

# Toolkit for Seniors: Ageism, Discrimination & Self-Esteem

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE & KNOWING YOUR WORTH

Everyone deserves to feel respected, valued, and included. Sometimes older adults experience ageism or discrimination that can quietly affect confidence and self-worth. This guide is here to help — with simple information, practical tips, and warm encouragement to remind you of just how much you matter.

- ✔ **Remember: Your value does not decrease with age.** The experiences, wisdom, and strength you carry are irreplaceable gifts to the people around you.

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Canada



# What Is Ageism & Discrimination?

Ageism means being treated unfairly or disrespectfully because of your age. It can show up in big, obvious ways — or in small, everyday moments that are easy to dismiss but still deeply hurtful. Discrimination more broadly can happen for many different reasons, and no one should ever have to experience it.

## Discrimination May Happen Because Of:

- Age
- Disability or health concerns
- Gender
- Culture or background
- Income or life circumstances

## What It Can Look Like:

- Feeling ignored or dismissed in conversations
- Assumptions being made about your abilities
- Being left out of decisions that affect you
- Being spoken to in a disrespectful or condescending way
- Feeling like your needs don't matter

If any of these experiences sound familiar, please know: it is not your fault, and you are not alone. Naming what is happening is the first and most powerful step toward addressing it.

# Understanding Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is how we see ourselves — our sense of worth, capability, and belonging. It is shaped by our experiences, relationships, and the messages we receive from the world around us. When ageism or discrimination enters our lives, it can quietly chip away at how we feel about ourselves, sometimes without us even noticing.

Healthy self-esteem does not mean feeling perfect or never having doubts. It means having a stable, caring relationship with yourself — one that recognizes your strengths even on the hard days. Understanding what low self-esteem looks and feels like is an important part of beginning to heal and grow.

## Self-Doubt

Questioning your own judgment, feelings, or memories — especially after being dismissed or contradicted by others.

## Negative Self-Talk

An inner voice that is critical or unkind, saying things like "I'm too old for this" or "I shouldn't bother."

## Avoiding Speaking Up


Staying silent in situations where you have something valuable to say, out of fear of being dismissed.

## Feeling Unworthy of Help

Believing your needs are a burden, or that you don't deserve support, care, or attention.

## Withdrawing from Life

Pulling away from activities, hobbies, or people that once brought you joy and connection.

 Recognizing these signs in yourself is an act of courage and self-awareness. It is the beginning of change.

# Building Confidence

Confidence is not something you either have or don't have — it is something you build, one small step at a time. Even on the days when it feels far away, there are gentle, meaningful actions you can take to strengthen your sense of self and reconnect with your own worth. You don't have to do everything at once. Every small effort counts.



## Speak Kindly to Yourself

Notice your inner voice. When it becomes critical, gently redirect it — the way you would speak to a dear friend.



## Celebrate Your Strengths

Your life experiences, skills, and wisdom are real achievements. Take time to honor what you have lived and learned.



## Spend Time with Supportive People

Surround yourself with those who lift you up, listen to you, and treat you with the respect you deserve.



## Set Healthy Boundaries

It is okay to say no. Protecting your energy and wellbeing is not selfish — it is wise and necessary.



## Try New Things at Your Own Pace

Growth happens when we gently stretch beyond our comfort zone — but always at a pace that feels right for you.



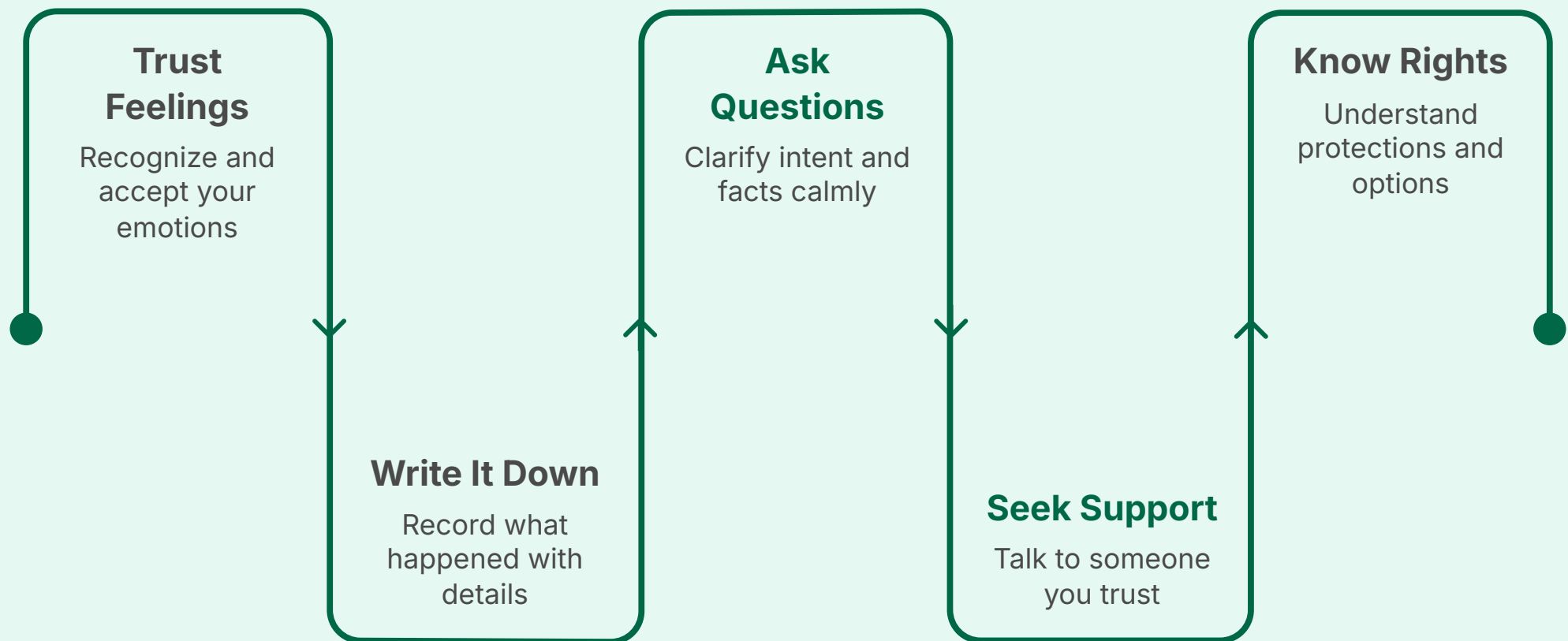
## Ask Questions & Speak Up

Your voice matters. When something is unclear or feels wrong, you have every right to ask and advocate for yourself.

**Small steps matter.** Every act of self-kindness, no matter how small, is a meaningful investment in your wellbeing.

# Responding to Unfair Treatment

If something happens that feels unfair, disrespectful, or wrong, it is important to trust yourself. Your feelings are valid. You do not have to simply accept unkind or discriminatory treatment, and you do not have to navigate it alone. Knowing what steps you can take can make a real difference — both in the moment and afterward.



Writing down what happened — including the date, time, location, and who was involved — can be a powerful tool if you decide to report the incident later. Even if you choose not to report, having a record can help you process the experience and feel more in control. Remember, seeking support from a trusted person or organization is always a sign of strength, not weakness.

⚠️ If you ever feel unsafe or in immediate danger, please call **911** right away. You deserve to be safe.

# My Strengths & Support Circle

This section is just for you. Taking a few quiet moments to reflect on your own strengths, your support network, and the things that lift your spirits can be a powerful act of self-care. You might be surprised by how much you have — and how many people genuinely care about you.

## Things I Am Proud Of

Think about moments in your life where you showed courage, kindness, perseverance, or creativity. These are yours — no one can take them away.

*Write your thoughts here, or simply hold them in your heart as a reminder of your worth.*

## My Greatest Accomplishments

Whether big milestones or quiet everyday victories, your accomplishments tell the story of a life fully lived. Every one of them matters.

*Reflect on what you have overcome, built, or contributed throughout your life.*

## My Personal Strengths

Perhaps you are patient, creative, funny, resilient, or a wonderful listener. Your unique qualities are what make you irreplaceable to the people around you.

*Name three to five qualities you value in yourself.*

# A Space to Reflect

Sometimes the most healing thing we can do is pause and listen to ourselves. Use this space as an invitation to reflect — there are no right or wrong answers, no grades, and no expectations. This is a private, safe place to explore your thoughts and feelings at your own pace.

"You have been criticizing yourself for years and it hasn't worked. Try approving of yourself and see what happens."  
— Louise Hay

Many older adults find that journaling, even just a few sentences a day, can gradually shift the way they speak to themselves. It helps to recognize patterns of negative thinking, celebrate small wins, and build a kinder inner voice over time. You don't need a special notebook or perfect handwriting — all you need is a moment and the willingness to show up for yourself.

- 📄 Try starting with this simple prompt: "**One thing I did well today was...**" — and let yourself write without judgment.

# People Who Support Me

We all need people in our corner — individuals who listen without judgment, show up when things are hard, and remind us of our worth when we forget it ourselves. Identifying your support circle is an important step in building resilience and knowing where to turn in difficult moments.

## **Family**

A family member — whether a child, sibling, niece, nephew, or other relative — who you trust and feel comfortable talking to.

*Name:* \_\_\_\_\_

## **Friends**

A friend who knows you well and genuinely cares about your wellbeing — someone who makes you feel seen and heard.

*Name:* \_\_\_\_\_

## **Healthcare or Community Support**

A doctor, nurse, social worker, or community worker who can connect you with services and advocate on your behalf.

*Name / Organization:* \_\_\_\_\_

## **Community & Spiritual**

A faith leader, community group, or neighbor who provides a sense of belonging, purpose, and connection.

*Name / Group:* \_\_\_\_\_

If your support circle feels smaller than you'd like, that's okay. Building connections takes time, and there are organizations in your community whose entire purpose is to walk alongside you. You are never truly alone.

# You Are Not Alone

One of the most difficult feelings that comes with ageism and discrimination is the sense of isolation — the feeling that no one truly understands or that you are somehow on your own. But the truth is that there are many people who share your experiences, and there are caring, dedicated people in your community who want to help.

Community matters deeply. Whether it is a seniors' group, a faith community, a local drop-in center, or simply a friendly neighbor, connection is one of the most powerful forces for healing and resilience. Research consistently shows that social connection improves both mental and physical health, and that people who feel supported are better able to cope with adversity and bounce back from setbacks.

## → **Reach Out**

Contact a local seniors' center, community organization, or support line. Taking the first step, even when it feels hard, opens the door to connection.

## → **Share Your Story**

When you feel safe and ready, sharing your experience with a trusted person can reduce the weight you carry and remind you that your feelings are valid.

## → **Accept Support Graciously**

Accepting help is not a weakness — it is wisdom. You have spent a lifetime giving to others. Allowing others to show up for you is an act of courage.

# What Helps Me Feel Confident

Confidence is deeply personal. What works beautifully for one person may not resonate with another, and that is perfectly okay. Taking time to identify what genuinely lifts your spirits, restores your sense of self, and helps you feel grounded is a valuable act of self-knowledge. The more clearly you know what nourishes you, the easier it becomes to turn toward those things when you need them most.



## Activities That Bring Me Joy

Hobbies, creative pursuits, music, gardening, cooking, reading — the things that make you lose track of time in the best possible way.

*My activities:* \_\_\_\_\_



## Places That Feel Safe & Peaceful

A favorite chair, a garden, a park, a place of worship — spaces where you feel most fully yourself and at ease.

*My places:* \_\_\_\_\_



## Words That Encourage Me

Affirmations, prayers, quotes, or phrases that remind you of your strength and worth when doubt creeps in.

*My words:* \_\_\_\_\_



## Routines That Ground Me

Morning walks, meditation, a cup of tea in quiet — small, consistent rituals that bring a sense of stability and calm.

*My routines:* \_\_\_\_\_






# A Letter to Yourself


One of the most powerful confidence-building exercises is writing a short, compassionate letter to yourself — as though you were writing to your dearest friend. In this letter, you might acknowledge the challenges you have faced, celebrate the ways you have persevered, and remind yourself of your inherent worth and dignity.

"You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection." — Buddha

This does not need to be long or eloquent. Even three or four sentences, written with honesty and kindness, can shift something deep within. Some people find it helpful to read their letter aloud, or to keep it somewhere they can return to it on difficult days — a drawer, a wallet, or tucked inside a favorite book.

## To Begin, Try Completing These Sentences:

-  "I am proud of myself for..."
-  "One challenge I have overcome is..."
-  "Something I value about who I am is..."
-  "I deserve to be treated with..."
-  "I am grateful for..."

-  Keep your letter somewhere you can find it easily. On hard days, it will be a gentle reminder that you are worthy — written in your own words, from your own heart.

# Daily Affirmations for Confidence & Worth

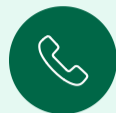
Affirmations are short, positive statements that, when repeated regularly, can gradually reshape the way we think and feel about ourselves. They may feel a little awkward at first — that is completely normal. With gentle practice, they become a natural part of how you speak to yourself and how you move through the world.

Try reading one or two of these each morning, perhaps while having your coffee or tea. You might choose one that resonates most deeply with you and make it your anchor phrase for the week.

- "I am worthy of respect and kindness, exactly as I am today."
- "My life experience is a source of strength and wisdom, not a limitation."
- "I have the right to speak up, ask questions, and advocate for my needs."
- "I am surrounded by people who care about me and want me to thrive."
- "Each day, I grow stronger, wiser, and more comfortable in who I am."

# Helpful Resources

You do not have to face any of this alone. There are caring, knowledgeable people and organizations ready to listen, support, and help you navigate whatever challenges you are experiencing. Whether you need someone to talk to, information about your rights, or practical assistance — help is available, and you deserve to receive it.



## Victim Services of Temiskaming District

**Call or Text:** (705) 647-0096

Confidential support for anyone who has experienced harm, discrimination, or mistreatment.



## Elder Abuse Task Force

**Call:** (705) 647-4305 ext. 2239

Specialized support for older adults experiencing any form of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

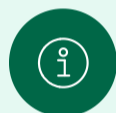


## Advocacy or Seniors Support

**Contact:**

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Local advocacy and support services to help you navigate community resources and speak up for your rights.



## 211 – Community & Social Services

**Simply dial:** 211

A free, confidential service connecting you with community, social, and government programs in your area.



## Emergency Services

**Call:** 911

If you are in immediate danger or need urgent help, please call 911 right away. Your safety comes first.

### Final Reminder

# You deserve to feel respected, included, and valued.

You are stronger and more capable than you may realize. Every single day that you show up for yourself — with courage, with kindness, and with the willingness to seek support — is a victory worth celebrating. This toolkit is yours to return to, whenever you need a reminder of your worth.

✔ **You are not alone. Help is here. And you matter — more than words can say.**