

Managing Client Fears About Aging

A Therapeutic Point of View

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- ▶ President, Patient Centered Care Partners, including behavioral health with physical health
- ▶ Ran branch Nat'l hospice, obtained Medicare certification
- ▶ Created Dept Advocacy, insurance co. Member Benefits
- ▶ Created 1st Dept Social Services, disease management co.
- ▶ MSW - Loyola University; MBA - LF Grad School Mgmt.
- ▶ 10,000 Medical Social Work home visits
- ▶ National presenter, published author



Introduction to Topic

- ▶ Why is this topic important?
 - ▶ We need knowledge and skills to help clients feel confident about aging
 - ▶ We need to expand general knowledge about how to live later phases of our lives
 - ▶ We need ways to be intentional about aging



Agenda

- ▶ Explore Ageism
 - ▶ The backdrop for Client fears
- ▶ Drill down into Fears about Aging
 - ▶ How those fears present themselves
- ▶ Preparing Clients and ourselves to Age Fearlessly



Ageism - the Term

- ▶ In 1969, Robert Neil Butler, (physician, gerontologist, psychiatrist, author, first Director of National Institute on Aging) talked about discrimination against Seniors
- ▶ There were already words that referred to prejudice, words like sexism, racism



Ageism - the Term

- ▶ Coined word and concept of ageism, similar to those words
- ▶ Prejudice based on a person's year of birth



Ageism - the Prejudice

- ▶ Combination of three connected elements:
 - ▶ Prejudicial attitudes
 - ▶ Discriminatory practices
 - ▶ Institutional policies and practices that perpetuate stereotypes based on year of birth
 - ▶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ageism>



Ageism against Seniors

- ▶ Pervasive in
 - ▶ Employment
 - ▶ Health care
 - ▶ Media
- ▶ Recently seen Tweet “Here's what Baby Boomers can learn from Millennials at work – other than how to use the office printer”
 - ▶ TED Talks @TEDTalks Sep 6



Ageism's effect on Seniors

- ▶ Prejudice legitimizes and sustains inequalities between groups
 - ▶ Not about how we look
 - ▶ About how people in power assign meaning to how we look
- ▶ When internalized by Seniors, ageist views can lead to poorer mental and physical health
 - ▶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/26/health/ageism-elderly-health.html>



Ageism: Seniors

▶ Amazon echo - 2.41

▶ <https://vimeo.com/248543335>





Can refer to Other Groups as well

- ▶ “Snowflake” a 2010 derogatory slang term for Millennials, implying
 - ▶ Inflated sense of uniqueness
 - ▶ Unwarranted sense of entitlement
 - ▶ Overly-emotional, easily offended, and unable to deal with opposing opinions
- ▶ [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowflake_\(slang\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowflake_(slang))



Ageism: Millennials

▶ 2 minutes 51 seconds

▶ <https://vimeo.com/239050403>





Ageism in Media

- ▶ Both examples of prejudice based on year of birth
 - ▶ Funny to us, but because they also strike a chord of familiarity



Ageism in Healthcare

- ▶ Seniors often seen as:
 - ▶ Unable or unwilling to change
 - ▶ (Change in value systems from quantity of life to quality of life around age 80)
 - ▶ Unable to learn new things
 - ▶ Set in their ways



Ageism in Healthcare

- ▶ Cognitive impairment or psychological disorders caused by polypharmacy, may go unrecognized, untreated



Senior Attitudes toward Aging

- ▶ Seniors who see aging in positive terms:
 - ▶ More likely to recover from disability
 - ▶ More likely to practice preventive health measures
 - ▶ Experience less depression and anxiety
 - ▶ Live longer



Client Reality Exercise

- ▶ Write down on a piece of paper the top seven things in order, that give meaning to your life - for instance family, friends, work, exercise, clubs/organizations, religion, your passions or enthusiasms, things that give you pleasure and make you feel fulfilled, connected and satisfied.



Client Reality Exercise

- ▶ Now cross a line through the top 5 items you selected



Client Reality Exercise

- ▶ Look at what's left
- ▶ How you will maintain a positive attitude toward your life now?



Reality Exercise - Outcomes

- ▶ If this is what you expected, why wouldn't you be afraid?



Possible Client Fears

- ▶ Losing executive function (especially with dementia)
- ▶ Losing independence
- ▶ Decline in general health
- ▶ Losing friends and relatives - losing a spouse or partner, loneliness



Possible Client Fears

- ▶ Becoming a burden, being resented or “put in a home”
- ▶ Feeling invisible, being treated as if you’re invisible



Wait, What? - Fear or Anxiety?

- ▶ Fear - a perceived danger or threat
- ▶ Fear is a reaction to a specific, observable danger
- ▶ **Anxiety** is a diffuse, unfocused, objectless, future-oriented fear (Barlow, 2002)
 - ▶ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/201812/anxiety-vs-fear>



Anxiety Arises from Uncertainty

- ▶ Anomie - Emile Durkheim, in 1893 developed “a theory that lack of rules and clarity result in feelings of worthlessness, frustration, lack of purpose, and despair.”

- ▶ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/anomie-definition-theory-examples.html>

- ▶ Depression

- ▶ Suicidality



Change of Certainty - Questions

- ▶ What was Life Expectancy at birth in 1930?
 - ▶ For men
 - ▶ For women
- ▶ What was the retirement age?
- ▶ When was the Social Security Act signed into law?
- ▶ Which President enacted it?



Change of Certainty - Answers

- ▶ Life expectancy at birth in 1930 was
 - ▶ 58 for men
 - ▶ 62 for women
- ▶ Retirement age was 65
- ▶ Social Security Act signed into law on August 14, 1935
- ▶ Enacted by President Roosevelt



Are Your Clients Anxious?

- ▶ Do they have plans?
- ▶ Do they have a structure they're moving into?



Antidote to Anxiety is Structure

- ▶ Help Clients find Meaning
- ▶ Meaning informs Structure
- ▶ Structure includes plans and activities
 - ▶ Things they will pursue as they age



Meaning Informs Structure

- ▶ One thing video - 1 minute, 27 seconds





Meaning as we Age

- ▶ What can the meaning of life be now?
- ▶ Victor Frankl's "Will to Meaning"
 - ▶ Positive life purpose and meaning
 - ▶ Associated with strong religious beliefs, membership in groups, dedication to a cause, life values, clear goals



Helping our Clients Find Meaning

- ▶ When all else is removed, what is left as the meaning of Client's life?
- ▶ What value have they added to the world?
- ▶ What would they like to leave behind?
(ethical will)
- ▶ What will be the meaning of their life?



Creating Meaningfulness

- ▶ By creating a work or doing a deed
- ▶ By experiencing something or encountering someone
- ▶ By the attitude we take - that "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: to choose one's attitude"



Values inform Meaning

- ▶ Personal Values - self examination
- ▶ Physical and mental well-being
- ▶ Address belonging and recognition concerns
- ▶ Personally treasured activities
- ▶ Spiritual closeness and connectedness



Using Values to create Structure

- ▶ Instead of thinking of retirement as a permanent holiday, think of it as a time of personal renaissance
- ▶ An opportunity to invest or reinvest in things that matter to us
- ▶ Chance re-engage with family or friends
 - ▶ <https://ideas.ted.com/think-retirement-is-smooth-sailing-a-look-at-its-potential-effects-on-the-brain/>



Seniors Aging Fearlessly are:

- ▶ Seeking New Experiences
 - ▶ Enjoy extended travel (45%)
 - ▶ Achieve a fitness-related goal (38%)
 - ▶ Get more involved in their community (26%)



Seniors Aging Fearlessly are:

- ▶ Nearly 70% of Seniors reported starting a new routine to make themselves feel healthier
- ▶ Starting a new diet (40%)
- ▶ Pursuing a new fitness routine (34%)
- ▶ Finding volunteer opportunities (11%)



Seniors Aging Fearlessly are:

- ▶ 67% retirees have not re-entered workforce
 - ▶ Of those who've re-entered:
 - ▶ 50% wanted to work again to have something on which to focus their energy
 - ▶ The remaining 50% felt they needed to generate a source of income
- ▶ <https://newsroom.uhc.com/news-releases/MR-survey.html>



Seniors Aging Fearlessly are:

- ▶ 75% host or attend social gatherings each month
 - ▶ Those socially active attend, on average, five social gatherings per month
- ▶ Pursuing what's most personally rewarding



Change Permissions to Age Fearlessly

- ▶ Give permissions to change and create
- ▶ Spontaneous smile homework



So to Sum it up

- ▶ Fear and anxiety result from lack of information, structure and routine
 - ▶ Living longer now
- ▶ We can help our Clients manage their fears of aging
- ▶ Helping them to plan for their Senior years



Living without Fear

- ▶ Diana Krall reference
- ▶ Fred and Ginger - 1 minute, 24 seconds
 - ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c08wiEyVuak>





Thank You

- ▶ Thanks to all from myself and also on behalf of those who've been facing aging without confidence, without a roadmap
- ▶ It's your compassion, kindness and commitment that makes positive change possible for Seniors as they age



Questions?

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