

Example of essay on adult development and aging

[Life](#), [Adolescence](#)



Psychology:

Aging and adulthood are two aspects of our life that we cannot avoid. As human beings we undergo physiological and psychological changes in our body and mind throughout our life circle. This change is often multidimensional and has been scientifically known to either progress or decline depending on many social as well as psychosomatic factors. Stuart Hamilton (2006) differentiates aging as influenced by immediate as well as factors that can be traced back to our childhood. From a psychological point of view there is evidence to the fact that the inevitable aging process can be made subsequently easier by the provision of societal and family support. It is not uncommon for people to lean towards religion or spirituality in order to be able to cope better with this change in their body and mind.

In this article, we will reflect on the process of aging and adulthood from the point of view of the aging individual, which can be sometimes based on the expectations that society places on older people. We will also explore the various ways that society, family and individual can contribute in the care for the elderly and help them cope with the various changes in their body. We will review and examine the topic under the below headings.

1. Coping with Old Age.
2. How to Age well.
3. Aging and Elderly Care.

Coping with Old Age.

As discussed earlier, adulthood and aging is a physiological process, which cannot be controlled, but it is true that some people age faster than others.

This could be due to health issues and living conditions for most. One other factor that causes premature aging is personal frame of mind. As we age, we most often lose track of some of the good things of our youth and happy moments of our lives. These moments do not disappear from our lives; rather we get so caught up with life that we stop enjoying the small yet important moments, which helped shape, our lives. Old age is most often focussed on habitual counting of days leading to our death rather than a phase in life that is worth living. Mitch Albom (1997) in his book *Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson* elaborates on the valuable lessons he learnt about life and old age from his aging teacher, Morrie Schwartz. The objective of coping with aging can be summarized in Morrie's own words "once you learn how to die, you learn how to live." (p. 81). As the line suggests, half the battle towards death is won once we get over the fear of death and view it as an end. Rather he recommends living a life in joyful anticipation of it. Coping with this eventuality or rather learning how to die paves the path for a fruitful old age. Psychologists have proven that positive aging can help avert half the ailments we suffer during old age. Most ailments are a direct result of a sense of loss of youth or negative feeling towards life and abject fear of death. A life of regret and guilt can trigger premature aging and ailments and hasten a psychological death within a living physical body. Living every day with a positive outlook and utilizing the days we have remaining in our lives to accomplish things we have always wanted to and nurturing the last days of our lives is a very apt way of coping with old age. Albom (1997) also talks about the imagery of having a little bird on our shoulder constantly

reminding us to live our life to the fullest so that when it is time to die we can die with the relief that we have lived a fulfilling life.

Society also plays a very important role in how people lead their lives, perceive themselves and invariably cope with old age. As we discussed earlier, two kinds of aging takes place in human beings, psychologists have proven that those who have had a nurtured and loving childhood cope with old age better as they seek out similar nurturing conditions even in their old age. This is in contrast to those who have not had a secure precedent to live by and thereby seek the same. Invariably people who fall into the latter category isolate themselves and are often times unable to cope with old age as effectively. (Richards & Hupert. 2011). In such circumstances an effort made by family and friends to provide love and support goes a long way. We cannot however ignore the fact that people from broken homes and those who have had a disturbed childhood can also make a deliberate attempt to make their adult life more positive. This again goes to prove the relevance of Morrie's advise in Albom's (1997) book. It is never too late to better our lives and seek those we love and care about.

How to Age Well

George E Valliant (2002) in his research conducted on adult development echoes similar sentiments. His research was conducted on almost 824 individuals and he traced their development into adulthood from their teenage years. His findings from his extensive research summarize that the secret to aging well and coping with the prospect of aging is to feel healthy mentally and emotionally. With old age and aging also come in many factors of fear of health and illusions of ill health. Most old people feel isolated and

have more time in their hands to reflect on the changes that they have witnessed through out their life span. Modernity and a fast paced life also subsequently brought with it many factors that affect our health and speed up aging. As proven in the research conducted in 1979 by a Harvard University psychologist, levels of intelligence, muscle strength and cognitive function measurably increased in a group of nursing home residents who had been psychologically transported to years of their own youth. While self-care and positive mindset is most essential it is also important to support the elderly with the stress they experience over social and economic changes that they might have experienced in their lifetime. As the test results proved, as we age we are happier dwelling in the days of our youth and in familiar circumstances. " So to understand old people requires an understanding of what was true when they were young, how the world in which they grew up has changed in their lifetime, and how these changes have affected them, which is bound to differ somewhat from one person to another." (Lazarus, 2006. P. 79).

There may be many factors that can make coping with old age difficult for some, but it is important for the aging individual to not feel sick emotionally while being ill physically. We will discuss further about the power of the human mind in coping with aging a little later in the article. Ill health is a given in the later part of our lives therefore the key to aging well is to have inner happiness and an ability and loving support during ill health than great health but unhappiness and isolation. At the same time care givers and family members must not ignore genuine signs of depression, neurosis and ill health. Inability to cope with old age is a serious ailment and to be taken

seriously according to Richard and Bernice Lazarus (2006)

The first and most common way of looking at treatment for the troubled elderly person is that the failure to cope effectively with problems of living is the result of neuroticism of some sort. Indeed, it often is, in which case psychotherapy to change faulty ways of thinking and coping patterns is appropriate. (p. 184)

Social aptitude over society and Class

The stress and competitiveness of modern life can result in many disappointments and inability to live a life that is fulfilling or rather to our expectations. Disappointments are a part and parcel of everyone's life and these can take on monumental proportions when we are at the threshold of old age. It is therefore important to remember and reflect on our lives as a result of a series of good fortune rather than dwell on the things that we do not have or did not achieve. Vaillant (2002) stresses more on social aptitude and ranks it much higher than social background, societal class and even intellectual achievements. As we discussed earlier aging is a time to take into account all the good moments in our lives and make the most of family and loved ones. Vaillant (2002) even goes a step further and recommends searching and dwelling into the many important and valuable relationships in the first half of our lives and renewing connections.

Self-care is also essential according to Lazarus (2006). It is necessary to identify and accept that as we grow older some of our physical abilities will change and our movements can become constrained. Therefore communal as well as individual planning of habitat to suit elderly life can make the

transition into aging more of a comfortable process. Accidental falls can be averted in old age by designing homes in anticipation of mobility constraints.

Aging and Elderly care

Medical and technological advancements have guaranteed us treatments for many ailments however there is no cure for aging and the aging process. It is but natural for the human body to undergo some changes and slow down in his working mechanisms. Ellen J Langer (2009) suggests ways to turn the psychological clock to cope with the advancing physical clock.

Brain aging is directly related to the way you view life. A positive attitude and outlook have been shown to help keep the brain young and health. Free radical production is reduced and the levels of stress hormones are kept low. All these things contribute to mental sharpness. (Kenneth & DiGeronimo. 1999, p 23)

Therefore there is medical evidence to the aspect of positive aging as discussed earlier in the article. Research and identification also gives birth to an abundance of medical terminology and Langer (2009) elaborates on some of the ill effects of intensive medical research and technological advancement on aging. Understanding and interpreting medical language on one's own is an essential part of coping with aging and coping with aging elderly. It is necessary according to Langer (2009) to evaluate each situation or symptom from a personality point of view rather than brand it medically or just blame it on old age. Memory loss or reduced agility could be a by-product of aging while also being an inherent personality trait of the individual. Therefore effective communication with medical personnel and objective interpretation of medical evaluations and symptoms is essential in

psychological elder care. The superiority of the human mind over body is a proven fact by many scientists and psychologists alike. The human mind has the capacity to heal and boost its immunity as proven by the 1979 research discussed earlier. Photographs taken at the end of the study also showed them to appear younger and proved beyond doubt that controlling our minds and accepting the changes can reverse the aging process. (Ferguson, 2010, para 5). Langer (2009) presents a personal example of her aging parents whose joyful outlook towards life made them look younger than their contemporaries.

Taking control over one's illnesses and bodily constraints is also a critical aspect of coping with aging. Langer (2009) defines "Chronic" as that being uncontrollable; therefore she recommends overcoming fear of illness and pain by not trying to control something that has been proven medically uncontrollable. At the same time controlling the mind can help understand psychosomatic symptoms of old age. It is more prudent to focus on other things in life and in building stronger relationships in life. Psychological effects of aging as we discussed earlier can result in feelings of guilt, anger, disappointment and eventually sadness and depression. Being hard on oneself and beating oneself up for things said or done in the past are unhealthy and do not serve any purpose according to Langer (2009).

Feelings of guilt according to her usually emanate from situations where one has no reasonable explanation for their behaviour and therefore there is no plausible reason to carry it in our minds instead of moving on with our lives. The role played by family and those close to the aging elderly person is also vital in preparing the elderly for the inevitable. Having an open conversation

with the person in question about death and embracing the eventuality rather than live in denial can in fact be a great source of support for the aged. Most often the elderly live in fear of pain and suffering in case of some kind of terminal illness. In cases like this it is necessary to make them take control and have a dialogue whereby the choice of deciding not to live in pain can be made well in advance. Fear of losing their independence and becoming dependent on others is another important aspect of aging that needs to be addressed. Chronic or terminal illnesses can render an individual incapable of taking care of themselves in their old age. It is therefore important to have an open discussion and identify dependency issues and provide inputs on the kind of services and facilities such as hospice or professional care in the home itself that can be availed. " With senior home care, we remain independent. We are free to do as we like without having to follow the rigid regulations of a nursing home facility." (Barnes 2010, para. 3). Providing excellent elderly home care services have in many ways proven to be effective in helping cope with aging. Home care can in many ways give them an opportunity to learn skills that they have always wanted to learn but could not find time in their busy lifestyles. Under these circumstances old age can be seen as an advantage and a stage where one can pay more attention to one's needs thereby leading to a positive outlook towards the aging process. Richards et al (2011) also insist that whilst helping the elderly make educated and informed choices with regarding to their old age it is also important to stress that all aspects of the discussion is based on extreme concern and support from the family. Overall a positive outlook towards

aging and looking towards it as another developmental and important process in our life span is very essential.

Conclusion

Scientific advancements have provided a marked increase in the human life span over the years. However these cannot still reverse or ease the path of aging. Rather it can make it harder to cope with for some as we saw in the article. Increased longevity does not counteract the effects of disease and critical illness brought about by aging. Therefore we can conclude that this boon of longevity can be enjoyed only if positive thinking, societal changes, family bonding and focussed medical care and services support it.

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