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4-H 190 What it is Like to be Old : Project Concern 1 Leader Guide (Designed for 4-H Members 9-12 Years of Age

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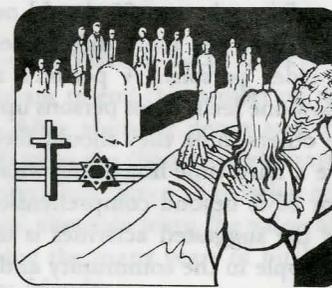
Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service 4-H 190

4-H Leader Guide

Project Concern I

What It Is Like To Be Old

(Designed for 4-H Members 9-12 Years of Age)



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Overview

This publication is a guide for leaders of 4-H members enrolled in the project, "What It Is Like To Be Old." Four-H leaders help youth learn by doing. Your role is to design learning situations that guide 4-H members to increase their awareness of aging adults and to promote interaction with their grandparents and older friends.

As a facilitator of learning you are to act as a resource to each person. Some of your project members will need special help in keeping up with their group. Others will be challenging to you by their advanced level of achievement and motivation. Keeping in the group setting can enhance learning by encouraging the quick to help the slow learners. Your guiding hand helps set the learning environment to be fun as well as educational. Most of all, you will gain from getting to know both old and young persons, who have so much in common.

The project is designed for six lessons and a life celebration party at the end. With few exceptions, the 4-H member manual is written in simple language. Members should read their lessons before the meetings, but conduct their activity assignments afterwards before the next lesson.

The overall purpose is to present a view that older people are like all other people with few exceptions. The human quality of older persons is emphasized. They are deliberately not exposed to negative stereotypes often given by society to older Americans such as "golden agers", "senior citizens" and "rest home patients". An effort has been made to avoid labels for aging adults. While we have used the age of 65 and older to designate older Americans, the diversity of the older population is highlighted. Four-H members should learn how well their



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older relatives and friends get along. It should give them hope for their second half of life.

Some references for additional reading are provided at the end of this publication. You are encouraged to use community resources where ever possible. The best reference is older people in the community. Other places to go for assistance include churches, schools, libraries, senior centers, clinics, and community organizations. Guidelines for each lesson are now provided.

Lesson 1 - Who is Old?

The main objective of this lesson is to illustrate that old age is a relative term and has different meanings for different people. The age of 65 and older is commonly used to designate the beginning of old age only because the U.S. government grants full Social Security retirement benefits at that age. It does not mean a person feels old at 65. Congress has recently passed legislation that delays full Social Security benefits for those born after 1959 until they reach the age of 67.

One of your hardest jobs will be to get your members to understand that all people over 65 should not be placed in one category. There are more differences than similarities among older persons. A person's age has less meaning than how one feels. Most persons up to nearly 80 feel better than others think they should feel.

Children have a hard time imagining what it is like to be 30, but 70 or 80 is beyond comprehension for some. The purpose of the suggested activities is to observe or talk with older people in the community and then to discuss the results in the club meeting. Ask members if their notions about aging have changed. Get them to share their perceptions of what it feels like to be over age 65.

Lesson 2 - Getting to Know Your Grandparents

Research has shown that not all grandchildren know their grandparents very well. A primary purpose of this lesson is to get the children to see the value of their grandparents as friends and as historians. Your members will have read about history from books or by seeing films. Show them how the past can come alive by learning from a person who has been there. A child is generally interested in learning what it was like to live in a previous time. Grandparents are the living examples from a previous historical period, as well as persons to reveal family stories.

It is important for grandparents and grandchildren alike to contribute to each others' lives. You can assist by encouraging them to complete their grandparent activity form. If they can't visit them in person, ask them to conduct a telephone interview with one of their living grandparents. This form will act as a guide to make a friendly conversation easy. If some of your children don't have living grandparents, assist them in finding another older person with whom they can relate.

Lesson 3 - What is Retirement?

Retirement is not a good word for the people who have stopped working for pay, but is the only general term that is used to describe the period following work. Often society restricts how retirees are supposed to act. Your goal is to show the many enjoyable ways this freedom from work can be experienced.

Since retired people and children both enjoy free time, possibly they can share some leisure time together. Many of the activities of older Americans interest children. The older generation may enjoy teaching children some of their skills or at least talking about common interests such as TV programs or baseball.

Activities suggested in this lesson have encouraged children to seek out retired individuals with similar interests. For example, a 4-H member interested in mechanics can find a retired farmer or auto mechanic to discuss cars, tractors, or machinery. You can help your members in finding a retired person with whom they can share an activity together.

Lesson 4 - Managing Money in Retirement

This lesson teaches that most retired people have enough income to get by, but not much left over for extras. Your project members need to understand that Social Security guarantees a minimum amount to all retired Americans. These transfer payments from payroll deductions from the working population pay the monthly benefits received currently by the retired population. However, Social Security was never meant to furnish the only retirement income. Most retired persons get all their monthly income from Social Security, pensions if they were covered, and from private savings and investments.

These benefits provide the basic necessities for most older Americans. Your children will be interested in learning that few older Americans get regular money from their adult children or relatives. Economic independence is important for retirees because it lessens their dependence on family members. Older Americans are more independent today than in previous times and thus have more freedom to live their lives in dignity. However, it takes money management skills to cope with rising costs on mostly fixed incomes.

Many young Americans have their doubts about whether there will still be Social Security benefits when they retire. In recent years, Congress has changed the Social Security system to lower benefits and increase payroll deductions, but most experts believe the system will have adequate resources well into the next century. Congress responding to the needs of citizens will surely continue to provide some financial support to such a growing proportion of the population.

One of the best ways 4-H members can help is to assist older friends with shopping. Give them the opportunity to buy some items which are either hard to find or very

expensive for people with difficulty getting around. Four-H members can locate hard-to-get items or determine the cheapest place to buy.

Lesson 5 - The Health of Older Americans

Our present generation of older Americans is healthier than ever before. With medical advances, older people are living longer and are able to control diseases like cancer and heart conditions. However, young people need to understand that as age advances there is increasing probability that chronic illnesses will become more prevalent. While chronic diseases usually are not fatal, they are bothersome and need constant attention with medications.

The important theme of this lesson is that 80 percent of the health problems suffered by older Americans are either preventable or postponable. This means that the health habits of the young affect their health in later years. Proper eating habits, regular exercise, enough rest and relaxation, and regular physical examinations can prevent or postpone many of these chronic conditions.

Since many of these medical terms may be new to your 4-H members, it may prove helpful to have you, a doctor or a nurse discuss them at your meeting or better still, visit a hospital, clinic or nursing home for a discussion period with staff.

Another suggestion would be for individual members to investigate the illnesses of their closest older friend or grandparent. The older person can provide instruction concerning the symptoms and treatment of the disease. Some of your members would enjoy going to the library to do research on one disease. There are many pamphlets available free from such organizations as the Arthritis Foundation, the American Cancer Society or the American Heart Association.

Despite the complexity of medical terminology, health is too important to leave entirely to the health professionals. Four-H members need to learn disease prevention and a healthy lifestyle. They can become aware of how most older people manage their chronic ills. Healthy older people with only a few aches and pains can provide a model of a lifetime of healthy living.

Lesson 6 - Death & Dying

Death is a subject discussed little in the U. S. Adults very often shelter children from facing the reality of the death of a relative. We have been described as a "death denying" society. The major theme of this lesson is to teach that death is a natural occurrence and it happens to all of us someday. Children need to understand that death caused by accidents and disease may occur at any age. However, over 85 percent of Nebraskans who died in 1983 were 60 years of age or older.

Since death is more frequent among older Americans, relatives can prepare themselves for this eventuality. Chil-

dren need to learn that death can be a blessing for many aging adults and their caretakers. They need help in learning how to relate to the survivors, older widows and widowers.

Often more difficult than coming to terms with death is communication with a dying person. The rules for visiting a relative near death should sensitize your members to act naturally, rather than fearfully in their presence.

Children need to know that dying relatives are often embarrassed about their present condition. Children should be given permission to feel sadness. On the other hand, children should not be made to feel guilty if they don't feel like crying.

If you feel uncomfortable about discussing this subject you may want to call on a minister or priest to talk about the process of dying and the consequences of death upon family members. It is possible that some of your group have recently experienced the loss of a family member. This would present an excellent opportunity for children to talk about this important family event. Furthermore, if the occasion should arise, arrange for your project group to attend the funeral of a valued community citizen.

Lesson 7 - Having a Life Celebration Party

It is important to end this project on the theme of life celebration. After studying death and dying, your 4-H members will enjoy the chance to celebrate the lives of living older Americans. Since they enjoy celebrating their own birthdays, they can learn the value of having a joint party observing the many years of birthday celebrations of their older friends.

The principles of planning a party are outlined in the member book. It is important to provide a role for all members on the planning committees. Their ideas should be sought and carried out if possible.

The major purposes of a life celebration party are not only to honor older Americans, but to enjoy their company in a social event. Having fun together, getting acquainted, and the satisfaction of doing something together should put the finishing touches on a learning experience with older Americans.

References

For your background information, you may want to visit a library, consult with a resource person, or write for free publications. Some references are provided below:

National Organizations

A Profile of Older Americans: 1985. This up-to-date statistical profile provides data on older Americans. Write Program Resource Department, American Association of Retired Persons, 1909 K Street, N.W. Washington, DC 20049.

To Your Health: In the Second Fifty Years. Foods for Older Adults. National Dairy Council, 6300 North River Road, Rosemont, IL 60018.

American Cancer Society. Vice President for Public Education, 777 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

American Diabetes Association. 1 West 48th Street, New York, NY 10020.

Arthritis Foundation. 3400 Peachtree Road, N.E. Atlanta, GA 30326.

American Heart Association. Inquiries Section, 7320 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231.

American Medical Association. Bureau of Health Education, 535 N. Dearborn, Chicago, IL 60610.

National Health Council. 1740 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Nebraska References

Nebraska Department on Aging. P. O. Box 95044, Lincoln, NE 68509, (402) 471-2306.

Aging Office of Western Nebraska. 4502 Avenue I, Scottsbluff, NE 68361, (308) 635-0851.

Blue Rivers Area Agency on Aging. Gage County Courthouse, Room 24, Beatrice, NE 68310, (402) 223-1352.

Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging. 885 S. 72nd Street, Omaha, NE 68114, (402) 444-6536.

Lincoln Area Agency on Aging. 129 N. 10th Street, Room 241, Lincoln, NE 68508, (402) 471-7022.

Midland Area Agency on Aging. P. O. Box 905, Hastings, NE 68901, (402) 463-4565.

Northeast Nebraska Area Agency on Aging. P. O. Box 1447, Norfolk, NE 68701, (402) 371-7454.

South Central Nebraska Area Agency on Aging. 124 W. 46th Street, Kearney, NE 68847, (308) 234-1851.

West Central Nebraska Area Agency on Aging. 200 S. Silber, North Platte, NE 69101, (308) 534-6780.

Books for Background Reading

Barrow, G., and Smith, P. (1983). *Aging, the Individual and Society.* St. Paul: West Publishing.

Butler, R., and Lewis, M. (1982). *Aging And Mental Health* (3rd ed.). St. Louis: Mosby.

Farber, N. (1981). *How Does It Feel To Be Old?* Berkeley, CA: Creative Arts.

Fox, N. *Old Is Beautiful Too.* Bend, OR: Geriatric Press.

Grollman, E., and Grollman, S. (1978). *Caring for Your Aged Parents.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Hazen, B. (1985). *Why Did Grandpa Die?* Racine, WI: Western.

Kornhaber, A., and Woodward, K. (1981). *Grandparents/Grandchildren: The Vital Connection.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Press.

LeShan, E. (1984). *Grandparents: A Special Kind of Love.* New York: Macmillan.

Lifton, R., and Olson, E. (1974). *Living and Dying.* New York: Bantam.

Nouwen, H., and Gaffney, J. (1974). *Aging.* Garden City, NY: Image Books.

Shedd, C., and Shedd, M. (1982). *Grandparents Family Book.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Uris, A. (1984). *Over 50: The Definitive Guide to Retirement.* Huntington Beach, CA: Chilton Book Co.