

Intergenerational friendship in our modern day society



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The festive season is a way of keeping in touch with friends through a letter or message in a Christmas card and like so many people I was saddened to learn that many long-term friends, of numerous years, had died over the past 12 months. These sad losses made me reflect on the meaning and its impact of long-term interactions, and the importance of the chemistry of connection and values of friendship and memories that over years had been interwoven into one's tapestry of life. Also, to reflect and accept it is inevitable that unless we live short lives, we are going to lose friendships particularly from the generation that came before us.

Social bonds are a key component of quality-of-life for many generations who thrive in a collaborative social network environment but it's not always easy in a modern day technological social media society to build or maintain friendships. Regardless of generational age differences friends bring us joy, trust, loyalty, and companionship that we desire and has an impact on our lives. Also, the feeling of security being just one of the many emotional benefits unadulterated mutual trust and compassion that long term friendships provide while also supporting one's mental and physical wellbeing.

At some point in our lives many of us may experience periods of loneliness and for some individuals this may lead to withdrawal from family, friends and the wider society. Loneliness and social isolation can also have serious consequences on an individual's physical, mental, and social health. But the risks of social isolation depend not only on who you are, but also on where you live.

At the same time global public health services are having to cope with additional demands placed on them by changes in demographics, such as an ageing society. Universally the proportion of older persons living alone is increasing, with many seniors spending too much time alone and the long-term effects of solitude can lead to an even greater risk of loneliness and total withdrawal from society especially in this COVID-19 era.

The importance of long-term friendships was highlighted recently when celebrating one's birthday

when the maitre d' was taking photos with my close intergenerational friends asked about the length of our relationships. Following the conversation, we suddenly realised the different generational span of our closeness and the joys of companionships, and fulfilment gained through our meaningful interactions over the years we had experienced! Also, it made me appreciate the core objectives of respecting and enjoying my social relationships and connecting to individuals I care most about while investing in the happiness and sharing of activities that we valued. Especially today where we are digitally connected to more and more people, yet the celebrations made me appreciate and appraise the importance of social face-to-face communication, which was achieved through touch, intellectual stimuli, laughter, genuine love, and friendships along with a personal musical rendition by my millennial musician/songwriter friend making my birthday a unique, memorable experience. On reflection the key to these relationships is always being empathetic in times of need and grounded in common interests and values.

Up until recently people were used to forming friendships within their own peer groups however, today's views to address the problem of social isolation within all age ranges in modern society is by promoting intergenerational connections and espousing how rewarding those relationships are. People who are high in extroversion tend to seek out social stimulation and opportunities to engage with others through social communication. Especially as relationships between the mature and the younger generation can make us feel connected in several ways as it can make us feel interconnected not only to each other, but to today's culture and society that benefits all generations.

Our perception of age changes as we grow older and due to our own unique personalities, the reality of what it means to be a senior differs, with some people seemingly set in their ways and fearing change in their forties or early fifties (Lindsay, 2020).

Today seniors are living longer and enjoying better health into their later years and have the

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benefits of lifelong knowledge acquisition offering opportunities to make a significant social contribution to intergenerational friendships. We need to continue to engage in and encourage this engagement rather than regress to an "age segregated society". However, sadly, many people's opinion of seniors has not kept pace with the changing reality, and serious problems may arise when stereotyping and prejudice leading to age discrimination (Lindsay, 2020).

Benefits of intergenerational relationships

Older adults can be a tremendous resource for younger people by sharing their history and lifetime of accumulated wisdom. The world is big enough for all of us and it is so important that we meet and support people from outside our own small families, our own circles, our own bubbles. Connecting with diverse societies and the younger generation makes us realise that they have just as much right to be here, and we have no special privileges, no preferential rights over others. Also, for the older generation their life skills can contribute to being a role model for younger generations to aspire to, and why it is so important for all of us to have at least one in our lives. Role models remind us that there is a way to be in this world, and that if we adopt that way, we will be able to leave the world a better place than we found it. We live in an increasingly divisive world hence we should leave our own egos behind and connect and provide genuine help and support to others, without expectation of reward, where and when we can. It is here that the role models are to be found as by doing something that radiates warmth, you are being engaged and curious, and most of all you are connecting. You are not only doing some genuine good, but you are forging a path that others will follow (Renyi, 2021).

The physical limitations that come with getting older can often help to cement the relationship between the young and old, and the physiological changes that accompany older age can be useful fundamentals for valuable intergenerational connections. While older adults may have more opportunities to share knowledge and resources with younger generations, they are also more likely to depend on the support of younger generations as well. Conversely, friendships with younger generations enables a senior to become motivated

to recapture a sense of adventure and a greater willingness to try new things as intergenerational friendships offer something different based on their status in life.

Having close friends of the opposite sex can sometimes push some people out of their comfort zone yet in my professional world I am extremely fortunate having the opportunities of professional multigenerational connections with millennials of both sexes. Over the years friendships within my professional and personal world have flourished among the opposite sex and different age groups. These close intergenerational friendships being formed have extended circa twenty-five years with individuals who really listen, care, legitimately take an interest and offer the kind of genuine support that continues to enrich my generation gap relationships to date.

As individuals we all have a natural, psychological need to socially belong enabling us to have a positive sense of self-worth assisting us to cope with the reality of what's going on in our personal lives and for me, being tactile along with non-verbal communication and facial expressions are an important language in relationships. Naturally we choose to be friends with people we connect and are comfortable with, contributing to our happiness and as much as people tease one about a generational age gap, for many it's the cement of sound respectful bonding friendships valuing the perspective that friends of a different age can provide.

Life relationships should never stop being fascinating as curiosity is one of the most important, as well as one of the most underrated qualities we can have. It allows us to accept that we don't know everything and never can as curiosity sparks learning, and we should never stop learning. For me personally I have gained a thousand fold with millennial friendships as I have been encouraged and empowered to expand my limited parameters relating to computer technology, social media, current day music, and discovering outstanding humour via the internet that I was totally unaware of.

We should aspire to empower individuals to age with dignity and security, as integral members of society, in a vibrant and socially cohesive populace. Hence, intergenerational activities are a great way for people of all ages in the community to get to know each other and for me personally I have become creative again in the kitchen preparing


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meals and looking forward to eating together, sharing stories, and common interests. Since experiencing bereavement the impact and value of these multigenerational friendships are both a tapestry of emotional and extremely rewarding therapeutic experience, hence enabling me to move on in my new life and looking forward to further get-togethers throughout the coming years.

CONCLUSION

To navigating and cultivating a rich rewarding multigenerational friendship requires a two way process that each respect, values and holds the same ideals as any other friendship. This enables the younger individual to have access to the

broader perspectives that come with age in an intimate non-judgemental, trusting, and enriching manner while conversely respecting the younger generation are more invested in media and pop culture. Also, having the ability to express and exercise their freedom of speech through countless digital channels and by being age-friendly, they can stimulate and enhance the technical and digital skills of the older person thus enabling the mature generation to embrace today's world of media. Just as gratifying, many older people experiencing younger generation companionship become once again fully integrated into their social communities, and thereby are given new meanings and wellbeing to their lives. 



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