

## The Positive Aspects of Aging

Goal: To increase awareness and appreciation of the positive aspects of aging.

The aging process is persistently upon us as a natural progression of our mental and physical changes. Some things get better with age—yummier, more beautiful, more expensive, more loved, and more refined. Some life happenings become more challenging with age—sometimes called “The Refining Fire.” We can also say that all aging humans have different aging changes that are physical and mental. We are all different in our physical growth and changes, mental challenges, capabilities, and life choices.

I had an interesting dream. As an aging senior, I sat at a table of exuberant college-age students. They were amused at my attempt to attend “their” classes to continue my learning. Being an aging person, they assumed I was assisted with numerous prescribed medications and teased me about these supportive needs. In frustration, I left their presence and, in so doing, forgot the required key to access a locked classroom door where students entered to attend classes. I felt the sting of their efforts to mock my delight in adult learning—or an aging senior. In what appeared to be a more concerted effort to thwart my learning attempts, they moved the classroom to another locked room the following day, keeping me from attending a classroom session. All this effort, I thought, delighted the younger students—so they thought! It seemed that little did they realize (or understand) that significant and meaningful learning continues through life—classroom or no classroom—and the blessings of such enhanced intellect as a result of the challenges of living continue to enrich the aging person’s life. We become more fully aware and practice the learned principles of quality and healthful living.

It is most likely that as aging adults, we have abundant life experiences to which we can continually apply and relate learned principles of quality living! So, by continuing to learn through our aging process, we refine and share the changing wisdom with others.

Emphasizing the positive: We have a choice—to grovel in the negativities as an outcome of the aging/growing older process or appreciate and pursue the personal enhancements as an outcome of succeeding and learning from life’s challenges. It is a blessing to recognize a personal lifetime of accomplishments (no matter what significance or how minimal it might be). As seasoned seniors of the living process, we can guide others toward a progressive aging experience. After all, the sense of such a positive purpose to help others toward a positive aging experience is known to help us (as members of the aging population) to live longer and with more meaning and purpose.

Emphasizing the positive: Aging (for many of us and our many different life experiences) makes us smarter, wiser, and more experienced in decision-making processes. It brings forth the life challenges of health, relationships, and the realization of a meaningful existence. Having often learned the hard way lessons of life, it causes a sense of personal achievement and satisfaction when we realize that a few of our important life happenings have gone well. Such positive feelings are often felt as a “pause that refreshes.” Our learned experiences are shared with struggling youth amid their life’s challenges. However, these early life challenges and struggles are necessary to refine ultimate wisdom and a lifetime of learning. The feeling of aging astuteness is common, yet we empathize with youth as they learn and find their way. How often the aging person thinks as we watch youth: I have been there, done that, I

know the implications of that—or, it is not wise to do or not do that! Our comforting wings spread wide as our aging experiences desire to pull into our protective presence the highly vulnerable youth who test the ultimate predictable outcomes of their youthful experiences.

As the aging generation, we are all as different as the sands of the seashore. However, we can (for sure) admit that some of us (as aging seniors) have experienced, for the most part, a healthful, full, and successful life. Such ultimately fulfilling and sometimes painful experiences cause the recognition of a successful aging pathway.

The following reminder of the positive aging lessons reminds us and others of the healthful, successful, and positive aspects of pursuing positive aspects of aging. Many wonderful aging lessons are learned from a lifetime of experience that support the appreciation of life's challenges, successes, and, yes, even life failures that have taught us painful lessons.

#### Positive Aging Lessons Learned—(or should be learned)

1. Happiness is transient; however, sustaining happiness during aging involves time to “smell the roses.” Our total energy of seeking money, material possessions, external influence, and recognition is transient and often unsustainable. Happiness during and after the aging process results from having quality-driven values. Attaching oneself to others (family/friends) with similar high-quality values sustains our joy throughout our lives. Meaningful relationships decrease loneliness, protect brain functioning, and increase our gift of happiness to ourselves and others. With our expected maturity, we should help people find happiness at any age.
2. Uniqueness is challenging; however, it allows for sharing different life experiences with other aging friends. These varied and diverse life experiences enrich an understanding of the uniqueness of aging. It is a recapping of life's journey that becomes the story-telling portion of group meetings.
3. Open hearts bring peace and joy to others. It offers an opportunity to know others and realize that others may have experienced more trauma than yourself during aging. It provides a chance to serve others, have time to spend with others, and share the feelings of making a positive difference in another person's life. With aging comes the ability to recognize and empathize with another person's pain, hurt, and outcomes of a painful life experience. Soothing a broken soul through acts of random kindness becomes easy.
4. Forgiveness is often difficult; however, the ability to forgive results from positive aging. Attempts to soothe a hurt soul (even our soul) can be a painful challenge. However, maybe that is one reason we have had an opportunity to experience the aging process—to have time to learn to forgive those who have trespassed against us. Or, is it to have time to forgive ourselves for our transgressions toward others? Unfortunately, the aging process has provided time to hurt others; however, it also allows us time to try to undo the hurt we have inflicted on others. It sometimes takes a lifetime to realize that not forgiving others hurts us personally. Peace is the result of complete forgiveness. The hurting process and our willingness to forgive our hurt by others helps us to understand human frailties—and we all have them!

5. Anger is a natural happening in life. It often takes years to control feelings of anger fully. Anger is a human challenge that often takes years to dissipate fully. However, anger (with the resolution learned through aging) has taught us that anger can be replaced with compassion and positive thoughts with our concerted effort. Take the time spent on feelings of anger and learn to replace anger with something positive for someone else. Do random acts of kindness, and listen to another person's emotions (perhaps anger). Become the guiding source for positive thinking that (as an aging person) has hopefully been learned and appreciated as a replacement for anger.
6. Love and the ability to show love is one of the most important lessons learned during the aging process. Love others and offer the loving strategies learned during the aging process. Others don't need to show their love to show love through kindness to others personally. As a seasoned aging senior, it is important to be able to give love! Love will naturally appear in return when love is shared. Open your heart to show the ways and means of love learned. Open your heart and find ways to show unconditional love. There is nothing wrong with telling others what you love about them. Love is never to be taken for granted!

And so it is:

- Learning the lessons of successful living sometimes is determined the hard way.
- Aging experiences have shown that giving back is important, not just taking or receiving.
- Any positive action today usually ends in happiness tomorrow.
- Happier people live longer and have increased health—even if it is supported by medication, therapy, counseling, frequent healthcare provider visits, and association with others.
- Yes, most of our lives have been and continue to be challenging! However, know this—we have learned so much, many times, through successful, hard, and even painful ways!
- The aging process has been a gift many others were not fortunate to have an opportunity to experience.

Your Accounting:

- What have you learned as a part of your aging?
- How has your life changed due to your aging successes, challenges, disappointments, and failures?
- How have/will your aging experiences been/be a positive influence on people in your life?

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