

Young & Old Together

From the National Association for the Education of Young Children website at www.naeyc.org

Young children may have misconceptions about older people—they may dislike them, feel sorry for them, or fear them in general. But it's important for children to feel good about their elders if they are to learn to appreciate people different from themselves and accept and understand the fact that they will get older someday. When children are happy and secure with themselves, they will be ready to take on each new stage of life.

Many early childhood programs today use "intergenerational curriculum." What this really means is that good classrooms incorporate people of all ages. As for older people, they may appear as part of a special program, or they may be paid staff members or volunteers. In any case, when older people are a regular part of the program, interactions with children occur in a natural way.

Many young children have limited experiences with older people, and see them only as benevolent grandparents or threatening strangers. Regardless of the age of children in the program or center, the goals of intergenerational curriculum are the same:

- Give children accurate information about older people.
- Show children that every older person is unique, just like every child.
- Enable children to feel good about older people—and growing older themselves.

Here's how to make sure children of different age groups benefit from their time

with older people.

Threes and fours

Three and four-year-olds often confuse size with age. They think they will "catch up" to a child slightly older, and that people of the same size are always the same age. They are also very vocal about the fact that they would rather stay young than grow old, and associate sickness, ugliness, and death to older people.

It's important at this time for children to become acquainted with a variety of older people and learn accurate information. Older neighbors, grandparents, or staff members should visit the class frequently and become familiar with children. As they get to know them, they may sit with children on their laps and read to them, or join in their activities. Children will gradually come to value the many different characteristics and qualities that older people have to offer. For the first time, children may begin to think about childhood and growing up—and see it as a natural progression.

Five-year-olds

Kindergartners still do not fully understand the relationship between age and time. Many still think that being elderly is contagious, or can occur overnight. Like threes and fours, they fear they will not be the same person when they grow older, and attribute negative traits to older people.

These children also benefit from being exposed to many older people, and discovering that older people are similar to them in many ways. Older people may have the same favorite foods as children, and they enjoy play and recreation. They may do sing and dance with children and engage in outdoor activities. Children may look at clothes and toys from their own childhoods, and begin to recognize the cycles of life.

and regional Affiliates, and a growing global alliance of like-minded organizations.

Six to eight-year-old

Children at this age have a better understanding of time, yet they still do not fully grasp its relationship to age. They can, however, make realistic guesses at a person's age and recognize their growth from twenty to sixty. They can begin to show interests in the skills that the elderly can patiently share.

Children at this age can learn new words for older people, and ways to describe people's characteristics. They can talk about all the older people they know and what they do. Now is the time for children to be exposed to the contributions older people make through literature and everyday activities.

About NAEYC

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8. NAEYC is committed to becoming an increasingly high performing and inclusive organization.

Founded in 1926, NAEYC is the world's largest organization working on behalf of young children with more than 100,000 members, a national network of nearly 450 local, state,