



What is it like to feel 70, 80, 90, and even 100 years old? Aging-related daily challenges can be simulated for teens and college students inexpensively and at home!

Tips for Sensitivity Training

1. Tailor the experience to the age level of the learners.
2. Training should be done in a structured and planned out process.
3. Tone of the training session is critical and increasing important as the age range decreases. The training should always be done in a respectful manner being careful not to make fun of older adults, especially with high school aged students or younger.
4. Prepare materials. Homemade props from inexpensive supplies are as effective as commercially available materials. Check your local dollar store for supplies, e.g., masking tape, popcorn kernels, garden gloves, cotton balls / ear plugs, Vaseline / toothpaste, sunglasses, etc.
5. Students need experiential simulation. Allow students to walk around in their shoes or sneakers after putting smooth small stones or popcorn kernels in them to simulate arthritis in the feet of older adults.
6. Collect old drug bottles and fill with small candies. Allow students to attempt to open medication bottles while wearing thin garden gloves, and then ask them to distribute the candies in weekly pillboxes.
7. Bring in back supports. Allocate time to have students wear the braces while using a crutch or cane to walk around.
8. Make a manual wheelchair available to the students to move around the room, school, or home.
9. Provide students with access to a computer and copies of accessibility labs that include exercises (but not limited to) teaching the students how to increase font sizes, change appearance and speed of the mouse pointer, change screen colors, make web pages less cluttered and one column, and utilize voice input.
10. Allow students to role playing with each other taking turns being the older adult while teaching computing technology. Strongly encourage them not to touch the mouse or keyboard for the “student” to learn experientially.
11. Remind the students that it is okay to feel awkward or uncomfortable when first encountering an older adult or individuals with disabilities.
12. Build in time for written and oral reflections including in-session discussion, blogging, and essays. Allow students to express their feelings as some may have touched upon a recent experience of someone close dying.
13. Provide opportunities beyond the classroom activities and have students blog about their experiences. Encourage students to share information with friends and family in-person, as well as through telephone calls and social networking sites. Allow some students to borrow simulation glasses and ear plugs to try at home. Offer optional extra credit assignments as wetting an adult diaper with water and wearing it for day, then blog about the experience with their classmates.
14. Within about a week after training, lessons learned need to be utilized within their context. For example, the students need to try out what they learned in a real-world situation involving older adults.