



# Best Practices in Intergenerational Programming: Practice 6

Intergenerational programs are most effective when activities are age- and role-appropriate.

## Practice 6 • Age- and role-appropriate activities

Intergenerational programs are most effective when activities are age- and role-appropriate.

Although all children are different, there is a predictable sequence in their development. Age- and role-appropriate educational opportunities are critical to a quality early childhood education program. Early childhood programs aim to prepare children for school while developing their social skills.

For older adults, appropriateness is a critical concept as well. Active engagement in appropriate roles helps older adults preserve their identities and can support functional abilities.

Planning activities that are manageable without seeming juvenile is key. Providing adults with age-appropriate art materials, such as colored pencils instead of crayons, is one way to support age appropriateness. Asking an adult to help a child build a house of blocks is role appropriate even if the adult needs the fine motor practice just like the child.

Skilled facilitators can support all adults in age- appropriate roles during intergenerational programming.

### Application of the Practice

Gardening has broad appeal to all ages. Because of the many tasks involved in planning, starting, maintaining, and harvesting a garden, it is easy to give participants of different abilities a role where they can succeed. Persons in wheelchairs can work at raised beds as small children work at hand height while standing. Adaptive equipment accommodates limited dexterity and strength. Adults who do not like to get messy can help plan the garden, sort seeds, water plants, and prepare harvested vegetables for a snack to share. Participants can plan the garden and enjoy the fruits of their labor together. Gardening provides a natural opportunity to incorporate STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) principles.

### Project TRIP

Transforming Relationships Through Intergenerational Programming

A Children's, Youth, and Families at Risk project of Virginia Tech with the Jefferson Area Board for Aging and the YMCAs of Charlottesville and Louisa County, Va.

**Shannon Jarrott**, Associate Professor, Human Development, Virginia Tech

**Karen DeBord**, Extension Specialist, Family and Human Development, Virginia Tech

**Contact:** Shannon Jarrott, [sjarrott@vt.edu](mailto:sjarrott@vt.edu)

This is one of 11 fact sheets on the emerging best practices associated with intergenerational programs.

Intergenerational programs are those that connect younger and older generations to foster positive experiences. Research continues to grow, noting that when successfully delivered, intergenerational programs result in positive health effects, child learning, and appropriate socialization for both young and old (Jarrott 2011).

The sixth practice relates to **age- and role-appropriate activities**.

## Program Ideas

- Trash to treasure for elders can be combined with Show and Tell for children. Invite antique dealers to be present if appropriate for extended learning. Adults and children both have favorite objects, with stories that reflect their interests and values.
- Weather Exploration is age-appropriate as weather affects everyone! Talk about weather folklore and reports, look at clouds, measure snow, invite a local meteorologist. Adults can help children select weather-appropriate clothes for dolls.
- Storytelling is enjoyed across the ages. Use interesting stories or story cards. Pair adults and children; add costumes and props.
- Sports are a lifelong passion for many; discuss games, rules, favorite teams, and being a good fan. Invite local athletes.
- Everyone needs transportation. Discuss travel including busses, trains, antique cars, and airplanes. Use books and field trips.
- Gift giving takes many shapes and is appropriate at any age – talk with both groups about the joy of giving, and make plans for giving to each other or working together to give to another group (e.g., a shelter). Have children and adults really consider each other's interests. This project may last over time. Suggestions are a family recipe, a puzzle to work together, seeds for a garden, ingredients for soup, and simple sewing projects.



### Additional Resource

Freeman, Judy. 1990. *Books Kids Will Sit Still For*. New York: Bowker.

Kaplan, M. 2012. Various publications from <http://intergenerational.cas.psu.edu/>

For more ideas, see: <http://intergenerational.cas.psu.edu/Docs/Sourcebook.pdf>.

### References

Jarrott, S. E. 2011. "Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going? Content Analysis of Evaluation Research of Intergenerational Programs." *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* 9:37-52. doi: 10.1080/15350770.2011.544594.

## Best Practices for Intergenerational Programming

1. Staff members of the adult and child programs *collaborate* to plan activities.
2. Participants are *involved* in *decision-making* about the activity and during activities.
3. Participation is *voluntary*.
4. Participants are *prepared* ahead of time and reflect on the activity afterward.
5. *Activities reflect interests*, backgrounds, and social histories of program participants.
6. **Activities are age- and role-appropriate.**
7. Activities support *interaction* among intergenerational participants.
8. Facilitators skillfully *stage the environment* to promote interaction.
9. Facilitators *consider the social environment and the role of staff members*.
10. *Adaptive equipment* is used as appropriate.
11. Facilitators *document and communicate* experiences to build on in future activities.