friends; and, most of all, she loves her boyfriend, Augustus, another cancer patient. She stays strong through thick and thin and never gives up.

I recommend reading this book. It is truly amazing to see inside the life of Hazel and to understand what life is like for young people with cancer. A great idea for some multi-generational bonding is to start a book club. Based on its content, *The Fault in Our Stars* is appropriate for kids twelve years and older (middle or high schoolers). You can ask your local librarian if you can have the book club at the library and invite kids of those ages to participate, or you could go to your local middle or high school and ask to sponsor a club there. Then, you can read *The Fault in Our Stars* together and discuss the effects of terminal illnesses on patients and their families.

INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION STARTERS



When you get together with a child, grandchild, or younger neighbor, do you talk? If you answered “no,” you aren’t alone. Hundreds of people experience feeling awkward and not knowing what to talk about when they are with a member of the younger generation. Hopefully, that is something I can change. Different generations actually do have a lot to talk about.

One topic that is a great thing to talk about is school; both the young and old have experienced it before and it could be cool to compare experiences and think about change over time (like community service, teachers, and lessons). That is another thing you can discuss: change. You can talk about how times have changed from years ago until now. Talk about the differences in technology, or the differences in clothing and style, or the differences in literature and media. You can debate world events and issues. You can tell stories, recall memories or even create a tale. You can arrange means of communication; get a pen pal or email pal, or maybe even learn how to video chat.

Another simple but beneficial thing that you can do is just ask a question. I spoke with my grandmother about conversation starters, and she told me a story about how, when she was my age, she learned an important lesson about communication. She explained that whenever she went to her orthodontist appointments in Washington DC, she read a magazine the doctor had in his office waiting room titled *Calling All Girls*. She vividly remembers an article that was all about how to start conversations with others. The advice was to ask questions. It was a simple suggestion, but it really works! My grandmother has used that advice for decades and it has taken her far! She became a beloved teacher and has also written a few short books, and her communication skills helped her to reach those goals.

A few great questions to ask youngsters are: What are you reading? What did you do today? What is your favorite movie? Are you participating in any fun after-school activities? If you had three wishes, what would they be? Finally, a great follow up question to any inquiry you make is “why?” Asking for explanations and seeing others’ points of view can really stimulate a conversation.

Many of these ideas will be elaborated on in my future columns. But in the meantime, why not give a few of these topics a try?

KIDS AND ADULTS: STAND UP FOR YOUR BELIEFS



Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, Rosa Parks. These are just three out of many ordinary people in history that took a stand for their beliefs in a peaceful, non-violent way. In fact, to this day, we still have many amazing individuals that speak at major events about their feelings and views. But, it is not just adults that can make a difference.

Take Malala Yousafzai for example, a young Pakistani girl who, at the age of 14 was shot by a terrorist because she had been standing up for women's rights and education. A group called the Taliban had been in the area telling women that they should be dressing in a certain way so that their bodies were covered, refraining from watching TV and listening to music, and that they shouldn't get an education. They were destroying buildings, especially schools, and were patrolling the area constantly. Malala however, wouldn't take it. She wanted a right to have an education. She spoke at many events and was also on TV. It was because of this that the Taliban had singled her out and shot her on her way home from school. The bullet did not kill her, but she was badly wounded. She managed to pull through with the help of many doctors and nurses, and to this day, continues to fight for an education. She was awarded the Nobel Peace prize for her work as well.

I believe that Malala is an inspiration to all of us. She has proven, along with Jane Addams for her social reform work, Mother Teresa for her charity work, Nelson Mandela for peacefully stopping apartheid, Aung San Suu Kyi for her non-violent struggle for human rights, and Elie Wiesel for his work on the cause of peace, and many others that, when you stand up for what you believe in, you can make a huge difference.

Read the newspaper; find issues in your community and in the world that you feel strongly about; get together with a younger buddy; and talk to them about it. You can discuss some of the big issues that have been affecting Americans in recent months or give examples of local matters like the effects of federal and state cut-backs on local programs for seniors and others. You can share your opinions on these subjects and bond and learn at the same time. Together, you may plan activities to make change. You can also read *I am Malala*, a book of memoirs written by Malala herself with your younger friend.

But just remember: both kids and adults can make a difference.

BACK TO SCHOOL TIME: WHAT HAS CHANGED?



It is September which can only mean one thing: school is back in session! Although much is the same, a lot about school has changed since many of you were being taught. This brings me to our topic today: the differences between schools now and in the past. The information about schooling from the past has been generously provided by my amazing grandmother.

How can we talk about school and not include classes, placement, and homework? The majority of today's schools have the following classes: English, math, science, history, physical education/health, foreign language, and an elective. My grandmother explained that in her day, her main classes were the same as those mentioned above plus a class called civics. She explained that civics was a junior high class similar to U.S. history with an emphasis on how the government functions. Today, high school students – at least those where I live – take a course called "National, State, Local Government."

We are placed in classes based on our ability to succeed in each. However, unlike placement strategies now, when my grandma was in school, students were "tracked." This was where a student was either below grade level, on grade level or advanced and all of their classes were on the same ability level. This meant that if a student was great at math but not as advanced in reading, he or she would have to be in the high level reading class in order to partake in the high level math class or in all low level classes despite their talent in mathematics.

We have much more homework and standardized testing than my grandmother did and she said that she never felt overwhelmed by homework or tests until high school. My grandma took only the national standardized Iowa Tests in the 1950's that compared the level of achievement of a student to other students in the nation. Today, there is a local and national debate about too much testing, like my MAP-R/M and the PARCC tests that take time away from instruction for students in classrooms. There is also a debate on the increasing amount of homework students deal with each day.

Safety in schools has also changed dramatically because of the development of technology and also because of current events. When we were discussing this topic, my grandmother told me a lot about certain drills that she had to participate in.

“I was in school after WWII and during the Cold War. Because of the fear of a nuclear bombing, we had to do a duck and cover drill. We would crouch down underneath our desks and cover our heads. Another drill I remember was in 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis. This one was where we had to line up in the hallway facing our lockers with our backs to a wall of windows, and we were all thinking: why are we lining up next to glass windows that will shatter if they are hit by a missile? We also had an assortment of weather and fire drills.”

There are still many threats present today such as the Maryland Sniper in 2002 and attacks similar to the horrible occurrence at Sandy Hook Elementary, so many schools now have drills regarding guns. An example of this is the lockdown drill. In this drill, the doors are locked, the shades drawn, and students are moved out of sight and told to be silent. This creates the illusion that there is no one there so if an attacker enters the building they won't have anyone to shoot. Another way to prevent guns and knives from entering the building is by having all schools require staff, parents, and outsiders to check in to the office. This is different from when my grandmother was in school. “Back then, you could just walk in the building.” Today, there are also security cameras, metal detectors, and, if a teacher or student is suspicious of a person for being in possession of a weapon, the staff has the right to search their locker and backpack. Similarly to schools “back then,” we also continue to have weather and fire drills, just in case.

Another development in schools is that there are now people called crisis counselors. This is a team of counselors, nurses, teachers, and psychologists that are available to help students cope after a traumatic event. This can include the death of a staff member, parent, or student, thoughts about suicide, parents getting divorced, etc.

It isn't just classes, placement, and security that have changed since my grandmother was in a classroom. Schools were also segregated during my grandma's time there. The famous case Brown vs. The Board of Education decided that separate public schools for black and white students were unconstitutional.

Technology has also changed dramatically. Chalk boards turned into white boards which are now promethean boards. In order to copy papers, my grandmother said that her school had ditto machines instead of Xerox and copy machines. Instead of on computers, reports were written on paper with a pencil or pen.

Now that you know about a few similarities and differences between schools some years ago and today, you can discuss this topic with a younger relative or younger buddy in depth! You can ask about whether you think today's methods are better or if you think things were better before. Maybe you can even chat about other possible ways to do things in schools that have not been thought of yet.

Whatever you decide to discuss, just be thankful that you no longer have finals to study for...because I do and it is not fun!

TEENS AND RETIREES HAVE A LOT IN COMMON



Before retiring, my grandmother was an award-winning elementary school teacher beloved by her students. However, after many years of teaching, my grandmother decided to retire. Now, she often tells people that retirement is like being an adolescent without the angst. I recently asked her what she meant and she explained that when she retired she felt like she did when she was a teenager but without the same stress. So, today, we will be comparing retirement and teen years.

Some similarities between retirement and adolescents include confusion, excitement, and questions about the future. For teens, this list of inquiries may include:

What will I want to do when I grow up? What will college/work be like? What if I make the wrong decision? Is it okay to be nervous, excited, and scared all at once?

Similarly, for retirees, questions may be:

What will I want to do when I retire? What will retirement be like? What if I make the wrong decision? Is it okay to be nervous, excited, and scared all at once?

For both seniors and teens, the future may seem scary or unsure. Teens are not certain of their entire future and seniors may specifically wonder how long a future they have after retirement and if they will have enough financial and health resources to support their choices. However, there are some additional differences between teenage years and retirement years.

Seniors have already been through the feelings, emotions, and experiences of teenagers and they have learned that they will survive and often thrive. Because of this, they are often not as anxious as teens. Due to their lifetime experiences, seniors also realize that there are many opportunities to explore their interests and use their skills and strengths in a variety of fields.

For those of you who have retired, and even those of you who are still hard at work, an easy and beneficial thing that you can do to connect with a younger friend is to simply talk to them about what is in store for them. Since you have already lived through your teen years, you can offer advice, thoughts, guidance and answer any questions about the future that your younger buddy might have. You can also tell stories about your life and choices you made. And to everyone who is no longer at work: happy retirement!

TEENS, SENIORS SHARE EMPLOYMENT WOES



Have you ever applied for a job and been turned away because of your age? This is something that seniors and teens alike can relate to. Some employers think that, because of someone's age, they cannot complete tasks or do things correctly and efficiently.

Senior citizens face several challenges. Although today's seniors are better educated than seniors of the past, they encounter problems because employers that hire seniors may give them jobs that require little ability. Several companies have also started to open up jobs overseas in an attempt to cut costs. There is a lot of competition for jobs; mostly from younger applicants. Seniors may also have trouble finding positions with hours that work for them. Most of all, some companies discriminate against seniors and do not appreciate their skills

However, if you are a senior looking for work, don't despair. There are many reasons why seniors are the right choice for the job. They have lots of experience with working and because of this, employers know what they are getting. They are mature and are typically very hard workers as they were raised learning the importance of effort and hard work. In some cases, they may also be better at communicating face-to-face because they grew up away from things like computers and social media.

Kids have challenges, too. Some employers think kids are too young and inexperienced and do not have the discipline to do a job well. However, kids can offer a fresh perspective and, because they have grown up surrounded by computers, iPhones, and tablets, they should be able to handle using any technology the business may have. Also, teens can be trained to the liking of the employer. Some states even offer tax benefits for hiring younger workers. Many kids have the same qualities as the older generation; they are conscientious, hardworking, focused, and motivated.

So don't worry! No matter your age, you are a very valuable worker and a great choice for the job! Some employers may not realize this...but you have the power to change that. Together, seniors and kids can make a list of reasons, besides the ones that I have already listed, why your age will benefit the employer. You can discuss ways to display your positive qualities to the interviewer and give advice on being a hard worker. You can do research together at the library or online about finding a job and how to network. Get together and discuss the feelings and emotions you both experience when you are denied a job or the ability to do something because of your age. No matter what, just make sure that you enjoy the beauty of your current age because you are capable of a lot, no matter how old you are.

GAMES CAN HELP CONNECT THE GENERATIONS



In previous columns, I have talked about serious things that seniors and teens can relate to and discuss: school, lack of control, standing up for one's beliefs, terminal illness, employment, retirement, etc. However, teens and seniors can connect through fun activities, too! A perfect example is games, played by both and loved by all.

Many new games are developed every year. Some games are more hands on, while others require strategy and logic. Creative ideas such as Blockus, Bop It, Cranium, and Sleeping Queens have been enjoyed and even been created by kids today. Blockus is a strategy game played with tiles and a board. The goal of the game is to use your tiles to block your opponent from getting their tiles to touch your end of the board before you can reach theirs. Bop It is a technological game for those who enjoy using their hands. In this game, the device will say verbal commands such as “twist it.” Players then have to follow directions and pull levers, twist knobs, hit buttons, or speak aloud into the device. Cranium is a team game where you choose a card which may ask you a trivia question, require you to create or sculpt something or ask a language question. Finally, Sleeping Queens is a card game that those of all ages can enjoy. The goal of the game is to gain 5 queens or 50 points (in a 2-3 player game) and you can play a variety of cards including knight, jester, and king to attempt to win, steal, or take a queen. All of these games are fun and relatively easy to play.

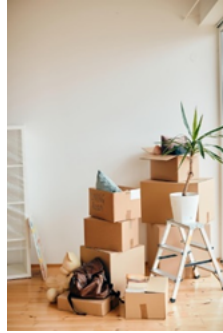
Nowadays, games are also played on smartphones, computers, and other sources of technology. The Wii, PlayStation, and Xbox 360 are all examples of game consoles used by the modern generation. You may have to use a joystick which has a lever you can rotate to move things on a computer screen or Wii control, similar to a TV remote, also used to do things on screen. They are both very easy to use. Some games can even sense your motions and require no controls at all.

However, have you noticed that many games still popular today were made decades ago? Games such as Monopoly, Sorry, Scrabble, chess, and Life have all stood the test of time. Each game is beloved by both kids of the past and kids of today.

And it isn't just kids who thoroughly enjoy games. Any person of any age can play board, card, and even video games! This is yet another shared interest of the generations.

The next time you and your younger friend get together, try to organize a game night. You can share games that you grew up with and also learn how to play new ones. This is a great way to get to know each other while still having fun.

MOVING AT ANY AGE TAKES SOME ADJUSTMENT



If any of you have ever moved before, you know that it is a difficult thing to do. Packing up and leaving your home behind can be very challenging...especially because it doesn't end there. After relocating, you have to make new friends and relationships which can seem daunting. When you leave your home, you may think no one understands how you feel. However, moving is an experience shared by both seniors and teens.

When seniors move out of their houses, they are often going to a senior community or moving in with a relative. Leaving their house may seem like saying goodbye to their youth and ability to be independent, and this can be extremely scary and unwanted.

Things can be just as hard for kids in this situation. They are forced to say goodbye to their friends, school, and neighborhood and have to readjust to life in an entirely different setting.

Moving for any age is challenging. However, it really all depends on how you look at it. You have the ability to start fresh, make brand new friends, and discover new places. Things can be great!

Despite this, you may still fear packing your belongings and leaving, but you aren't alone in your worries. Luckily, because so many feel the same way, there are many things you can do to find solace. There are support groups that you can attend to talk about the challenge of relocating. There are many people that you can talk to about any nervousness you may have. In terms of making new friends, you can go to mixers and social events to meet people in your new neighborhood. Volunteering or joining a club is a great way to meet other people. If all else fails, you can always take comfort in the fact that your old community and friends won't disappear just because you left. You can always keep in touch.

So, the next time you get together with your younger friends, talk to them and see if they have ever moved before. You can swap stories and give advice. You can practice meeting new people by doing role play situations. You can even volunteer together at a place in the new community to make some friends while still bonding with your buddies. Anything goes! Just remember that if one of you is moving, you can still keep in touch! Relationships don't have to end just because you moved. So don't worry...everything will turn out just fine.

HOW STEREOTYPES AFFECT PEOPLE OF ALL AGES



We make stereotypes every day whether we know it or not. Many of these stereotypes are made by seniors towards teens and vice-versa. But are these stereotypes true or even fair? Why are these stereotypes made? What can be done about these hurtful words?

I was curious about this, so I interviewed Ms. Leah Bradley, the Assistant Director of the JCA Heyman Interages Center. “The JCA Heyman Interages Center intergenerational programs have brought children and older adults together for over 25 years. Since 1986, thousands of children from hundreds of schools and hundreds of isolated older adults from senior facilities have benefited from participation in their programs. Over the years, hundreds of dedicated and caring older adult volunteers, who are the heart of Interages, have made a significant difference in the lives of children.” Ms. Bradley is knowledgeable about stereotypes regarding teens and seniors and their effects on others. Our discussion is below:

Q: What are stereotypes?

A: Stereotypes are commonly held images or ideas about people or things.

Q: What are stereotypes teens make about senior citizens?

A: There are many stereotypes that individuals of all ages make about older adults – including, sometimes, older adults themselves. For instance: that all older people eat dinner early and go to bed early. That all old people have trouble hearing or seeing. But, those are just stereotypes, as each individual is different.

Q: What are stereotypes seniors make about teens?

A: There are many stereotypes that individuals of all ages make about teenagers – including, sometimes, teenagers themselves. For instance: that all teenagers spend all their time on their phones and can’t have an eye-to-eye conversation. Or that all teenagers are bad drivers and succumb to peer-pressure. But, those are just stereotypes, as each individual is different.

Q: How often are the stereotypes accurate?

A: Very rarely – they are based on a perception of one or two people that someone knows – not a generation as a whole.

Q: Why are these stereotypes made?

A: It's very easy to generalize based on a small sample – and often times, people find that stereotypes are humorous and illicit laughs.

Q: How do unfair stereotypes affect people's lives?

A: Unfair stereotypes can affect a person's self-esteem and confidence if a person cannot be seen for who he or she really is – but instead is assumed to be a certain type of person based on his or her age (or any other group for which he/she is a part).

Q: What can be done to stop the making of unfair stereotypes about seniors and teens?

A: Intergenerational programs – intentional connections between the generations dispel stereotypes. When people get to know each other as individuals they often stop making unfair stereotypes.

Q: What were things done at your meeting about stereotypes?

A: I met with a group of high school seniors prior to them participating in a multi-session program with older adults. We discussed stereotypes and biases that the students may have about older individuals, as well as stereotypes and biases that they believed the older adults may have about them. We played a game, in which I read a statement and asked what generation (teens or older adults) that statement was describing. The teens playing the game had strong opinions as to which generation I was describing – when in fact, each statement could have described either generation. We as people are more alike than different, regardless of age.

Q: What was the outcome?

A: After the meeting about stereotypes, the students said they were excited to engage in the upcoming program and have a chance to get to know older adults through conversations. Let's hope they do enjoy the experience!

You can get together with a younger friend and talk about stereotypes and snap judgements you have made about others and others have made about you. You can also follow Ms. Bradley's advice and join intergenerational programs. You will be able to get to know teens as individuals as well as make some new friends.

Just remember: the next time you see teens, instead of making stereotypes about them, remember that they are individuals and not cardboard-cut-outs. The only way you can make an accurate conclusion about them is if you get to know them. So, why don't you?

SENIOR PROM BECOMES “SENIOR” PROM



When you hear the term “senior prom” you probably think of high school seniors dancing the night away in their school gymnasium. However, in this column, we are going to talk about a different type of senior prom: a senior *citizen* prom! The Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA) and, more specifically, Interages, a program designed to help bridge the gap between the generations, recently hosted a senior prom that was a resounding success. I had the incredible opportunity to interview Ms. Margot Smith, one of the amazing workers responsible for setting up the prom and making the magic happen.

Q: How would you describe a senior prom?

A: The senior prom for JCA is very much like a regular high school senior prom except for the age of the participants. There are tables with food, a DJ, and a dance floor. It is however, a little old fashioned because it is less digital than a high school prom.

Q: What is your job regarding the prom?

A: I am one of many who buy refreshments and food for the prom so that people have plenty to eat. I also set up the room to make it more festive and organize things.

Q: What is usually done at a senior prom? Are there specific activities or traditions?

A: It’s mostly just eat, drink, and be merry. There is lots of dancing, and current music is played. It is extremely fun for both generations.

Q: Who sets up and runs the prom? Do teens and/or seniors help?

A: The prom is set up by both adults and teens. Teens play a large part in helping with the set up and participating in the prom. Teams from the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, a Jewish youth group, participate and dance with the older people. There is lots of interaction. However, the elderly don’t set up prom, they just attend. Just like teens going to a high school prom, the elderly are guests and are not expected to help with the set up and clean up.

Q: What are the key similarities and differences between a senior citizen prom and a high school senior prom?

A: The main differences are that a senior citizen prom is a little tamer than a high school prom, and that it is a little bit more old-fashioned and less technology-oriented. However, similar activities and traditions are held and it is still lots of fun.

Q: How does the prom benefit seniors?

A: The prom is very nice for the elderly because they can spend time with others and do something they may not be able to do in their normal lives. The place is normally packed with all different generations. The event gets seniors out in a social situation and gives them new opportunities. For them, to be with younger people and to dance is lots of fun.

Q: How does the prom benefit teens?

A: It gives teens a new perspective on older people. Many teens believe the elderly to be stationary, but in reality, they can be extremely fun and lively and can boogie with the best of them! Teens can make new connections and get lots of wisdom from the seniors as well.

Q: How does the prom connect the generations?

A: The different generations are brought together and dance and talk all night. Teens may know seniors in their family but it is very different when they make connections with seniors outside of the family. Seniors get the same thing with kids, and new perspectives can be shared and created.

Q: Why is it important that teens and seniors are brought together?

A: This time spent with new people of different generations erases stereotypes and can encourage the seniors and teens to spend more time together. It is important that the generations connect because they each have so much to offer one another.

Q: What is the most rewarding part of the prom?

A: I love bringing two different age groups together outside of families. It allows seniors to have more personal attention and fun than they may be used to, and gives teens a chance to see seniors in a new light. It is also lots of fun for everyone!

The prom was decorated with floral centerpieces, streamers, and fancy table settings. Of course, you can't have a party without treats, so there were lots of trays of cookies, pastries, and candy on each table.

Seniors from The Charles E. Smith Life Community, the Mislser Adult Day Center, and Kensington Club attended along with teens from multiple BBYO chapters to enjoy some food, dancing, and music. There was a DJ who played all kinds of music, from the era of Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey to more current songs such as those by Pharell Williams or Silento: a span of over 7 decades!

Regarding the prom, one senior citizen remarked, “I am having a wonderful time. These are wonderful people.” Another said, “I am loving everything.” One senior was over 102 years old! When asked the secret of her longevity, she said, “Eat good food, exercise, and have a great family.”

The teens were having fun as well. One said, “Everyone is really happy. There is lots of joy in the room,” while another commented, “It is really fun to be around the seniors.”

Of course, you cannot forget the volunteers who made this event possible. One said, “It is really fun to be with everyone across the generations.” Another claimed, “This is one of our most successful senior proms yet!” As you can tell, this was a very lively, fun, and successful event.

So, the next time that you hear about a senior prom in the area, see if you can attend. It can be a great way to have some fun and bond with youth. If you aren’t interested in attending but want to contribute to this cause, you can ask if you can volunteer to help with the prom whether it’s setting up, cleaning up, recruiting other seniors to attend, or purchasing supplies and decorations. You can even get some assistance from a younger buddy and volunteer together. If all else fails, spread the word! You can speak with principals of schools or members of intergenerational programs and ask if a senior prom could be held there. Giving others the idea of the prom and helping to set it up can make a huge difference in the lives of teens and seniors everywhere, and that is definitely something worthwhile.

HOW A LOVE OF READING CAN UNITE THE GENERATIONS



We may be decades apart, but my grandparents and I share a love of books — and love to swap them. How do we figure out what books might bridge our ages and diverse tastes?

Recently, my grandmother told me, “Well, I want a realistic fiction book, not fantasy like usual, and I’d love to have something like the *Out of My Mind* book about the girl with a photographic memory and cerebral palsy you gave me a few months ago.”

So I told my grandmother about a book called *Fish in a Tree* about a girl with dyslexia, which sounded like a great next choice.

Whenever I see my grandmother, we swap books and then discuss them at length. Most of the time she agrees with my opinions, however, sometimes we get into great debates over characters and plots.

Even when I was little, my grandparents inspired a love of reading in me. My grandfather used to read fairy tales to me and make them silly by mixing them all up. It took me a while to realize that Cinderella was the one who went to the ball, not Goldilocks from "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." However, no matter what, after each story we read together, my grandparents always held a discussion about the moral, plot, and characters of the book.

The book *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is a special book that we particularly bonded over. The story is one of my grandmother's favorites, and she was very eager to share it with me. I loved the book. My grandmother and I talked about the bond between Scout and Atticus and how he shared his wisdom with her and modeled, by his actions not just his words, what traits and values should be followed — respect, justice, kindness, etc.

We also discussed the message of the book and noticed the contrast between the seriousness of the theme and the moments of humor in the novel. I watched the movie adaptation, and it was interesting to see how the story was brought to life on the screen. I also just recently finished Harper Lee's second book, *Go Set a Watchman*, which I also thoroughly enjoyed.

I have read so many books that I never would have thought to read without my grandmother's recommendation and have fallen in love with many of the classics such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Little Women*, and *Anne of Green Gables*.

It has also been interesting to see the development of our discussions from when I was younger until now. I am now able to state my opinions more clearly and have a more educated discussion with my grandmother. I can now comprehend more adult themes which have allowed me to take another step into the world of literature.

This book exchange has become a tradition between me and my grandmother. In fact, recently, my grandfather became jealous and now we have begun a book exchange as well!

My grandmother says, "I think that finding literature that we can discuss together gives us an opportunity to not just discuss the book itself, but also discuss the impact the themes of the book have on our lives."

My grandfather says, "I love sitting down face to face with Alexis to have a discussion, and so talking about a book that we both read is another great opportunity to do that."

Maybe you could start a book exchange with a younger friend, too. Each week you could meet and discuss what you read, and then swap books.

If you want to go even bigger than that, you could also go to your local library and host a book club with multiple participants from both your generation and mine.

You can also select books that include multi-generational relationships such as Harry Potter and Dumbledore from the *Harry Potter* series, Reynie and Mr. Benedict from *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, and Scout and Atticus from *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

If you aren't nearby to physically set up an exchange, use technology to communicate, like email or Skype. And if you have no reading-age children in your life, consider volunteering at a local elementary school.

Whatever option you choose, you will be able to bond and devour a good book...and who doesn't like that? So get out, and get reading!

POLITICS IS AN INTERGENERATIONAL TOPIC



With the presidential election coming up, I am sure that many of you have been thinking a lot about politics and voting. Kids are also aware of this important political event and have had first-hand experiences while in school with the voting process.

Senior citizens are extremely important to elections. According to The United States Census Bureau, in 2012, 45 percent of those 18 to 29 voted, while 72 percent of those 65 and over did. Senior citizens make up a large percentage of voters and make a big difference in the polls.

Despite the fact that teens under the age of 18 cannot vote in this up-coming election and therefore can't directly impact elections, that doesn't mean that they can't get involved. Teens can learn about current events and discuss them with others in order to learn more about the candidates and policies.

They can also participate in the elections by volunteering at the polls, something both teens and seniors can do. As Barbara Ruben stated in her June 2016 column, "Doing their part in democracy," "most election workers are at either end of the age spectrum. In Montgomery County, about 80 percent are over age 50, while in Fairfax County older adults make up 86 percent of the workers. Older high school students, who usually have the day off, also help out. While pay varies by jurisdiction, most election workers end up earning about \$10 to \$18 per hour."

As part of their Student Government Association (“SGA”), teens make political changes in their school. Students who run for office follow the same process as that of a national election. Nominated by their peers, students campaign, give speeches at rallies, and fill in ballots that are counted. Once elected, they attend meetings in which they make decisions regarding the well-being of their school. They also attend several conferences held by the county SGA. By holding office in school, teens can learn more about what it is like to hold a position of power, and what qualities a skilled leader should have.

There are also many political organizations for teens such as the Junior State of America, a leadership and education program for high school students. According to their website, “JSA is a national organization organized at the local chapter level. These chapters collectively form regions which coordinate communication with chapters and run regional events annually. The regions form states which run three large overnight conventions a year, and the national level of general program operations.”

Kids and teens can also participate in the presidential election in ways other than official voting. The Nickelodeon TV network produces a collection of campaign specials called *Kids Pick the President*. This special includes a mock election so that the participating kids can choose who they think should become president. Remarkably, *Kids Pick the President* has predicted the winner of each election accurately, with the exception of the 2004 race. Who says kids don’t have good judgment?

The next time you hang out with your younger buddy, talk to them about their opinions on the current presidential race. You may find that there is a lot to talk about, and you can compare opinions and see new perspectives. You can talk about different ways that you can make political change in your community and come up with projects to work on together to influence those around you. You can also get together with your friend to watch *Kids Pick the President*.

Both the young and old play a major role in politics whether directly or indirectly. Remember: you can make a big difference in your school, community, or in your nation no matter what age you are.

FURRY FRIENDS OFFER COMFORT AND SUPPORT



What has benefits including increased physical and mental health, improved literacy skills, and reduced anxiety and loneliness? Pet therapy! Pet therapy can be a great help to members of both generations in many ways, from something as small as decreasing boredom to something as significant as improving cardiovascular health.

Pet therapy uses animals such as dogs to help people with health problems cope and recover. It has been scientifically proven that there are lots of benefits to interaction with amiable pets. “Anyone who has ever owned a pet will readily verify the benefits of associating with furred, feathered, or finned friends,” according to journalist Odean Cusack. “Animals are fun to be with and comforting to hold. Their antics inspire humor and a sense of carefreeness, a return to childhood with its buoyant spirits. Caring for pets encourages nurturance, responsibility, and adherence to a daily schedule. Pets enable owners to reach outside themselves and to put aside fears of an uncertain future. Pets live in the immediate moment and interacting with them makes us keenly aware of the present with all its joys and idiosyncrasies.”

Just as Mr. Cusack eloquently puts it, pets can make a great difference in a person’s happiness. Spending time with a “furry, feathered, or finned friend” can release endorphins that have a relaxing effect as well as lifting spirits and lessening depression. They can also make a great difference specific to each generation.

The Occupational Therapy staff at St. Mary’s Hospital for Children piloted the pet assistance program in December of 1998, and the program has quickly expanded. Several dogs visit the hospital each month and assist children with special needs. The dog can help the child to meet specific goals that can lead to his or her recovery. A child who lost function in one arm, for example, might be asked to use the arm to feed, groom, or pet the dog. This will simultaneously add joy and excitement to the patient’s life and allow the patient to exercise his or her arm. The increased excitement to participate in treatment will also cause the child to be healed more quickly and efficiently.

Besides helping to restore health, pets can assist those learning to read. The PAWS for Reading program gives children the opportunity to read aloud to an animal such as a bunny in order to improve their communication skills and reading comprehension.

Pets can be constant companions to senior citizens as well and can be a great comfort in times of isolation or sickness. Seniors with heart conditions who own pets tend to live longer, have lower blood pressure, and lower cholesterol levels than those who don’t own pets. Also, for patients with dementia, having a pet can be soothing since the patient may have trouble using language, but doesn’t need to feel pressure to communicate with their four-legged friend. Pets can lower health care costs since those with pets make fewer doctor visits than those without. Finally, pets can cause a reduction in depression.

Even just owning a pet for non-health related reasons can be beneficial. You would have a loyal friend who will add joy to your life and can help teach discipline and responsibility to children.

Since you may already have a child or teenage friend, why not try to make a furry friend as well? You and your younger buddy could volunteer at local animal shelters to have a chance to spend time with pets and do good simultaneously. If you are uninterested in being around animals yourself, why not suggest it to others in your life who may be in need of a cuddly companion? Pets do so much good for those in need. It's no wonder that we call them "man's best friend."

IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH WITH A YOUNGER BUDDY



The holiday season is approaching and with it the celebratory feasts and delicious baked goods that we all love. However, despite our cravings for those cookies, it is essential to remember to maintain our health.

Whether you are six, 16, or 60, nutrition and exercise have a pivotal role in your well-being, as well as other components of health that we may not consider. So, find a younger friend, and let's get started!

First, it is important to understand why it is so imperative to develop healthy habits. By practicing simple daily habits such as eating healthy and exercising, you will lessen the risk of obtaining heart disease, osteoporosis, type-2 diabetes, and some types of cancer. With all of these benefits, there isn't any reason why you shouldn't do more to promote your health!

It has also been proven that practicing healthy habits makes you a happier and more focused person. After all, being a joyful, mindful, and thoughtful person is also very important.

If staying healthy is so important for both teens and seniors, why not work together to achieve a healthy lifestyle? There is plenty that both generations can do to bond, have fun, and lead a healthy lifestyle simultaneously. I remember vividly that, when I was a lot younger, my great-grandmother and my mom and I went to pick apples together at a nearby orchard. We built strong memories over a very nutritious food.

In order to ensure that you are eating nutritiously, you and a younger buddy can plan and prepare meals together. I recently went over to my own grandparents' house to prepare a meal

with my grandfather. We made salads and macaroni and cheese from scratch. It was a wonderful opportunity to spend some time with him and get to know him better. He told me about where he had learned the recipes as well as humorous experiences he had cooking in the past. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and got to eat a delicious and healthy meal! You and your friend can do something similar such as taking a cooking class, finding recipes online, and even sharing family recipes and the stories that accompany them. If you aren't interested in cooking, you can also go out to dinner together and hunt for healthy and delicious restaurants. This is also a great bonding experience as it allows for great dinner conversation. Whether you stay in or go out, working together to create well-balanced, simple, and colorful meals will surely benefit your health.

As for exercise, there are plenty of variations of physical activities that you can do together. Taking an exercise or dance class, going to a local gym, or just going for a short walk is an easy activity for you to do together.

Although most people don't think about it, emotional and mental health are large components of your well-being, too. Taking a few minutes a day to do yoga, meditate, color, or just relax is essential to a happy and mindful you. You and your friend or family member can do any of these activities together and observe how they make you feel in your daily lives.

Keeping your mind sharp by developing your intellectual health can be a great way for you and your friend to bond. You can complete puzzles, host a multi-generational book club, select words of the day to learn, conduct science experiments, attend museums, debate current events and even more. You may find that, by doing this, you feel more alert, more confident, and more informed.

Finally, you can discuss the benefits of maintaining your health and how you can work to improve it. Maybe it is incorporating more vegetables into your diet, getting up off of the couch and watching less TV, spending more time outside, or reading that novel you've heard so much about. Whatever it is, you and your younger buddy can do it together, and pave the way to a healthy life for each of you.

MUSIC'S POWER TO UNITE YOUNG AND OLD



The universal language isn't spoken, it's sung. Music can have a lasting impact on both teens and seniors. After all, a simple melody has the power to unite individuals, cultures, societies, and even the generations.

One of the only activities that requires usage of the entire brain, listening to music is beneficial to both the body and soul. Music is a stimulant that can alter one's mood for the better almost immediately. It is also a great way to relieve stress; ever wonder why lullabies are used to get babies to sleep? Additionally, music is a way to express oneself and connect with others. As a way to share ideas, it can also enable listeners to learn new things or see life in a different way.

Music impacts teens in a variety of ways. At an age when it often feels like no one understands, music can be an escape, with the ability to capture almost any emotion. It can even lead to higher levels of self-esteem! Studies have shown that songs with positive messages inspire kindness and increased social and teamwork skills in teens. Not only that, but listening to music also tends to enhance grades. I find that I focus and study more efficiently when listening to my favorite songs. Now I know that there is science to back this up: a study done by the Stanford University School of Medicine revealed that listening to music improves attention and memory.

Senior citizens also benefit from listening to their favorite tunes. Studies have shown that music betters the memories of those with Alzheimer's and Dementia. Also, as mentioned before, music visibly reduces stress levels leading to lowered heart rates and reduced blood pressure. For those of you who stuck with those childhood piano lessons: you're in luck! Other research indicates that playing an instrument at a young age leads to a sharper mind once older. Better moods and higher levels of happiness are just a few other reasons why music is so powerful.

As the universal language, music is also the universal connector. You and your teenage friend can bond over your favorite melodies...and there are so many to choose from! The other wonderful thing about music is that there are so many genres to try. Whether it is classical, hip-hop, rock, show tunes, or reggae, there is a type of tune for everyone.

I have noticed that my peers often assume that the music listened to by their elders is boring and slow, while many seniors believe that kids today just listen to noise. However, this is very untrue. The songs released in a particular era, including those released today, reflect the world at the time. If teenagers ignore music from the past, they will be missing out on so much culture and history. Likewise, if seniors do not hear the popular melodies of today, they will not be able to see how young people experience the world around them. Each decade and genre of music offers something unique and special, and it is very important to at least give this music a try with an open mind.

Another common assumption is that teens and seniors have completely different musical preferences. This, too, is often inaccurate. One of my favorite things to do when visiting my grandparents' house is listening to artists from when they were growing up, and some of my favorite groups have stemmed from the musical influence of my family. There have also been many instances when I have gotten my grandparents interested in music from today.

So, kick off the new year by meeting up with your younger buddy and jamming out! You can experience different types of music, discuss artists, and see how the songs make you feel in your daily life. If you want to add a spontaneous dance party into the agenda, feel free. Whatever you do, just make sure you are having a great time bonding and listening to something that makes you smile.

SCAMS TARGET BOTH TEENS AND OLDER ADULTS



The past few decades have had us mesmerized by new technological developments, including the internet, mobile phone, television, etc. It is truly incredible that there are devices that can enable communication with any point of the world, entertain us for hours, and store countless amounts of information. However, we sometimes do not realize how important it is to be aware when surrounded by these types of powerful gadgets. With the use and development of technology increasing, now is a perfect time to educate yourself on what to look out for online, and how it can affect both senior citizens and teenagers alike.

Teens have much to be wary of when it comes to advertising and scams. Teens are often viewed as naïve and ignorant of the dangers that can happen online, allowing them to be taken advantage of. Common scams for teenagers include cheap luxury goods (“iPhone on sale for only \$50”), scholarships and grants (scammer receives student’s personal information “in exchange for grant”), lottery or contest (Claim that teen won money or prize to collect personal information), and online auctions (buyer pays for item that is never received). Teens also happen to be the perfect audience for false advertisers; they have a desire to fit in, allowance to spend, and are constantly pressured to be in possession of the latest and greatest items. These ads’ goal is to entrance youth and urge them to buy whatever the latest fad or “must have” happens to be. Advertising companies look out for ways to focus on teenage issues such as body image and peer pressure to increase sales of their product, regardless of whether the company is sincere or not.

Senior citizens are also a main target of internet scamming. Scammers tend to view seniors as vulnerable and trusting, making them an easy way to get money. As well, targeted seniors may be too embarrassed to admit they have been victimized, afraid that they may lose their independence if a family member is told of their blunder. This allows the scammers to get away with whatever they have done. Common scams for seniors include grandchildren in trouble

(“grandchild” calls claiming they need money), IRS (someone claims they are from the IRS, and money is due), sweetheart (person asks for money after developing relationship via online dating site), and ID theft (caller claims to be from a bank or insurance agency and requires personal information such as credit card numbers). False advertisers also find seniors to be a prime target since they are inclined to have interest in certain products or services. For example, it may be very easy to sell anti-aging creams, social security services, funeral insurance, etc. regardless of if the product is real or fake.

While technology has countless benefits, it is essential to take care and protect yourself when using it. A general rule is that if something sounds too good to be true, it likely is. If someone asks for your personal information, stop, and think. Do you really know who this person is?

Since this is a common issue for both teenagers and senior citizens, you can work with your younger buddy to come up with ways to stay safe together. Meet with your teenage friend and discuss the various scams and false advertising that can occur. The most important thing is to educate yourself on what can happen to you so that you will recognize it if it does. Take some time to learn what websites are trustworthy, and which ones often promote fake ads and scams. Next, you can practice ways to handle scams and false advertising should they present themselves. One of you can pretend to be a scammer and have a “mock-phone call” to ensure that you can stand up for yourself in this type of situation. Knowing what to do and being confident in yourself can really make all the difference.

DEPRESSION CAN BE DEBILITATING AT ANY AGE



What is depression? This severe mental health challenge causes an un-lifting feeling of sadness in individuals and can affect members of any generation. If you or a loved one are currently experiencing it, you are not alone. It is estimated that 350 million people experience it worldwide. Clearly, this is not a light topic, and it therefore must be acknowledged.

It is necessary to comprehend that depression isn't something that can easily be rectified with a positive attitude and a happy face. It is a serious issue that usually calls for long-term treatment and can have many consequences.

Depression can develop for a multitude of reasons. Peer pressure, academic struggles, and uncertainty of the future are just a few of the many reasons why the ups and downs in a

teenager's life may just stay down for quite some time. Meanwhile, loss of a loved one, medical problems, or stressful life decisions may be its cause in senior citizens. While many who experience these situations are able to get back on their feet again after adjusting, individuals with depression cannot.

Depression can reveal itself in both teens and seniors with a few key symptoms, both emotional and behavioral. Often, depressed individuals will have feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, trouble thinking or concentrating, and a loss of interest in typically-enjoyed activities. Specifically, teenagers may become socially isolated or see a drop in their grades at school, and older adults may have enhanced medical issues that cannot seem to be cured by common treatment.

If these symptoms are recognized, it is essential to take action. Luckily, there are many ways to treat depression in teens and senior citizens. These include medication (antidepressants), psychotherapy therapy (also known as talk therapy), and complementary therapies (such as meditation or yoga). If you or a loved one are experiencing depression and looking for treatment, consult your doctor for the best type for your needs.

There are many things that you can do to aid someone experiencing depression. Simply offering support is already more help than you know. You can also make sure that they have a way of getting to their doctor, invite them to engage in outdoor activities that may boost their mood, and remind them that, with time and treatment, the depression will fade. Most of all, you can look out for any comments or suggestions made by the individual about suicide; if you hear or see something that alerts you to any suicidal thoughts or actions, please report it to the individual's doctor or therapist, and ensure that they receive help immediately.

The next time you make plans with your younger buddy, you can have a serious discussion with them about the causes and effects of and solutions for depression. You can talk about what to do to help others with depression, and you can come up with a plan to work together to reach out to a doctor and get help if something terrible occurs. Finally, if you or a loved one are currently going through this terrible time, know that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

DRIVING CAN BE RISKY FOR TEENS AND SENIORS



This summer, I took what I consider to be one of my first steps into adulthood; driving lessons. This rite of passage was liberating and it felt incredible to be behind the wheel. Still, it is slightly intimidating to know that you are in control of the vehicle you are so used to being in the passenger seat of. After all, along with all of the meanings of various street signs, rules of the road, and car part vocabulary, I also learned about the dangers of driving, many of which are caused by members of my age-group and by senior citizens, something which both of the generations can discuss.

It is often said that teenagers and senior citizens are the most dangerous age groups on the road. In fact, according to a study done by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, teens aged 16-18 and seniors 65 and older have the highest accident rates. As a result, both teens and seniors are often pressured to give up the keys and let their parents or children take the wheel. Teenagers are the riskiest drivers and are the age group most commonly associated with accidents. This is most likely because teens have little driving experience, the lowest seat belt usage of any age group, and, because their brains are not fully matured, poor judgment. Whether it is because of texting while driving, singing to music, or interacting with a friend in the back seat, distractions cause teens to get into a large number of accidents. Tighter drivers' license restrictions and better education have led to a decrease in accidents, but they are still common, and are a severe problem.

Senior citizens are also considered to be a danger on the road. Unlike with teens, seniors tend to have a great deal of driving experience. However, age-related conditions can interfere with their ability to make decisions and to drive safely. For example, reaction time is slowed and muscle pain can make it harder to look over one's shoulder or press down on the brake. These conditions can cause damage to be much more severe should an accident occur. According to the Pew Research Center, baby boomers will outnumber teenagers aged 16 to 18 years old by more than three to one in a trend known as the "silver tsunami." Unfortunately, states may not be ready for this trend, and experts say that they should be looking to implement more prominent means of public transportation to accommodate the great wave of seniors.

Regardless of what studies show, however, you and your younger buddy can work to become better, safer drivers on the road. As cliché as it may sound, practice makes perfect, so working with and being supervised by a skilled driver can help each of you to develop your own driving skills. You can also discuss simple ways to avoid accidents such as removing all sources of distraction from your car, playing a no-talking game to discourage each other from becoming distracted by a conversation, making sure to stay healthy, get rest, and stay alcohol free in order to perform your best on the road, and more. You might also try experimenting with different types of cars which have specific safety features that could assist you with driving, or if all else fails, public transportation.

Driving is exciting and, in this country, essential for getting around. Make sure that you and your teenage friend are doing it safely

INTERNSHIPS AREN'T JUST FOR YOUNG ADULTS



What can career hopefuls do to gain experience, develop skills, and increase self-confidence? Get an internship! Contrary to popular belief, an intern doesn't necessarily have to be a fresh-faced, college-bound teenager, although internships can be extremely beneficial for this age group. Those of you who have seen the 2015 movie *The Intern*, starring Robert De Niro and Anne Hathaway, know that internships can also be held by senior citizens. Regardless of your age, however, internships can be a meaningful experience for all.

An internship can be defined as a work experience which is both structured and related to the individual's employment goal. It can be paid or unpaid, full or part time, and is typically supervised by an expert in that particular field. Most of all, the experience should positively impact and enhance the individual's career path and future development.

Internships are beneficial for teenagers because they provide them with much needed work experience which can entice employers to hire them in the future. For students who are still unsure of what they would like to do when they grow up, an internship can assist them with their choice, whether by interesting them in a new field or by allowing them to rule out a career path. Besides enhancing their resumes, the internship can also enhance their personal lives. They are a great way to connect with mentors and form long-lasting relationships. I had my first internship in August this summer at none other than *The Beacon Newspapers*! After partaking in this experience, I can confidently say that internships are an incredible opportunity for teens everywhere. My time at *The Beacon* fostered my passion for writing and gave me the experience of being at the site of a real newspaper (I normally type my columns at home and email them to my editor for publication).

However, teens aren't the only ones that can benefit from this kind of opportunity. *The Intern* is the perfect example, introducing us to 70-year-old Ben Whittaker (De Niro) who, tired of retirement, takes a job as an intern at an up-and-coming fashion website run by Jules Ostin (Hathaway). The two form an unlikely friendship, and while Ostin educates Whittaker about the new ways of business, Whittaker teaches Ostin about the old. This movie may be fictional, but the premise is 100 percent realistic. Although substantially less common than teenage internships, there have been several instances of senior internships as well. In fact, some companies including Harvard Business School, MetLife, and McKinsey prefer senior interns. This is because senior citizens have already developed skills and expertise, and may also have

previous connections thanks to their past experiences in the workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of senior interns aged 55 and older are projected to increase by 25.2 percent in 2020 from 13 percent in 2002. Senior internships can be a great way to continue following one's passion and to learn about modern means of business.

Now you can take internships one step further and use them as a way to become closer with your teenage friend. Search for employers looking to hire both senior citizens and teens and take the opportunity to work together doing something that interests you. You can help each other to prepare for interviews and educate each other about old and new ways of doing business. If this is not an option, you can always make some popcorn, and watch *The Intern* together. After all, as is the movie's slogan, "experience never gets old."

TIPS FOR GETTING CLOSER TO YOUR GRANDCHILD



People often assume that the relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild is just that; a family relationship made relevant only by holiday dinners and birthday parties at which the entire clan will be present. However, it can be so much more than that. The truth is that grandparent-grandchildren relationships can be educational, meaningful, and just plain fun!

Although wisdom is generally associated with the older generations, teens and children can harbor plenty of knowledge of their own. They can be a means of connecting their grandparents with daily life and current events and can provide unique insight on modern day issues. Grandchildren can also introduce their grandparents to innovative technology; when my grandmother was looking for a way to present information for a project, I introduced her to PowerPoint software (she is now an expert). As a result of this grandchild-provided education, it can become easier for grandparents to adapt with the times and remain relevant to their grandchildren and to the modern world.

I recently had a great discussion about this with my grandparents at breakfast. Over scrambled eggs and turkey bacon, my grandfather told me about his grandmother whose beliefs and values changed greatly from the time she was young to when she grew old. Despite her age, he always felt close to her because she was so willing to look at things through his eyes and

accept that the world is a constantly changing place. He explained that as you get older, while you should never completely let go of what you believe in, it is important to pay attention to the changing world around you and to be open to its modern societal standards. He added that one way he does this is to listen to and learn from me, his grandchild, just like his grandmother did before him.

Informal and formal education can be impactful. Even childish humor and tendency to tell long, rambling stories can lead to the development of patience and listening and can also induce lots of laughter and carefree fun.

Conversely, grandparents can be grandchildren's greatest teachers. When history textbooks and history channel documentaries are perceived as "boring," sometimes a tale shared by a grandparent can bring twice the intrigue. Kids can learn a great deal about the past by talking to someone close to them who has lived through the time in question and has personal stories from that time. This doesn't have to be within a historical context; sharing family stories is a terrific way for grandchildren to get to know their grandparents better.

Grandparents can also pass down skills that may not be as common today to their grandchildren such as sewing, woodworking, or baking. Most of all, they can pass down life wisdom. I cannot tell you how many times I have called my grandparents when I needed some advice, and they almost always know just what to say. Grandparents can provide a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, or much needed humor so that their grandchild can get back up on their feet again.

Even as grandkids get older, there are still many ways to connect with them. College-aged adolescents can be taught much about financial responsibility, relationships, and the "real world" from their grandparents. It is important for grandchildren to remember that grandparents were their age once, too. By listening to the wisdom their grandparents have gained, they can make better decisions and get closer to their grandparents all in one. Grandparents and children can also volunteer together or bond over their favorite movies and novels no matter what age they are; some things never get old.

From swapping personal stories to debating current events to playing both old and new games, the potential experiences to be shared with a grandchild are endless. If you have grandchildren, don't lose sight of the incredible opportunity you have to not only become closer with a family member, but to learn things you would have otherwise never imagined, and see the world in a new light.

THE CHANGING PERCEPTION OF GENDER ROLES



When someone cries, “Be a man!” or “Act more lady-like!” have you ever really wondered what that implies? What it means to be a man or a woman has changed greatly over the past few decades. The issue of gender identification has also become a more prominent focus in recent years. This all leads to one question: What does the word “gender” really mean?

Gender roles have drastically changed over the past few decades. Society has developed stereotypes about each gender, for example that men are athletic, dominant, and brave or that women are delicate, emotional, and obsessed with looks. Each gender also has assigned duties or skills such as the expectation that men go out and work while women stay home to raise children. While some of this is a result of nature or biology, a great deal of it comes from nurture.

Our society has stressed the importance of these gender roles for years and only recently has it become acceptable to behave differently. Today, identifying as a specific gender doesn't mean you must comply with these standards. Plenty of women work or are skilled at sports, while many men do the cooking and cleaning or stay home with the kids. Reversal of these gender stereotypes isn't a bad thing – the point of this change is to usher in an era of gender unity, where women and men are equals with the same opportunities. It is also to promote a sense of self.

Stereotypes and expectations made about the gender of individuals can in fact place pressure on them to be someone who they are not. Women may feel pressured to give up on their career aspirations to get married while men may be forced to suppress their emotions so that they will not be perceived as weak. Non-compliance with the stereotypes may also cause the individual's sexuality to be questioned. Still, the idea of being forced to be someone you are not can mean more than just not being able to participate in an activity not typically associated with your gender; it can actually mean not identifying as your gender at all.

This leads me to the idea of gender identification. The technical definition of the word “gender” according to The World Health Organization is “the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.” Sex is not the same thing as gender, although the two terms are often used interchangeably. Sex is based on biology and the specific chromosomes the individual possesses, and can be classified as male or female. Meanwhile, gender (described as masculine or feminine) is simply how a person chooses to identify. Trans-gender individuals are those whose gender identities do not match the sex they were assigned at birth. They are often bullied, marginalized, discriminated against, and harassed. Again, this stems from society's obsession with gender compliance. It seems that people expect you to pick a side: girl or boy. However, why must we identify as a specific gender?

The idea of going gender neutral or having genderless children has begun to manifest itself slowly around the world. Although children being raised as gender neutral are still assigned a male or female sex, they are simply being discouraged from partaking in activities classified as masculine or feminine exclusively because of their sex.

You and your teenage friend can have an in-depth discussion about this topic. From contrasting gender roles during your lifetimes to discussing the idea of gender neutrality, this is a great opportunity to learn more about each other's lives and to see things from different perspectives. You can also discuss how perceptions of gender norms have impacted your life as well as which stereotypes do and do not fit you. Finally, you can chat about the importance of acceptance regardless of your gender and how children can be raised to be comfortable in their own skin, not just in their own assigned sex.

The "gender landscape" is rapidly changing. The hope is that, eventually, we will reach a time of acceptance; a time when regardless of your sex or gender, you will be free to do whatever and be whoever makes you feel happy and special.

BE A HAPPY CAMPER WITH YOUR GRANDCHILD



If you attended a camp as a child or teenager, you might remember the meaningful experiences you enjoyed or the long-lasting friendships you forged. You may also yearn to go back to those days of s'mores, sing-alongs, and summer sun. The good news? Just because you are no longer a kid doesn't mean you can't go to camp. There has been a recent increase in the number of opportunities for seniors and teens to attend "grandcamps," or camps just for grandparents and their grandkids to bond. Not only will this allow seniors to once again partake in the fun of a summer camp experience, but it can also allow them to develop stronger relationships with their grandchildren.

Camps are an ideal way for children or teens to experience independence for the first time; grandcamps are no exception because many don't allow parents to come, only grandchildren and their grandparents. Grandcamps are a great way to introduce a child to the idea of going to sleep-away camp in the future. They won't be completely on their own because their grandparents will be there so they will have the comfort of a familiar face. Still, they will be separated from their parents and exposed to what camp is all about. They will also get to truly be themselves, and don't have to worry about the pressure to fit in they might experience at home. At a camp, they can let loose and have a great time. Camps can be just as beneficial for seniors. Going to camp enables them to get a vacation, relax, and revisit some of their old passions. If

you've ever traveled with your grandchildren before and enjoyed yourself, think of camping as another experience to spend some vacation time with your grandkids. The summer before last, I went on a vacation with my grandparents to Alaska. We enjoyed some camp-like activities together including hiking, photography, and nature walks. This experience not only allowed me to experience the beauty of the great state, but it brought me a lot closer to my grandparents. A camp can be just as powerful. Both teens and seniors will be able to spend some meaningful time together and bond over fun and interesting camp activities. Camp will also give both generations the opportunity to make new friends of both ages.

Now it's time to decide which camp sounds right for you and your grandchild. Luckily, there are plenty of options to choose from, each with unique activities and focuses. For nature and sports lovers, Sierra Club's Just for Grandparents and Grandkids, which gives campers opportunities to hike, skate, swim, and more could be the perfect fit. For a historical experience, a stay at Historical Virginia camp could be a blast; campers can actually weave baskets and cook over an open hearth while enjoying colonial music. More of an artsy type? At Sagamore Summer Camp's "Grand Camp," attendees can create crafts, barn dance, and participate in music programs and talent shows. Some universities including the University of Wisconsin, Michigan State University, and Winona State University in Minnesota offer a slightly different type of grandcamp, in which campers can stay in university housing and take classes together. If you are a person of faith, some church camps even offer grandparent-grandchild experiences and are less expensive than some other camps. Doing a search online for other grandcamps in the area can help you find the perfect option for yourself and your grandchildren.

Don't have grandkids? You can still enjoy a "homemade" camp experience by camping out in your backyard with a friend or other young family member and planning some fun activities; perhaps roasting marshmallows, bird-watching or star-gazing, and telling ghost stories. Regardless, enjoy the opportunity that a grandcamp, official or homemade, gives you to get closer with a member of the younger generation.

COMMUNICATING ACROSS THE GENERATIONS



Psychologist and author Rollo May once said, "communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing." Yet, in an age where the Internet has blurred

the lines between what is and is not considered interaction, what is communication really? The technical definition of the word is “the imparting or exchanging of information or news; social contact,” yet as May indicated in his quote, it is so much more than that. Communication is complex in its mediums and can have profound effects on those united by it.

Communication has experienced massive innovations throughout the years. Where once humans could only communicate face-to-face or via written letters, the invention of telegraphs, telephones, email, instant messaging, texting, video chat applications, and social media have forever altered what it means to interact with others. Generation Y (those born between 1977 and 1995, Millennials) are known as the first digital generation. Meanwhile, Baby Boomers are known for their value of face-to-face communication.

The generations often clash over their chosen methods of communication, yet there are pros and cons to each. Social media allows a message to reach a broad audience with ease. Users are able to connect with others even if there is a distance barrier or time difference. Additionally, users can view other people’s messages and profiles with just a few clicks, making it easy to retrieve information instantly, and have the ability to revise a message, meaning that an enraged response can be modified to a calmer reply as the user has time to reflect and edit. Meanwhile, negatives include a potential lack of privacy, inability to remove information that has already been posted, and opportunity for cyberbullying (online bullying allowing the oppressor to remain anonymous).

Face-to-face communication possesses an equal number of pros and cons. This type of communication often allows individuals to have a more dynamic conversation, with facial expressions as opposed to emojis (digital icons used to symbolize expressions and ideas) and the ability to listen to the tone and octave of the voice; as a result, there is a smaller chance of misunderstanding meaning. It inspires closer and stronger relationships whereas those on social media may be two dimensional. Yet face-to-face communication makes it impossible to connect with those far away and severely limits the extent to which a message can be spread. It takes a longer time for the communication to take place which can be a major problem in a dire situation where information is needed instantaneously.

So, which is better and who is right? The answer: both. Regardless of the chosen method of communication, communication itself is essential. While utilization of face-to-face communication and more modern means of communication can be prudent or not depending upon the situation, communication itself is always prudent. Human beings have an innate need for connection. We crave social interaction and thrive when we are surrounded by friends and loved ones. The best way to acquire these relationships? Communication. Whether it is gathering the courage to say “hello” to the new kid at school or creating a profile on an online dating app, taking the step to put yourself out there and interact with others is fundamentally necessary for human happiness and health. Studies show that a lack of social stimulation can lead to an

excessive release of stress hormones, intense sadness, heightened blood pressure, and hindered learning and memory capabilities.

To use this information to your advantage, get in touch with your teenage friend. You can discuss the ways in which communication has changed and debate which method is more effective or preferable to you. While doing this, aim to keep an open mind; whether or not you agree, you should respect each other's opinions and values. Afterward, you can talk about the impact of human connection and test out your theory by going out to do something fun. The most important thing is to interact with others, no matter how you do it. Hopefully, this column has been an effective way of communicating that message.

CONSIDER A SECOND CAREER IN CHILDCARE



Fed up with the inflexibility of the typical public-school curriculum and passionate about working with children, PJ Lents of Palo Alto founded the Periwinkle School, a young fives and transitional kindergarten program for small children that operates in her own home. Referring to her rebellion against the lack of creativity and accommodation in many schools, Lents remarked, laughing, “I was raised when people were rebelling against things...and I’m really good at it!”

“Really good” may be an understatement – the Periwinkle School has been running successfully for fourteen years and is enabling the personality and creativity of each student to shine through. Now 62, Lents is in charge of the entire program --writing the school’s curriculum, teaching, bookkeeping, enrollment, correspondence between the school and parents, etc. “If you take a school and boil it down to everything that needs to be done in terms of administration and classroom,” explained Lents, “I do all that stuff.”

However, establishing the school, while doable, required a lot of work. Lents had to get licensed under a home daycare, get her home inspected, take classes regarding how to run a home-based program, get insurance, purchase supplies and furnishings, get an accountant to handle taxes, and more. Despite the sheer enormity of these tasks, Lents looks back on them with fondness. “It wasn’t complicated once I had a checklist to work from. I absolutely adore what I do – it’s so much fun! It’s just so charming to watch kids really bloom.”

Lents' story is only one example of many of how older adults can have meaningful intergenerational childcare experiences. Many other examples have been illustrated by Joy Zhang and Madeline Dangerfield-Cha. These two MBA students at the Stanford Graduate School of Business spent the summer of 2017 researching intergenerational models of childcare. The fruit of their labor is a paper entitled, "MAKING THE CASE FOR INTERGENERATIONAL CHILDCARE: How Adults 50+ Can Support Home-Based and Family Childcare Centers." From Zhang and Dangerfield-Cha's research, one thing is clear: for older adults who aspire to enter the childcare field, there are a world of possibilities to discover.

Start a home daycare or school: Lents' childcare experience was one of the childcare models studied by Zhang and Dangerfield-Cha, and they advocate that other seniors follow in Lents' footsteps. As proven by Lents, anyone can start a daycare center or pre-K program in their home, and this is a great way to follow one's passion for working with children. However, Zhang warned – and it can be inferred from the myriad of tasks Lents had to complete to start Periwinkle – that starting a school or daycare center is not for the faint-hearted. "It's an emotionally, financially, and mentally exhausting task – it is essentially starting a small business – but it is also really rewarding," she explained.

Jumpstart Community Corps: For those uninterested in becoming a business owner, become a volunteer instead. If one is willing to put in the time – up to 12 hours a week – Jumpstart Community Corps, a program based in Washington, DC, in which community volunteers assist young children in a classroom setting, could be the perfect fit. After undergoing training, volunteers partake in activities such as assisting with snack time, helping instructors with children's activities, teaching the children to read and write, and engaging them in outdoor games. To learn more or to apply for a volunteer position, visit Jumpstart's website at <https://www.jstart.org/our-work/corps-members/> or contact Vida Awasom, Jumpstart's Community & Partnerships Manager, at the email vida.awasom@jstart.org or the phone number (202) 223-7050.

Interages: Other fantastic volunteer opportunities can be found at the JCA Heyman Interages Center. The JCA has a variety of programs that connect seniors with kids – such as Dialogues Across the Ages, Grandreaders, and Intergenerational Bridges – in which seniors work with children in Montgomery County, Maryland to improve reading skills and share conversation. Read "Interages Brings the Generations Together" in the September 2017 edition of The Beacon to learn more. It can be accessed at www.thebeaconnewspapers.com/interages-brings-the-generations-together. For further information, visit www.accessjca.org/programs/interages or call (301) 949-3551.

College courses: Interested in getting some more formal education about childcare? Have you always wanted to work with children for your career? Then consider going back to school for your early education degree. Dangerfield-Cha explained, "We've seen people who have finished careers as bookkeepers or accountants and then are starting their early ed certificates at a

community college and are planning to become teachers in preschool classrooms.” Some schools in DC, Maryland, and Virginia offer programs for senior citizens to do so. Georgetown University’s Senior Citizen Non-Degree Auditor Program, the University of Maryland’s Golden ID program, and the University of Virginia’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies, for example, enable older adults to take university courses. Visit the schools’ websites to learn more, see if there is a course that interests you, or apply. Georgetown:

<https://scs.georgetown.edu/departments/33/senior-citizen-non-degree-auditor-program/>,

Maryland: <http://registrar.umd.edu/current/registration/golden-id.html>, Virginia:

<https://www.scps.virginia.edu/uploads/seniorwaiver.pdf>. You can also talk to the staff at your local community college to see if they have any programs that may behoove you. If these options are inconvenient, you can always take classes online. Ashford University and Liberty University offer online early education courses that may help interested seniors to achieve their childcare-related goals without having to physically travel to class.

Grandmas2Go: An Oregon-based program, Grandmas2Go employs women 50 and above to serve as mentors or “grandmother-figures” to babies and young kids. Members essentially act as babysitters, caring for children in the child’s home. While this program does not currently exist in the DMV area, that doesn’t mean it never will...and you could be the one to pioneer a similar organization! After receiving some training (i.e. CPR, basic childcare, etc.) you can advertise your babysitting services to those in your community and volunteer to care for their children. To learn more about Grandmas2Go’s mission or to donate to their cause, visit their website, <https://grandmas2go.org/>.

Generations Together: As a middle schooler, I created a club called Generations Together in which participants visit a local retirement community and engage the residents in various activities. You can do something similar by reaching out to your local retirement community and elementary school to see if they would be interested in establishing a partnership; that’s a wonderful way to interact with children and promote intergenerational relationships.

Miscellaneous: Besides the suggestions mentioned above, Zhang and Dangerfield-Cha suggest other methods of participating in childcare. A few of the ideas mentioned in their paper and blog post include starting an intergenerational community garden, initiating sporting events between local kids and seniors, offering to be a “playground helper,” or volunteering in preschool classrooms. Read and access Joy Zhang and Madeline Dangerfield-Cha’s paper (<https://encore.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/IGChildcarephotos-1.pdf>) and blog (<https://encore.org/blogs/10-ways-can-support-early-childhood-education/>) to learn more.

Regardless of which path you pursue to become involved in childcare, take PJ Lents’ message to heart: “I would highly recommend what I do. If you have the energy to [take part in the childcare field], then it’s absolutely doable. It takes a lot of time...but it is really interesting and fun!” she concluded with a smile.

LEARNING EARLY TO REVERE ELDERLY IN JAPAN



In one of my earliest columns published in *The Beacon*, “A pen pal can bring a lifetime of benefits,” I discussed the advantages of having a pen pal. When one of my close friends, Sakiko Miyazaki, moved to Japan from the US, I decided to take my own advice, and for two years have been keeping in touch with her via email. From comparing school days, to discussing summer plans, to swapping book recommendations, our correspondence has been a blast. One topic that we have particularly enjoyed exploring is one of the most significant differences she noticed between Japan and the United States: the way that older adults are viewed in society. I recently interviewed her to learn more about this cultural distinction.

In a country that is as technologically and medically advanced as Japan, individuals are able to live exceptionally long lives. In fact, Japan has one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world. In large part, this contributes to Japan’s notoriety for respecting their elders. Another reason for this cultural value is Japan’s rich history. “Japan,” Sakiko explained, “has a really interesting history because it has been influenced by so many countries over hundreds of years. It has been influenced heavily by China, and in China, respect for the elderly is viewed as something all children should have.” This emphasis on respect for older adults has thus become integrated into Japanese culture and continues to manifest itself today, for example in Japanese teenagers, who view the elderly as wise and experienced. “Many teens go through a rebellious phase,” Sakiko admitted, chuckling, “but I feel like when it comes to the elderly they take a step back. The unconscious action [of treating our elders with respect] has been ingrained into us from a young age as we watch our parents and others in our community. So, doing things out of respect for the elderly is almost in our blood.”

A perfect example of this “unconscious action” is one that is outrageously simple and yet has a profound impact on the elders in the community: giving up one’s seat on public transportation for use by an older adult. “What I love about Japan is that in public transportation, there are actually sections on the bus or train designated for the elderly,” elaborated Sakiko. “Younger people can sit there, but if an elderly person enters the train, we will stand up for them to sit. It creates a culture of not just respect, but kindness.” Teens in particular, according to Sakiko, are enthusiastic about showing respect for their elders. “On the public transportation system, teenagers will go out of their way to ensure that the elderly have a seat. I knew that [practice] existed since I was little, but I don’t think I ever appreciated how much it meant to the people on the trains until I moved to Japan after living in the US.” Besides random interactions

both literally and figuratively on the street, Japanese teens connect with senior citizens in their communities. “We have a lot of opportunities [to interact with older adults]. For example, some schools visit elderly homes, and the teens involved are passionate about showing that they care.”

In addition to the platonic bonds between teens and elders in Japanese society, the familial bonds between grandparent and grandchild are strong. “Japanese grandchildren are often very close to their grandparents, sometimes even closer than to their parents! Parents tell you what to do, but grandparents’ rules are a little looser...kids will sometimes suck up to their grandparents to get something like an ice cream,” Sakiko revealed, laughing.

Sharing one of her personal experiences with her grandparents, Sakiko remembered fondly, “Whenever I go to visit my grandparents’ house, I play the piano for them. Playing for them has become a tradition seeing that my maternal grandparents love music and have passed that love down to me. I always enjoy seeing them; they have all these stories and values, and we’ve created our own culture within our family.” This family culture is quite common in Japan. “It is almost universal in Japan for families to get together during the holidays and celebrate. In fact, there are a huge number of examples where adult children will move to Tokyo to work but then come back home for New Years – which is huge in Japan – to spend time with their elderly parents. The grandkids grow up doing that, so when it is their turn to move away, they make sure to do the same.” Based on this, it is clear that children, whether teenage or adult, care deeply for their elderly family members. Sakiko confirmed this, noting that “there is a household appliance company that created an app with the intention of ensuring the safety of older family members; when elderly family members use their products, their younger family can see it. This way, their family can ensure that they are safe and going about their daily lives as usual.”

Thanks to a plethora of rich culture and values, the relationship between teens and the elderly in Japan can be a truly special thing to behold. Sakiko agreed, saying, “It could be as simple as me holding the door for [an elder]. They are really appreciative and say ‘thank you,’ and it’s just our own really special moment. It makes you feel good because you know that you did something to make someone’s day.”

Have your own special moment with a teenage friend. You can compare and contrast similarities and differences between the attitudes toward and societal values regarding senior citizens in American and Japanese culture, as well as look into how the elderly are viewed in other countries. Maybe even plan a trip to Japan to see for yourself!

EATING DISORDERS CAN EAT AWAY AT ALL OF US



Have you ever glanced into a mirror, given yourself a once-over, and thought, *I hate the way my body looks*? Imagine feeling this way every day of your life.

Whether it's anorexia, bulimia, or binge-eating, eating disorders can have a profound and dangerous impact on one's health. In fact, an estimated ten million men and 20 million women in the United States experience a "clinically significant" eating disorder in their lives according to the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA). The most common forms of eating disorders, as mentioned above, include: anorexia nervosa, a disorder in which one has a fear of gaining weight and distorted perception of their appearance; bulimia nervosa, a disorder in which people consume a sizable meal only to purge it from their system in unhealthy ways; and binge-eating disorder, in which affected individuals have a compulsion to eat unusually large quantities of food. People may contract these disorders as a result of a combination of factors: societal standards and the emphasis of the media on the "perfect body," feelings of low self-esteem or loneliness, depression or anxiety, or desire for a coping mechanism or something that can provide them with a feeling of control. Regardless of the reason, eating disorders are exceptionally harmful. Anorexia and bulimia can cause an extreme loss of weight, kidney problems, bone loss, and heart failure, while binge-eating can lead to diabetes, heart disease, and some variations of cancer. In teens, some red flags potentially indicative of eating disorders include skipping meals, making excuses to pass up on an eating, obsession over dieting and exercise, persistent complaining about being overweight, abusing laxatives and other drugs after eating, eating massive amounts of food in one sitting, or frequenting the restroom immediately after meals.

However, although these conditions are commonly associated with youth, their reach actually extends much farther than those aged 15 to 30. While often unfocused on, older adults are just as susceptible to contracting an eating disorder as teens and young adults, and, in some ways, these conditions can become even more life-threatening for those of the older generation. The primary issue is that many of the characteristic symptoms of eating disorders (i.e changes in behavior such as using the bathroom after eating a meal, sensitivity to cold, loss of hair, gastrointestinal, heart, or dental problems, desire to eat alone rather than with friends, etc.) are akin to those commonly linked to the aging process – older adults may have a hindered ability to maintain an adequate diet due to functional problems, and may require medication that causes nausea, allowing these tell-tale signs to slip by undetected.

Professor Bulik, the founding director of the University of North Carolina Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders, expanded on this notion in an article from *Medical News Today*: "We have seen cases of laxative abuse in assisted care facilities, where they often hand laxatives out like candy, but the patients clearly had eating disorders and were using laxatives to purge. We have seen cases of anorexia motivated by beliefs that caloric restriction will extend life." In fact, adopting an eating disorder can lead to the exact opposite effect; with less resilient body systems due to age, a lack of proper nutrition can abrade these systems at an alarming rate.

If you or a loved one are being influenced by an eating disorder, it is imperative that you seek treatment immediately. Secure a medical checkup and talk to a doctor about how best to address the situation. Treatment commonly consists of therapy and medication if accompanying symptoms such as depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder are present.

Work with your teenage friend to discuss the effects of eating disorders on the body, mind, and soul. Together, you can discuss body image and consider the mixed-up messages the media sends about body type acceptability. Talk about sustainable eating habits and perhaps even compose a “healthy meals plan” to brainstorm nutritious and delicious food options.

Finally, remember that you are beautiful, regardless of your body type – never feel pressured to transform yourself into something you are not.

BULLYING CAN AFFECT OLDER ADULTS, TOO



What do you think of when you hear the term “bullying?” Perhaps you envision a small child being beaten up by an older boy on the school playground or a group of middle school girls gossiping about the “nerdy” kid in class. However, as much as the media may convince us otherwise, bullying isn’t limited to these scenarios. In fact, bullying is not experienced solely by the younger generation; it can impact any person of any age, at any time, and in a wide variety of ways. As a result, it is an action that it is essential to understand and to prevent.

The currently accepted definition of bullying according to the Centers for Disease Control and Department of Education is “unwanted aggressive behavior; observed or perceived power imbalance; and repetition of behaviors or high likelihood of repetition.” This definition additionally acknowledges two modes by which such cruelty can occur: direct bullying, or, bullying that takes place in the presence of the victim, and indirect bullying, or, bullying such as gossiping that does not take place in front of the targeted individual. As well as these two modes, there are four types of bullying: physical, verbal, relational (attempts to destroy the reputation or relationships of the victim), and damage to property. Cyberbullying has also been gaining acknowledgement as a serious form of bullying in which aggressors target their victims via the Internet and cell phone correspondence.

A large part of the reason why you may have initially visualized a child or teenager as the culprit and/or victim of the initially described bullying situation is because bullying is quite common among youth. Up to one in three students in the United States claim to have been

bullied at school. Specifically, 28% of U.S. students in grades 6–12 experienced bullying and 20% of U.S. students in grades 9–12 were victimized. Child or teenage bullies may choose to behave in this manner due to a desire for power, popularity, or in response to arbitrary prejudice or peer pressure. They may bully others by excluding, spreading rumors, verbally disparaging, or even physically wounding them.

Still, the immaturity of a bully doesn't necessarily fade with age. Many older adults and senior citizens have also been victims – or perpetrators – of hostility. Information collected from various nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and senior centers throughout the nation corroborates this notion. According to the Department of Health and Services' Administration on Aging, there were 2,793 complaints of elderly resident-to-resident abuse in long-term care facilities – and this was in 2008 alone. Based on this information, it is approximated that up to one in five older adults have experienced bullying, which isn't too far off from the number of estimated youths bullied. Many older adults may find themselves reverting to this immature behavior due to physical pain, fear, loneliness, or vulnerability. Generally, the bullying exhibited by these older adults often takes on the form of exclusion, rumors, verbal abuse, and, in extreme cases, even physical abuse. Sound familiar? Clearly, not much has changed since high school for many of these individuals.

Therefore, it isn't much of a shock that, regardless of age, bullying can have a severely negative impact on victims' lives. It can lead to enhanced feelings of isolation, terror, and anxiety and could even lead to suicidal thoughts or actions. This is why it is so essential that those being bullied – as well as those who are bullying – get help...from you. Despite the prevalence of bullying in today's society, there are a myriad of things that people, younger and older, can do to keep bullies at bay.

First, if you are an observer of bullying, also known as a bystander, intervening on behalf of the victim can dramatically improve unsatisfactory conditions. The most effective way to do so is as follows: do not provoke the bully, but look them directly in the eye and politely ask them to stop. This method is simple, but it works; bystander intervention has been shown to stop bullies 50% of the time. In response to bullying toward kids, parents – and grandparents – can participate in preventing hostility by having discussions with their children and grandchildren about the negative impact of bullying, their responsibility to speak up if they witness bullying, and the importance of spreading love rather than hate. In fact, having these kinds of discussions can be just as applicable to the senior community. Having open conversations between residents or clients of senior centers, retirement communities, etc., working to develop a code of conduct intolerant of bullying, and providing services such as confidential bullying reporting processes or counseling is another step toward stopping the bullying. As well, never be afraid to speak to a trusted adult; for kids, this may mean a parent, teacher, or counselor, while for older adults it could be someone like a staff member or boss.

You and your younger friend can work together to advocate for anti-bullying in your community. Have a discussion with them about bullying as outlined above. Take time to brainstorm strategies about how to handle cruelty from peers. You can also consider the psychological impact bullying can have on one's psyche and why some individuals may feel the need to talk down to others.

Bullying is not something to be taken lightly. Be sure to do your part to prevent it in your community.

THE PRESSURES BEAUTY STANDARDS IMPOSE



They say that you should never judge a book by its cover...but that's exactly what people do every day. Our society has outlined a blanket definition for what qualifies as "beautiful." It is likely that you know this definition by heart: women should be equipped with shiny, long hair, dark eyelashes, and a slim waist, while men should be tall, lean, and muscular. These physical standards are echoed by the photoshopped images we see in magazines, flawless celebrities featured in popular movies, and the beauty queens that have risen to fame on various social media sites such as Instagram and YouTube. Beyond selling products that supposedly enable people to "improve their appearance," beauty companies also sell a lifestyle; they tell us that only if we can alter our natural looks to resemble one of the gorgeous individuals pictured in fashion magazines (which, apparently, we should all aspire to do) can we attain the same fame, recognition, and happiness. And that's just not true.

Still, people buy into the media's message about what is attractive. Teenagers are plagued by pressure to look a certain way. I have observed as many of my peers have struggled to keep up with the ever-changing fashion trends and scrape together what little money they have to purchase the latest "revolutionary" cosmetics. Even I have succumbed to this pressure; I cannot tell you how many mornings I have forced myself out of bed in order to have enough time to straighten my naturally curly hair, just so I could feel pretty and confident. This desire to be considered good-looking isn't limited to teens. A fear of "fading beauty" due to age prompts many older adults to turn to plastic surgery or makeup in an attempt to "remain attractive" or hold onto their youth.

Unfortunately, fear of not conforming to societal standards of beauty is not unfounded. In fact, studies have shown that "beautiful" people are often hired sooner, promoted faster, and

given higher salaries than their “less-attractive” colleagues. In addition, according to University of Texas at Austin professor of economics and author Daniel Hamermesh, attractive people earn roughly three or four percent more than others. People are also more likely to approach stereotypically attractive individuals to ask them out on a date than those who may not be as “good-looking,” and, generally, the ultra-charismatic political candidate is the one that wins our elections.

However, “beautiful” doesn’t have a blanket definition, as much as society attempts to convince us otherwise. Regardless of one’s physical appearance or age, beauty is a fluid concept and is truly in the eye of the beholder. There have been movements to try to dispel the belief that only one type of beauty exists. Dove, the soap company, has launched a self-esteem campaign to try to boost the confidence of young girls, no matter their appearance. They provide materials on their website that enable teachers to host body-image workshops and have beauty-related discussions with their students, and that instruct parents how to raise a self-assured child. The Beauty Becomes You Foundation’s mission is to prevent Failure to Thrive Syndrome which occurs when people are not touched. To do so, the foundation supplies trained volunteers with expertise in geriatric aesthetic health and wellbeing to assist senior citizens with “personal aesthetic care solutions that maintain and improve appearance while lifting self-esteem.” Pop star Rihanna has established a line of cosmetics, Fenty Beauty, in order to provide makeup options for women of all races and skin tones, rather than just the limited shades offered by most beauty brands. These are just a few of the efforts being made to reveal the truth about beauty: that every individual is beautiful and should be confident in their own skin.

You and your younger friend can get together to have a conversation about beauty. What does beautiful mean to each of you? How have standards of beauty evolved during your lifetimes? In what ways have they stayed the same? Work together to be role models for others in your community by being caring, kind, and confident individuals. Only then will society finally get the message: true beauty lies within.

ACTIVE LISTENING BENEFITS ALL GENERATIONS



There was a poster hanging in my eighth-grade health teacher’s classroom that I can still visualize to this day. It read in a brightly-colored font, “‘listen’ and ‘silent’ are spelled with the same letters.” This poster echoes a message that we have been taught – and that we often choose to ignore – from an early age: that merely hearing, or the act of perceiving sound by the ear, doesn’t cut it. Only by actually listening, or concentrating on another’s words and internalizing

their meaning, can we partake in an effective conversation and show respect to our peers – and this goes for individuals of any age.

Can you recall a time that you shared a personal story with a friend and felt a sense of validation as they hung on your every word and asked thoughtful follow-up questions? If so, then you are among the many who appreciate active listening. This communication technique is composed of five stages: receiving a message, understanding it, evaluating it, remembering it, and responding to it. This last stage of responding is of particular importance; by providing feedback or asking relevant questions, the listener reveals to the speaker that they have been paying attention to their narrative, sending the underlying message that they care...and knowing that someone cares feels good.

Since teenagers and senior citizens experience a lack of control within each of their respective stages of life, it is a common sentiment for members of each age group to feel as if they are not being listened to. People often assume that members of these generations are unable to handle themselves completely, and, as a result, teens and seniors can be ignored or have their opinions disregarded. On the flip side, teens may choose not to listen to others, especially to their parents, as a way to declare independence or as a sort of power grab. Seniors, too, crave their own independence, and after years of being an authority figure, may be hesitant to listen to younger folks who are now telling them what is best. However, although all of these scenarios can be frustrating, it is essential that you attempt to be an effective listener, even if you may not agree with the views of the person speaking.

So, how does one become a better listener? There are a few tips and tricks that can be highly impactful when it comes to actively listening. First off, when having a conversation, be sure to make eye contact with the speaker. This indicates that the speaker is your number one priority, and you are not allowing yourself to become distracted by other things. Next, be sure to keep an open mind. If you jump to conclusions about what the speaker is saying, it may compromise your effectiveness as an unbiased listener. As well, try not to be a “sentence-grabber,” someone who finishes people’s sentences before they get the chance to do so themselves. It is important to let the speaker finish their thoughts and not assume a specific conclusion to their sentence – that’s talking, not listening. To maintain focus on what the person is saying, try to picture the information being communicated, and remember key words and phrases; this will enable you to take more from the conversation and follow up with insightful questions. However, don’t take this advice too far and spend the duration of your companion’s story planning what to say next; the speaker may have responded to the question you were planning to ask as you were thinking. Besides these, a few final tips include refraining from interrupting, trying to put yourself in the speaker’s shoes and replicating the emotions they convey through speech on your face (for example, appearing stressed as the person with whom you are talking expresses anxiety about an upcoming deadline or project), and nodding to indicate that you are actively processing what they are saying.

Listening skills are essential, and you and your younger buddy can work together to improve yours and encourage others to actively listen as well. A great way to practice this is to make listening into a game: one of you can tell a story, and the other must see how much detail they can remember. By working to develop your listening abilities, people will likely find you more trustworthy and loyal – after all, the best type of person to say something to is the type that you know will be listening.

FASHION REFLECTS PERSONALITY FOR ALL AGES



The expression, “the only constant is change” is entirely applicable to what is considered fashionable. As society and popular culture evolve, so too do the garments people choose to wear. However, regardless of what styles were in vogue throughout history, one thing remains the same: fashion is a high priority in American society, and this goes for both teens and seniors.

First, it is necessary to clarify the difference between “fashion” and “style” because, while the two words are often used synonymously, they are by no means the same thing. “Fashion” is a trend often made popular by prominent celebrities and can include anything from clothing, to hairstyles, to accessories and footwear. Meanwhile, “style” has a more personal definition; it is how individuals choose to present themselves – how they dress, how they arrange their hair, etc. – and while their final looks may or may not be similar to what is currently deemed fashionable, they are typically reflective of their unique personalities.

At an age where a desire to fit in tends to trump all else, fashion is often considered important by teenagers. Dressing similarly to one’s peers can inspire a sense of acceptance – you can feel confident in what you are wearing because you already know it is widely accepted as fashionable. This idea is referred to as “mirroring.” In a *Psychology Today* article penned by Stephanie Newman, this concept is explained as follows: “If someone feels unsure but sees him or herself reflected back in another’s appearance – say in identical clothing – that person feels pumped up, less insecure...when adolescent[s] see aspects of themselves mirrored in their peers, they get an ego boost and feel less vulnerable.” Sometimes, however, mirroring backfires: I have often seen people at my school wearing the exact same shirt because it was displayed on the mannequin at a trendy shop in the mall. In addition, it can put arbitrary pressure on teens to dress a certain way or to purchase items only sold by a specific brand or store.

Simultaneously, although it may seem contradictory, teens' clothing choices are one of their earliest steps toward independence and differentiating themselves. No longer do their parents pick out clothing for them – they can express themselves in any way they wish. As I have gotten older, I have especially enjoyed experimenting with different looks, some based on what is shown in catalogs, and some based on what I feel comfortable and confident in. I also love to mix and match popular fashion with my own style, for example wearing a fashionable jean skirt with a graphic tee boasting the name of my favorite band. The elements of my outfit ultimately combine to reflect my personality, and the ability to control that is liberating. Teens use social media platforms, primarily Instagram, to debut their styles, many of which take on and are replicated by teens everywhere.

What many neglect to consider, however, is that senior citizens can be just as impacted by – and influential in – fashion as teenagers and young adults. Older adults can be susceptible to mirroring as well (though perhaps not to the same extent as teens) and enjoy putting together their own unique looks which often reflect both modern trends as well as styles popular when they were growing up. In addition, of late, many fashion companies are recruiting older models to set trends. The idea is that these 60-plus-aged models will inspire not only members of the fashion-obsessed younger generations, but also their own peers. A perfect example is 64-year-old Lyn Slater who is better known by her Instagram username, “Accidental Icon.” This inspiring fashion blogger and model has been hired by companies such as Uniqlo for advertising campaigns due to her blog's extreme success and her influence within the fashion industry. Slater proves that baby-boomers can shape the fashion game.

Discuss the ways in which fashion has changed over time with your teenage friend. What styles do you like the most? Which are your least favorite? Which decade's trends do you believe have been the most impactful in the fashion industry? You can also consider the impact of mirroring and the pressures of looking a certain way. Together, you can also create your own styles. Go shopping together and compile looks that are fun, glamorous, and uniquely you. Don't forget to take pictures when you are done!

SOCIAL MEDIA: THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY



There are few things more characteristic of the 21st century – or more controversial – than social media. Whether it's catching up with old friends on Facebook, watching video after video on YouTube, or posting a new selfie on Instagram, social media has dominated our lives.

And given its undeniable presence and impact, it is essential that we consider its benefits, drawbacks, and the unfortunate stereotypes that its use perpetuates.

Let's start by clarifying the meaning of "social media." This term includes any "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)" according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. This would include such apps and sites as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and more.

Many are quick to write off social media as destructive and dangerous. But these individuals neglect social media's many benefits. Communicating with others online has been shown to help individuals develop better social skills and feel less isolated. My own personal experience has taught me that this can indeed be the case: after coming home from summer camp, social media has allowed me to stay in touch with my friends who live miles away. And this notion can be especially relevant to seniors: As corroborated by Sunrise Senior Living's website, "one of the most advantageous aspects of social media for senior citizens is that it allows them to communicate with loved ones who live in other parts of the world. They are able to chat with friends or family in group messages, enabling both parties to check in on the other and have peace of mind knowing everyone is healthy and happy." However, for many, social media can go even deeper when it comes to combating isolation. For instance, an LGBTQ+ individual can connect with others who are also a part of that community online, making them feel as if they are not alone. One can also be exposed to new cultural and societal ideas and issues. Logging onto Facebook or Instagram, one is often bombarded with news clips and current events. Even though the reporting on many of these social media sites may not be the most credible, it still serves to alert users to what is going on in the world, and can often influence them to do further research on more reputable sites. And social media can serve as a platform to promote positivity and spread ideas. A topical example is the #NeverAgain movement on Twitter, led by American students fighting for increased gun control.

Still, this doesn't mean that social media is perfect; in fact, it's far from it. Spending too much time online can lead to disconnect with the real world. I've seen this occurring in my own life as well: there have been several times when I've arrived at lunch at school only to find my friends ignoring one another, immersed in the world behind their screens. Social media can also lead to the development of poor body image and self-esteem. This frequently stems from the fact that many users post only the most flattering, aesthetically pleasing images of themselves, creating the illusion that their bodies and lives are perfect and making viewers feel like failures by comparison. In fact, according to *HuffPost*, "60% of people using social media reported that it has impacted their self-esteem in a negative way." And then, of course, there's cyber-bullying. Teen girls in particular are at risk of being victimized, but teen boys, adults, and senior citizens are not immune. This type of bullying can have profoundly detrimental effects, ranging from depression to anxiety, to suicidal thoughts and actions. And, with 2020 soon approaching, how can I not mention the role social media has played of late in the political sphere? Russian

hacking, propaganda, and Twitter storms have been in the public eye in recent days, reminding us that social media can negatively impact our political as well as personal lives. With this in mind, seniors and teens alike must aim to stay vigilant and exercise critical thinking skills when balancing social media with political messages.

Still, beyond the good and bad about social media, we must also consider the ugly: stereotypes we frequently make about social media and technology use. You know the ones I'm talking about: "all teens are obsessed with their phones" and "anyone over the age of sixty has no clue how to use social media." I can still remember a time when, after the end of my shift at work one summer, I was approached by an older man who told me that if I didn't get off my phone, I might turn into one. I respectfully nodded and acknowledged him, but I remember feeling hurt by his comment; I, in fact, have very little social media presence and had just wanted to quickly check my emails. Similarly, I remember feeling aggravated when a friend of mine made a comment about how annoyed she was that her grandparents had no idea how to use a smartphone. It wasn't fair for her to fault her grandparents whom, unlike her, had not been born into a technological world. With these anecdotes in mind, I ask that, regardless of your level of familiarity or comfort with social media, you please remember the importance of putting an end to these harmful stereotypes.

Another great way to prevent these stereotypes from being made is to defy them, point blank. For those interested in becoming more technologically fluent, there are plenty of programs in which teens help older adults learn how to use technology and social media! In addition, you may want to consider contacting your local library, senior center, or recreational center to see if they offer any tech courses for seniors.

Social media is a complex animal. Having conversations about its merits and drawbacks is extremely important to understanding it. It is my belief that making said conversations intergenerational will diminish use of stereotypes like the ones I've listed above. When you next interact with your younger friends, I encourage you to partake in this kind of dialogue, and work together to secure a more technologically safe and aware future.

ISSUES FACING THE SANDWICH GENERATION



In my previous columns, I have talked a lot about the younger and older generations. However, there is another generation that I have not discussed that very much deserves to be recognized: the sandwich generation.

The sandwich generation is so named because members of that generation are the “filling” between the younger and older generations. As such, they must balance the responsibilities of caring for their children and their aging parents, a task that can be quite challenging. After all, juggling work, relationships, childcare, and parental care coalesce to create a rather long to-do list.

Claudia Fine, LCSW, MPH, CMC, is the executive vice president and chief professional officer at the professional geriatric care management company, SeniorBridge. She attested to the rigor of a sandwich generation lifestyle, explaining that “these kinds of stressors contribute to mental health problems and physical problems, such as hypertension, overeating, being too busy to exercise and simply not attending to [one’s] own needs.”

I have seen firsthand how members of the sandwich generation attempt to balance their equally pressing responsibilities of care for their children and parents in the context of my own family. I have observed my mother as she made time to attend my school functions and help me with math homework only to race over to check on my grandparents’ condominium while they were away on vacation or visit my grandfather in the hospital. At the same time, she is swamped with work and needs to care for her own needs.

“I am fortunate,” my mom admitted to me, “that even though I am in the sandwich generation, grandma and grandpa are relatively healthy and you are not a little kid; you’re independent. What’s hard is that you are not driving, so I have to manage my schedule and your schedule and get you where you need to be. When there is an issue with grandma or grandpa, it can be very difficult to deal with.” She continued, saying, “the biggest issue on top of all that is that I am an only child and I don’t have siblings to share the load. So, I have to make sure that if I go to the hospital to be there for my dad or help grandma, that you are covered. I can’t be in multiple places at once and that’s hard.” My grandmother agreed, elaborating, “Your mother and I can truly relate to each other because both of us have been the middle part of the sandwich. When your mom was little, I was in the middle dealing with her and my parents. When my parents got older, it became harder to keep that balance. The tricky part comes when both “pieces of bread” are needy at the same time. You end up having to prioritize and sometimes that’s really challenging. Then you may also be working, so you’ve got your kids, work, and parents that you’re forced to juggle. When everybody needs you...that’s the tough part.” She also commends my mom for handling her role as the caregiver so well. “Your grandfather and I have always been made to feel that we are important. Your mother recognizes that we can be independent, yet when we need help, she’s available,” she explained gratefully.

With all of this responsibility and, at times, stress, it is essential that members of the sandwich generation accept help from siblings, significant others, professional caretakers,

doctors, etc. to manage the care of parents and children. Fine suggested that if individuals of this generation feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities, they should seek the counseling of an eldercare professional to reduce stress and improve care for their parents. “A geriatric care manager looks at the entire constellation of factors that contribute to problems and stressors and considers each individual’s assets and strengths...and can link you to the right resources, and ultimately partner with you to coordinate them,” Fine said. In addition, it is advised that members of the sandwich generation proactively consider potential aging-related conflicts that may afflict their parents. For example, they could hire a professional to do a home assessment to ensure conditions that will decrease the likelihood of a parent tripping, have someone manage a parent’s medication, arrange bill pay before parents become victims of financial abuse, etc.

So, how is this information applicable to the younger and older generations? Many of the issues faced by kids and older adults that the sandwich generation members struggle to balance parallel each other. For instance, the individual must handle their young child’s desire to gain more freedom while managing their older parent’s resistance to loss of freedom, transport both their kids and parents from place to place, manage doctors’ appointments and checkups for both parties, and much more. You and a younger buddy can brainstorm some of these similarities and recognize that you may have more in common than you thought. Most importantly, however, together you can take time to express appreciation for the help and devotion of the “sandwichers” in your life. Don’t resist working with professionals – not only will it benefit you, it will allow those struggling to manage care of kids and parents to take a breath – and perhaps come up with ways that you could help to alleviate some of the pressure your sandwiched caregiver feels to do it all. Take the time to express your gratitude for all that they do to be the “filling” that holds your “family sandwich” together.

MONEY MANAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT FOR ALL



Over the summer, I had the incredible opportunity to study across the pond at Oxford University. I would approximate that I spent roughly 75% of my money on Moo-Moo’s milkshakes. Perhaps not the most intelligent budgeting on my part, but, what can I say? Those milkshakes were heavenly. However, my escapades in England exemplify just how essential it is to be well-versed in the art of money management. And it seems that I am not alone in my lack of financial expertise: Bills.com, a financial services website, cites the NY Federal Reserve’s 2018 Q4 Household Report which estimates that, “...total household debt increased by \$32 billion (0.2%) to \$13.54 trillion in the fourth quarter of 2018...Furthermore, overall household

debt is now 21.4% above the post-financial-crisis trough reached during the second quarter of 2013.” It is evident from these statistics that many Americans need to work on their budgeting abilities. This is a crucial skill regardless of one’s stage of life; after all, we all use money on virtually a daily basis, and seniors and teens each face their own unique monetary challenges.

If you are over the age of 65 and retired, you’re likely well-acquainted with the widespread problems relating to Social Security, paying for health-related services, and having limited income. In addition, a lesser-cited, yet prevalent problem faced by older adults is debt from student loans; many members of the baby boomer generation are currently experiencing financial difficulties over co-signed or borrowed student loans for their children and grandchildren. In fact, roughly 2.2 million Americans over the age of 60 have co-signed student loans for their offspring, making them responsible for the debts their children were unable to pay. These types of monetary plight only scratch the surface of what senior citizens experience as they struggle to manage money today.

But fear not: there are several tips and tricks for seniors that will help you to manage your money strategically. Doing simple things like shredding receipts, bank statements, and unused credit card offers before throwing them away, locking up checkbooks and account statements when in the company of others, and keeping personal information such as one’s Social Security number a secret are easy ways to ensure financial security. It is imperative to consult with financial advisors, attorneys, or your banker – with whom you should attempt to build a strong relationship – before signing documents you do not understand or making major financial decisions. Seniors are also often the victims of financial scams, a topic I wrote a previous column on. This makes it crucial for older adults to be vigilant at all times; do not click on suspicious advertisements or supposed lottery winnings, as they are likely scams.

Money can also be a source of stress for teens. Adolescents are at the age when they are beginning to take on financial responsibility for themselves. As children, many teens are able to rely on their parents to purchase things for them. However, upon becoming a teenager, many parents expect their children to get jobs and pay for themselves. My parents, for instance, strongly encouraged me to get a job when I turned 16, and require me to pay for most of my non-essential, miscellaneous expenses such as movie tickets and lunch outings with friends. But because teens do not boast much financial experience, they often struggle with money management, a skill that will become increasingly important as they age and become independent.

The most important lesson for teenagers to learn is how to budget and to spend less than they earn. This can be a challenging task for teens eager to buy the latest video game or go on a shopping spree with friends. An effective way to prevent teens from using their money inappropriately is to encourage them to divide it into sections: “spend,” “save,” and “give.” This may help them to avoid blowing all of their savings on a single item. It is also wise to teach teens how to use a credit card and how to pay the check at dinner early on. By instilling healthy

financial habits in teens, it is far more likely that they will be intelligent spenders and savers in the future.

They say that money makes the world go round. Whether or not this is truly the case, it certainly plays a major role in all of our lives. Take advantage of this commonality the next time you interact with your younger friend. Together, you can discuss some of the previously mentioned strategies for money management. Talk about the importance of effectively budgeting your money and brush up on tips to avoid scams. And maybe, to celebrate your newfound monetary knowledge, you can buy yourself a special treat – perhaps a milkshake.

CREATIVITY: IT CAN GET BETTER WITH AGE



I have been writing for *The Beacon* for six years now. But I have been writing stories almost from the time I could pick up a pen. My first recorded story, or so I'm told, was about a magical butterfly that could travel around the world in a matter of seconds. Perhaps not the most plausible of plotlines, but it serves as evidence of my early creativity. However, as familiar as we are with the look of wonder in a child's eyes, we are likely just as accustomed to the dull, unimaginative adult trope.

Popular culture often leads us to believe that once one has reached the age of twelve, one loses any semblance of creativity and becomes hardened and primed for the harsh, cold reality of life. This is, however, an exaggeration and a falsehood. True, with age comes maturity and an understanding of the workings of the broader world. But that doesn't mean that imagination must be sacrificed. In fact, it is very possible – and highly beneficial – to stay creative for the entirety of one's life.

However, this begs the question: why should one strive to hold onto creativity? What purpose does it serve? And how does its application differ for teenagers and senior citizens?

The propensity to be creative holds extreme value for older adults. The innovative mindset is, in fact, quite similar to the aging brain. The aging brain is highly distractible; so is the creative brain. Aging brains possess high levels of crystallized intelligence; creative brains use this accumulated knowledge to produce novel ideas. With this in mind, it makes sense that the aging brain is often extremely well-suited to creative fields. And creativity may enhance one's aging brain as much as one's aging brain may enhance creativity – a sort of symbiotic relationship. Engaging in artistic endeavors can assist in alleviating boredom and ensures that

one's mind remains active throughout the aging process. And finding creative outlets can help preserve one's body as well: arts and crafts, for instance, help with hand-eye coordination, cognitive abilities, and focus, among other things.

Meanwhile, for teens, creativity instills positivity, confidence, and an appreciation for natural beauty from an early age. It challenges maturing individuals to approach obstacles with ingenuity, which will help them to produce innovative products as they enter the workforce, as well as unique solutions to the world's problems. A creative mindset prevents functional fixedness, or the tendency to only look at objects in a single, subjective way. And it encourages teens to remain open-minded, tolerant, and respectful of others' points of view, a skill that is especially important in today's politically divided world.

But a rather surprising effect of creativity – one that is applicable for both seniors and teens – is its tendency to prompt healthy risk-taking. Creativity and risk-taking go hand-in-hand. T.S. Eliot once remarked on the subject that “only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far it is possible to go.” And his words couldn't be truer. Some of the world's most creative minds – from Beyoncé to Margaret Atwood to Neil deGrasse Tyson – never would have gotten anywhere had they not been bold and taken risks. It is, after all, only through risk-taking, pushing boundaries, and going where no others have gone before, that the most beautiful and influential art can be created. Think about it this way: when we solve a problem, we often do so by navigating through narrow channels in the brain. This makes sense, as we want to sift through the least amount of information possible to efficiently find our solution. However, when it comes to creative problem solving, we suddenly need to search through vast expanses of knowledge, and to consider connections and notions we may have otherwise disregarded. According to *Forbes* magazine, when taking risks, mandatory conditions for innovation are generated, and the brain is trained to think in more unusual ways. So, creativity generates risk-taking and risk-taking generates creativity – another symbiotic relationship.

Now, go through your closet and find all of your colored pencils, music records, and your sewing machine. Get together with some of your younger friends and take some risks! Write a story, paint a mural, or bake a cake. Anything to get your creative juices flowing. Not only will you have a blast, but you may be inspired to produce something truly beautiful, and uniquely yours. And while you're creating your masterpiece, you can talk about the many benefits of ingenuity, and encourage each other to never lose that creative spark.

FAMILIES NEED TO SHOW LOVE, ACCEPTANCE



Family has been an integral part of human society since the dawn of time. However, while the presence of families remains unchanging, the structure of familial units has been drastically altered over the years.

In the early and mid-1900s, family units were still quite traditional, typically consisting of a mother, father, and two children. Divorce, homosexuality, single parents, and biracial relationships, among other things, all existed, but these living situations were extremely taboo and discouraged by society. As a result, the traditional family is likely what many older adults are accustomed to.

Meanwhile, today, the aforementioned types of relationships have become far more normalized and woven into the fabric of modern society. To see this, all one needs to do is turn on a television: commercials portray biracial and gay couples, single-parent families, and other familial configurations, revealing just how much society has progressed.

Gender roles within the family have also changed greatly, with more freedom and opportunities for women and less pressure to bear children. To learn more about changing gender roles, you can read my previous column on the subject in the December 2017 edition of *The Beacon*.

With these types of extreme changes in family composition and dynamic, many seniors may be taken aback. However, it is essential that they remain open-minded. After all, many of these changes can likely be seen within their own families and in the families of those close to them.

Regardless of the composition of one's family, loved ones are integral components of one's life for teens and seniors alike. You're probably all familiar with the moody teenager trope. Once they hit thirteen, teenagers are often characterized as grumpy, avoidant, and perpetually embarrassed by their parents. As a certified teenager myself, I can say that this stereotype isn't true for all teens. And even if adolescence is a time during which many feel more easily flustered by family, that doesn't mean that family becomes unimportant. Quite the contrary. A lot of emotional challenges and changes occur during one's teenage years, making the nurturing presence and support of parents – and grandparents - imperative. While many may believe that teens want nothing to do with senior citizens – a stereotype I'm working to abolish – a February 2001 Gallup Youth Survey reveals otherwise. According to the survey, "...eight in ten American teens say they see their own grandparents or the grandparents of close friends at least five or six times per year, while 57% say they visit their great aunts, great uncles, older cousins or other older relatives that frequently." The survey additionally revealed that 77% of teens aged 13 to 15 say they have a close friend who is an older adult. In other words, the familial bond between teens and seniors can be vastly impactful on members of the younger generation. Taking this into consideration, it becomes even more important to model acceptance when it comes to the modern family; teens should feel as if their living situation is normal, healthy, and acceptable.

The next time you interact with your teenage friend, you can have a discussion about the changing face of the American family. Talk about changes in relationships and gender roles, and perhaps consider what societal conditions and historical context prompted said changes. Be sure to remind each other to keep an open mind, and to love and accept your family for what it is. In the process, you'll be spending some bonding time with a teen who is in need of and appreciates your guidance and support.

FOR TEENS AND SENIORS IN THE DATING GAME



Romantic comedies are relatively formulaic: two people meet, instantly hit it off, go through a slight bit of relationship drama that may involve walking in the pouring rain with sad music in the background or chasing someone through an airport, and then ultimately solve all of their problems and live happily ever after. In reality, dating isn't that easy. This is especially true for teenagers and senior citizens; teens are new to the dating game and have relatively little romantic experience. As for seniors, it may have been a while since they have been out on a date, making the prospect of "putting themselves out there" daunting. However, dating can also be exciting for both age groups, and is something over which they can bond.

According to *Psychology Today*, "in the U.S. teens begin dating around the age of thirteen, and by the age of sixteen more than 90 percent of teens have had at least one date." These days, when twelve-year-olds are "dating," that likely means they have swapped phone numbers and perhaps hold hands in the school hallway. However, by the age of 16 or 17, teen relationships tend to become deeper and more mature. While the idea of their teens dating may be anxiety-provoking for many parents, romantic relationships can actually be quite positive for adolescents' social development. Considering that the average age of marriage (currently 27 for women and 29 for men according to *Psychology Today*) has significantly increased over time, dating for teens can be great practice for more long-term, stable relationships in the future, as well as an opportunity to have fun.

That being said, dating as a teen comes with its own set of difficulties. With many inaccurate, sugar-coated portrayals of romance in the media, many teens find it challenging to cope with unrealistic expectations of how dating ought to be. It is often difficult for teens to set boundaries with their parents and to balance supervision with freedom. Peer-pressure also plays a major role; teens are at various stages of comfort with romance and their sexuality and may feel pressure to do things in their relationship that they aren't yet ready to do. And, regardless of age,

dating abuse, whether physical, verbal, sexual, or otherwise, is always a potential concern. For these reasons, it is important that adolescents and their guardians have candid conversations about dating, as uncomfortable as they may be. Teens need to be talked to about warning signs in relationships, how to communicate their feelings and desires, and the importance of respect, consent, and mutual trust. Parents should work with their children to create agreed-upon boundaries that enable teens to experiment and have fun while still ensuring their health and safety, for example by enforcing a curfew. By doing so, teens will likely feel more comfortable communicating with their parents or guardians about their relationships as they take their first steps into the dating world.

For seniors, dating can be just as exhilarating and just as intimidating as it is for teenagers. Many assume that dating is no longer a concern for older adults. However, whether due to the tragic loss of a spouse, divorce, or otherwise, many seniors find themselves thrust into the dating game once more. This can be a remarkably positive experience for seniors – it keeps them active and may introduce someone exciting and compatible into their lives. In addition, dating may take on a different meaning for seniors. While young adults seeking romantic partners may be extremely discriminating regarding age, appearance, religious and political beliefs, etc., many of these factors don't matter as much to older adults. In fact, many dating seniors want nothing more than to find a companion to spend time with. And, typically already having dating experience, seniors often feel more comfortable being honest with their partners about their wants and needs.

Still, dating as an older adult can be complicated. Many modern dating sites are designed to meet the needs of twenty-something-year-olds who prefer messaging potential partners before a first date rather than calling them or skipping prior contact altogether. This isn't necessarily compatible with the desires of seniors who tend to opt for the latter options. Dating as a senior, especially after the loss of a spouse, may alter one's financial situation, affecting one's Social Security or pension. And, finally, many seniors feel anxiety reentering the dating world, for fear that it is a "young person's game." In fact, this couldn't be farther from the truth. Plenty of older adults are looking for a partner, and, although they may be less common, there are dating sites and apps specifically for senior citizens such as Silver Singles or SeniorMatch. Dating as a senior can be a lot of fun and shouldn't be shied away from.

It doesn't matter how old one is – dating is frustrating, terrifying, exhilarating, and magical all at once. When you're next able to spend time with your younger friend, take advantage of this commonality. You can talk to each other about what you've learned about relationships and how to stay safe in them. Just remember: for all of its challenges, dating can be beneficial and enjoyable, and you shouldn't allow its difficulties to overshadow that.

TEENS AND OLDER ADULTS CAN BE TEAM PLAYERS



There is a strong argument for why teenagers and older adults should be the age groups most concerned with remaining active. After all, one's primary period of growth occurs during adolescence, and it is imperative to maintain a healthy lifestyle during late adulthood to ensure a long lifespan. However, despite the necessity for both teens and seniors to remain physically fit, they are in fact the most sedentary of all age groups.

In a study conducted as part of the 2003-2004 and 2005-2006 cycles of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 12,529 Americans ages 6 to 85 wore devices designed to measure their movement – movement of all types, not just exercise – during the course of one week. The study's goal was to determine how one's level of physical activity changes over time. The results were shocking: they concluded that an average American, by age 19, is as sedentary as a 60-year old. How sedentary is an older adult in their 60s? Another study, conducted by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, found that adults between the ages of 60 and 85 spend roughly 60 percent of their time, or eight hours daily, sitting or lying down.

As alarming as these conclusions may seem, when you consider the results, they make sense. Older adults may have difficulty getting out to exercise as their bodies age. Teens, on the other hand, are constantly forced to remain indoors at a desk due to the way the American school day has been established. In addition, technology such as television and computers may entice many to pass up on a game of basketball for video games.

In contrast to the negative impact a lack of activity can have on the health of teens and seniors alike – including depression, heart conditions, etc. – an active lifestyle can promote longer lives, build muscle strength, improve hand-eye coordination, achieve better balance, and much more. Risk for disabilities or dementia could be significantly reduced and cognitive function enhanced should older adults exercise regularly. Beyond this, making time to exercise can improve relationships with others. Joining a competitive team or meeting friends to play a friendly game of a favorite sport enables both teens and senior citizens to avoid isolation and adopt a more social lifestyle. Exercise can also make you feel genuinely happy. When active, the body releases specific proteins and endorphins that result in an improved mood and an overall feeling of ease. I, personally, like to run on the treadmill in the mornings so that I don't feel antsy when doing work during the day. Finally, participation in athletics can bolster leadership skills which can be useful at any age. Playing team sports requires effective communication, strategy, and consideration of others – there's a reason for the expression, "take one for the team."

The next time you interact with a younger friend, brainstorm ways that you can stay fit. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teenagers should get at least an hour of physical activity per day. Meanwhile, it is recommended that seniors get approximately two and a half hours of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise each week. Work together to ensure that you achieve those goals. To do so, teens can join school sports teams or community leagues, and older adults can search for local senior sports leagues or adult aerobics classes – often, local community or fitness centers provide athletic options for older adults. You can also arrange to play sports together or with other friends at a local tennis court, athletic complex or park. No matter what you decide to do, you can feel positive about the fact that you are making a healthy decision that will benefit you physically, socially, and emotionally.

Action Steps: Bridging the Gap



One of the most difficult things to do is to take an idea and make it into a tangible reality. How can young people and seniors address the generation gap?

Opportunities for volunteering to bridge the gap between the generations are in your community, just waiting for your help. Famous anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has.”

There are a number of steps that can be taken to achieve this goal. Of course, each individual’s journey may follow a different path, but being open to opportunities and possibilities is essential. The following actions may be used as a framework for initiating and/or engaging in activities:

Alexis: Below are a list of ways in which teens and youngsters can form intergenerational relationships:

- I. **Reach out to a family member:** When was the last time that you called your grandparents, great aunts and uncles, or other older members of your family? Reaching out to these relatives and engaging them in meaningful conversations may lay the foundation for a newfound connection.
- II. **Connect with older adults in your community:** Do you have older adults living in your neighborhood? Why not ring their doorbells and introduce yourself? Simple actions like waving hello, stopping by for a chat, offering to shovel older neighbors’ driveways, etc. may help bring you closer with senior community members.
- III. **Research volunteer organizations:** You may find opportunities to bond with older adults at your local retirement community or nursing home. There are also many organizations dedicated to bridging the generational gap; doing a quick online search will inform you of nearby opportunities to volunteer.
- IV. **Join relevant clubs at school...or start your own:** Many schools have clubs that involve students working with older adults. If yours does not have a club like this, start

one of your own! Resources to initiate your own Generations Together club can be found in the appendix of this book. Find out what the club registration process looks like at your school and get creative!

- V. **Host a “senior prom”:** You can work with your school, a local volunteer organization, or a retirement community to host a “senior prom” (a party/dance for older adults). Music, food, and good company – what better way is there to connect with senior citizens in your community?
- VI. **Teach tech at your local library:** Reach out to your local public library or another community venue to join or start a “tech cafe.” Older community members who visit the cafe can be taught by teens how to use technological devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptops.
- VII. **Start an intergenerational book or movie club:** Host your peers and elders in an intergenerational book or movie club. Alternate between older and more recent media and then meet monthly to discuss. You’ll gain exposure to new works and have enjoyable conversations!
- VIII. **Educate yourself:** Do research on ageism. Read books and watch films from before you were born. Learn about world history. This will make you more open-minded to forging relationships with older adults and could inspire fascinating discussions!
- IX. **Dispel stereotypes:** The next time you hear a friend claim that all older adults are grumpy or say “okay, boomer,” don’t just ignore them. Politely challenge their perspective and ask them why they feel the way they do about senior citizens. You may encourage them to adopt a more nuanced view of older generations and even convince them to assist you in your efforts to bring the generations together.

Sue: The following action steps outline one approach for seniors to engage with youngsters and teens. Part of the excitement about creating connections between the generations is the planning stage; planning itself is an action step! Plans then become a roadmap to follow that will bring seniors to real interactions with their target audience. By engaging with the younger generation, you are becoming an “agent of change.”

- I. **Research:** Research is the act of investigating and collecting information about a particular topic. There are many avenues that can be explored when gathering information about bridging the gap between the generations. Go online and use keywords like “bridging the gap between the generations,” “senior citizens and teens,” “generations together,” “organizations that help senior citizens interact with young people,” etc. to locate helpful information. Write or record the sources you find and explore their suggestions for intergenerational activities.
- II. **Read:** Locate and read newspaper, magazine, and journal articles on the subject of intergenerational opportunities for interaction. Write or record the information you find and explore their suggestions for intergenerational activities.

- III. **Ask:** Talk to family, friends, doctors, mental health, community services, and nursing home facility personnel, retirement home staff, faith-based sources, etc. for suggestions. Write or record the sources you find and explore their suggestions for intergenerational activities.
- IV. **Contact:** Once you have done a search for people, places, events, and organizations that offer suggestions for intergenerational activities, call or write to them to learn exactly what you can do to participate. Decide with whom you would like to work together on the activities. Reaching out to a youngster or teen in your family or among your friends or even with a neighbor may be a wonderful first connection! Speak with the adult about your mission to bridge the generation gap. Ask their permission to talk to their child to see if they would be interested in joining you in a variety of activities. You may suggest that starting a Generations Together Club at school would be a great way to “pay it forward” and improve generational relationships among their peers. You may offer to be a mentor as they work to create the club (share the pages from the appendix at the end of this book). Then, contact that young person!
- V. **Schedule:** Decide on when, where, and how the two of you can meet (in-person, email, Zoom, phone, etc.).
- VI. **Show up:** Be there, be present, be engaged!
- VII. **List:** Brainstorm a list of possible activities you can do together. Brainstorming is a technique to generate new ideas in a non-judgmental atmosphere. It helps participants come up with more than one solution or alternative to a given problem (Barnes-Robinson & Jeweler, 2007). Brainstorming also aids in formulating ideas and planning action steps for any project the generations wish to pursue. To begin, write down a list of ideas. For each idea, write down the materials needed and the steps needed to finish the project. Together, decide which project you want to work on and keep the other brainstormed ideas for future projects. The following is a list of possibilities:
- Walk together
 - Talk on the phone (phone pals)
 - Create art projects
 - Read to each other
 - Write to each other (pen pals)
 - Watch movies
 - Play games
 - Cook together
 - Listen to music
 - Tutor
 - Attend a cultural or sport event together
 - Learn to use technology
 - Garden
 - Build something

- Do puzzles
- Other

VIII. **Do the activity:** Engage together on your chosen project and reap the benefits!

Conclusion



Alexis: It is easy to be a bystander. It takes courage and character to fight for change. Now more than ever, it is crucial that we do our part to curb societal discrimination. It is my hope that this book has challenged stereotypes you may have once held and that it will help you contribute to a more accepting, ageism-free world. In doing so, you may learn something new, gain exposure to unfamiliar perspectives, educate others, and, of course, make new friends. Instead of sitting idly by and accepting a status quo of division and indifference, do your part to bring the generations together!

Sue: Our focus has been on bringing generations together. The value to young people, seniors, and greater society is enormous. Shared wisdom, respect, creative thinking, active listening, enhanced communication, modeling, perspectives, and deeper understanding all help the generations to reach out to each other, leave their respective silos, and have a positive effect on themselves, their community, and beyond.

There seems to be an awakening. According to Cathy Free’s July 20, 2022 column in *The Washington Post*, “intergenerational living arrangements have benefits for both parties.” Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United, was quoted as saying, “with young adults and older adults feeling the most isolated, connecting them is the right thing to do.” Most recently, Kelly Ripa said, “it’s time to bridge the generation gap!” She is the host of a new quiz show, *Generation Gap*, where teams composed of young and older people compete.

Stewart Brand, an American writer said, “When a generation talks just to itself, it becomes more filled with folly than it might have otherwise.” Use the valuable information in this book and begin your own exciting intergenerational adventures!

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The publication's incredible publisher and editor, Stuart Rosenthal, decided to take a chance on a young girl with a vision. He hired Alexis as a monthly columnist and, from age 12 to 18, she penned articles proposing bonding opportunities for teenagers and senior citizens. She was also given an internship at the newspaper as a high-school student.

We thank the Rosenthals, who embody the goal of uniting the generations and model how to provide platforms for intergenerational conversations.

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HOW TO CREATE A GENERATIONS TOGETHER SCHOOL CLUB

The following pages can become a handbook for any teens wishing to begin a Generations Together club at their middle school or high school.

GENERATIONS TOGETHER SCHOOL CLUB DESCRIPTION AND PLAN

CLUB DESCRIPTION:

Generations Together is a club made for and by students that strives to connect teens with senior citizens. Participants will have the opportunity to spend time with the older generation at [nursing home name] and [school name]. There, participants will engage seniors in activities including art projects, interviews, games, etc. in order to create lasting relationships. The mission of the club is to bridge the expanding generation gap because both generations have so much to offer each other. This is a great opportunity to earn Student Service Learning Hours (SSL), and to give back to the community. Generations Together is an exciting and meaningful extracurricular option for students.

PLAN FOR INITIATING THE GENERATIONS TOGETHER CLUB AT SCHOOL:

- Arrange for a faculty sponsor to work with students.
- _____ (student leader) will work with the volunteer coordinator from the _____ nursing home and the school faculty advisor to arrange the club connection between the center and the school.
- Create a schedule for meetings.
- Post a flyer announcing sign-ups for joining the Generations Together club.
- Attend the nursing home orientation.
- Students volunteer at the nursing home on the designated day.

SAMPLE GENERATIONS TOGETHER FLYER

GENERATIONS TOGETHER

Do you want to earn SSL hours?

Do you want to make friends and memories?

Then join Generations Together!

Generations Together is a club made for and by students in which you will have the opportunity to spend time with senior citizens at (nursing home name) doing activities such as art, music, fitness, book club, current events discussions, and even technology courses that you could teach! You can also earn SSL hours in the process!

Don't delay! Sign up today!

Date:

Time:

Place:

Transportation:

SAMPLE LETTER TO RETIREMENT COMMUNITY STAFF TO ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIP

Dear _____,

My name is _____, and I am a student at _____ School. I am interested in bridging the gap between teenagers and older adults. To do so, I have started a project called Generations Together. This is a club in which students from my school would visit a local retirement community to spend time with its residents. We hope to build meaningful intergenerational relationships over art projects, games, conversations, and more!

Would you be interested in partnering with my school and hosting the Generations Together club? If yes, we can discuss the best dates and times for club members to visit your retirement community and spend time with residents. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or suggestions.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

ACTIVITIES SURVEY FOR RETIREMENT COMMUNITY RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS

Generations Together Activities Survey

1. Would you rather:
 - a. Spend time outside
 - b. Stay inside
 - c. Spend time both inside and outside

2. Do you like to:
 - a. Learn new things
 - b. Do things that you are familiar with

3. Circle the three activities that you would like to do most:
 - Art
 - Exercise (indoors)
 - Technology
 - Walk outside
 - Book club
 - Current events discussion

4. If you have any other ideas for fun activities that you would like to do, please write them here:

Thank you for taking this survey!

SAMPLE GENERATIONS TOGETHER PERMISSION SLIP

Generations Together Club Parent Permission Slip

Dear parents,

Your child has signed up for the Generations Together club at _____ School. In the club, students visit _____, a local retirement community, and spend time with the senior citizens living there doing activities such as art projects, music, fitness/exercise, and even technology courses that your child could teach! There will be a staff member who will sponsor the club and accompany the students. It is a fantastic experience for both students and older adults, and your child could earn volunteer hours for participating. Because we will be leaving the school grounds, we require a parent/guardian's permission. Please fill out all of the information below. Thank you!

Student name (print) _____

Parent name (print) _____

I, the parent of a student interested in the Generations Together club at _____ School, approve of my child leaving the school grounds to visit residents of _____ retirement community.

(Signature) _____

Emergency contact information:

Name of contact _____

Phone number/email _____

Alternate contact _____

Phone number/email _____

Any additional information (allergies, needs, etc.)

GENERATIONS TOGETHER CONVERSATION STARTERS

SCHOOL: Compare experiences and think about change over time (e.g., community service, teachers, lesson plans, etc.).

CHANGE: Talk about how times have changed from years ago until now. Consider the differences in technology, in clothing and style, or in literature and media. Debate world events and issues.

ASK A QUESTION: Asking for explanations and seeing others' points of view can stimulate a meaningful conversation. Examples of questions to ask are listed below:

What are you reading?

What music do you enjoy?

What did you do today?

What is your favorite movie?

Are you participating in any fun activities?

What jobs did you have?

What do you think about the new technology?

If you had three wishes, what would they be?

What games did you play when you were my age?

Finally, a great follow up question to any inquiry you make is "why?"

BRAINSTORM OTHER TOPICS OR QUESTIONS HERE:

GENERATIONS TOGETHER STUDENT FEEDBACK SURVEY

Please read the following questions and answer them honestly:

1. What were two or three activities that you enjoyed doing?
2. What were two or three activities that you didn't enjoy?
3. Do you have any ideas for new activities?
4. What did you like about this club?
5. What did you not like about this club?
6. What do you think we should change in order to make this club better?
7. Did you feel that you got to know the older adults and made new friends?
8. If you have any other feedback, please write it here:

Thank you for participating in Generations Together

RESOURCES

The following resources include examples of organizations, support groups, and additional sites. Investigate resources in your own community and record the information.

ORGANIZATIONS

Generations United <https://www.gu.org>

“Generations United (GU) is the national membership organization focused solely on promoting intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations, representing more than 70 million Americans and is the only national organization advocating for the mutual well-being of children, youth, and older adults. GU serves as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. GU provides a forum for those working with children, youth, and the elderly to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation. For three decades, Generations United’s mission has been to improve the lives of children, youth and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit of all. We have been the catalyst for policies and practices stimulating cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. We believe that we can only be successful in the face of our complex future if generational diversity is regarded as a national asset and fully leveraged.”

Interages Heyman Interages® Center - Jewish Council for the Aging: <https://accessjca.org> › interages

“For more than 30 years Interages has been a program where seniors and youth meet face to face to discuss issues, solve problems, receive instruction and build relationships. Intergenerational volunteer programming provides opportunities for individuals at both ends of the age spectrum to discover that the myths they’ve heard about the young and the old are far from true and they have so much to learn from each other. Our current programming offers a combination of virtual and in-person opportunities which provide the benefits from intergenerational interaction. In order to create this programming, Interages is fortunate to have developed strong relationships with community-based organizations that work with children throughout the greater Washington DC area as well as Montgomery County Public Schools. We are pleased to be able to offer volunteer opportunities for seniors who are 50 years old and above, service-learning opportunities for students in middle school through high school, and volunteer tutoring opportunities for university and college students.”

AARP <https://www.aarp.org>

“AARP is a national membership organization of people age 50 and older. One of the lead senior advocacy organizations in the world, AARP offers a variety of programs, services, and surveys concerning the interest and views of older people.”

AmeriCorps <https://americorps.gov>: “Our members and volunteers support students in nearly 12,000 public, private, and charter schools across the country. Through our work we improve attendance and engagement, increase high-school graduation rates and expand college enrollment.”

YMCA <https://tgfymca.org>: “The YMCA is the leading nonprofit committed to strengthening individuals and communities across the country. At the Y, we’re here to help you find your “why” – your greater sense of purpose – by connecting you with opportunities to improve your health, support young people, make new friends and contribute to a stronger, more cohesive community for all.”

Boys and Girls Clubs <https://www.bgca.org>: “Provide a world-class Club Experience that assures success is within reach of every young person who enters our doors, with all members on track to graduate from high school with a plan for the future, demonstrating good character and citizenship, and living a healthy lifestyle.”

Project Giving Kids <https://www.projectgivingkids.org>: “Our mission is to connect youth to meaningful and age-appropriate service to help those in need while cultivating empathy and lifelong community leadership.”

JASA <https://www.jasa.org>: “JASA honors older New Yorkers as vital members of society, providing services that support aging with purpose and partnering to build strong communities.”

SUPPORT GROUPS

- GAP: Grandparents as Parents, 2801 Atlantic Avenue, Long Beach, Calif. 90801
213-595-3151
- Generations United, National Council on Aging
202-479-6604
- Intergenerational Activities Program Training video, Intergenerational Program Resources, Broome County Child Development Council, Inc., Binghamton, N.Y.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

- AARP Grandparent Information Center, Social Outreach and Support, 601 E. Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20049
202-434-2296
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, PO Box 104, Colleyville, Texas 76034
817-577-0435
- Second Time Around Parents, Family and Community Services of Delaware County, 100 W. Front Street, Media, Pa. 19063
215-566-7540