MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES OF AGING

PURPOSE & KEY TERMS

- **Purpose:**
  - To assist the learner in identifying myths and stereotypes about the elderly;
  - Knowing the difference between a myth or stereotype and facts about aging will improve the care of residents living in AFHs.

- **Key Terms:**
  - Ageism
  - Stereotyping

OBJECTIVES

- **The learner will be able to:**
  - Define ageism;
  - Give examples of how stereotyping can affect the care of residents; and
  - Examine if their own ideas about aging are based on stereotyping.
MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES OF AGING

- Review handout

MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES OF AGING

- Answer True or False for each statement below:
  1. In general, elderly people are alike.
  2. The majority of elderly persons are senile or demented.
  3. Elderly people have no more worries once they retire and start enjoying life.
  4. The elderly do not desire, and do not participate in, sexual activity.
  5. Most elderly people are set in their own ways and are unable to change.
  6. The elderly are unproductive and uncreative; they cannot work as effectively as younger people.
  7. The elderly are slow to learn, less intelligent and more forgetful.
  8. Elderly people are crabby and hard to get along with.
  9. The majority of elderly persons are socially isolate and lonely.
 10. Elderly people become more religious as they age.
ARE YOU STEREOTYPING?

- It is important to evaluate our own ideas about aging. To be able to increase our knowledge of aging we must be:
  - Open to new ideas; and
  - Eliminate our own judgments regarding growing older.

MYTH ONE

- MORE ALIKE
  - The idea that we all become more alike as we age is common, but false.

MYTH TWO

- SENILE
  - The word “senile” actually means to age or grow old. It has come to mean “dementia.”
  - Dementia is not a normal part of aging. It is a disease that affects the brain and nervous system. “Alzheimer’s disease” is a type of dementia.
MYTH THREE

- SERENE
  - Many older people face poverty, isolation, grief, physical decline, loss of social stature and decreased control over their lives.
  - Stresses may be reduced by help from family, friends, churches, public agencies or community networks.
  - Suicide rates are reported to be approximately 16 per 100 individuals aged 75-84.

MYTH FOUR

- SEXLESS
  - Sexual activity and enjoyment do not decrease with age.
  - There is a strong belief in our society that older people should not and/or cannot engage in sexual activity.

MYTH FIVE

- INFLEXIBLE
  - Inflexibility means to be resistant to change and to be unable to adapt to new situations.
  - Older people must adjust to changes such as retirement, disease, illness, death of family and/or friends and lifestyle. Without the ability to accept change, adjustment to these changes would be impossible.
MYTH SIX

- **UNPRODUCTIVE AND UNCREATIVE**
  - Many elderly people remain active and productive throughout their lives. We would all be missing a great deal without their creativity.

MYTH SEVEN

- **DIFFICULTY LEARNING NEW SKILLS**
  - How older adults learn is different from younger learners, but that does not mean they cannot understand new information.

MYTH EIGHT

- **“CRANKY”**
  - People who are difficult to get along with when they are young may be difficult when they are older.
  - How people adjust to change, accept and respect others when they are young will most likely be their style when they are old.
MYTH NINE

LONELY

Many people believe the elderly are usually abandoned by their family. Most elderly people are not abandoned by family and usually have close contact with one another.

Family and friends largely determine whether or not an elderly person is lonely and rarely is an elderly person totally abandoned in our society.

MYTH TEN

MORE RELIGIOUS

- Difference is generational rather than age-related.
- Members of the present older generation did not become more religious as they aged, but grew up in a time when there was more formal religious training given to children. Their lives were often started on a more religious path that continued throughout their lives.

DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS