

GUIDELINE 4

Psychologists strive to gain knowledge about theory and research in aging.

Rationale

To provide effective clinical services to older adults, psychologists strive to gain comprehensive knowledge about theory and research in aging. APA-supported training conferences emphasize the importance of psychologists becoming familiar with the biological, psychological, cultural, and social content and contexts associated with normal aging as part of their knowledge base for working clinically with older adults (Diehl & Wahl, 2020; Knight, et al., 2009; Woodhead & Yochim, 2022). As many practicing psychologists will likely work with clients, family members, and caregivers of diverse ages, a rounded preparatory education encompassing training with a lifespan developmental perspective is very useful (Hinrichsen et al., 2018).

APA accreditation criteria now require that students be exposed to the current body of knowledge in human development across the lifespan as well as didactic and experiential training on diversity factors including age (Commission on Accreditation Implementing Regulations, Section C: <https://irp.cdn-website.com/a14f9462/files/uploaded/section-c-soa.pdf>).

Over the past half-century, the field of psychology of aging has made significant progress, as evidenced by a wealth of scholarly publications. 'PA's publication "The Psychology of Adult Development and Aging" (Eisdorfer & Lawton, 1973) marked a pivotal moment in summarizing the current state of substantive knowledge, theory, and methods in psychology and aging. Subsequent overviews further advanced understanding in areas such as normal aging, psychological assessment, and intervention with older adults (e.g., Bengtson & Settersten, 2016; Lightenberg et al., 2015a, 2015b; Pachana & Laidlaw, 2014; Pachana et al., 2015; Scogin & Shah, 2012).

By developing and maintaining expertise in aging-related theory and research, psychologists can deliver better-informed and more effective care to older adults, contributing to their overall well-being and quality of life.

Application

To effectively implement Guideline 4 psychologists working with older adults can consider the following strategies: Continuous Professional Development: Practitioners can stay updated with the latest research and theories in geropsychology by engaging in continuous education and professional development activities. Attend conferences, workshops, and training sessions that focus on aging-related topics to enhance their knowledge and skills.

A 2022 publication by members of the Council of Professional Geropsychology Training Programs provides an overview of foundational competencies in geropsychology (Garrison-Diehn et al., 2022; Hinrichsen & Emery-Tiburcio, 2022; Jacobs & Bamonti, 2022; Lind et al., 2022; Mast et al., 2022; Woodhead, E. L., & Yochim, 2022).

Extensive information on resource materials is now available for instructional coursework or self-study in geropsychology, including course syllabi, textbooks, videotapes, online modules, and literature references at various websites. A brief list of websites is presented at the end of this document.

Lifespan Perspective Training: Seek out educational opportunities that provide a lifespan perspective, including such topics as concepts of age and aging, longitudinal change and cross-sectional differences, cohort effects (differences between persons born during different historical periods of time), theories of aging, and research designs for adult development and aging (e.g., Zelinski et al., 2009; Fingerman et al., 2010; Pachana et al., 2014; Bengtson & Settersten, 2016; Segal et al., 2018). Understanding these concepts will aid in contextualizing the experiences and

challenges faced by older adults (see Guidelines 5 and 11 for further discussion as well as Diehl & Wahl, 2020 and APA, 2022b), and aid practitioners in the application of empirical findings to their work.

Collaborate With Interdisciplinary Teams: Foster collaboration with professionals from other disciplines who specialize in geriatrics and gerontology. Interdisciplinary teamwork can provide a comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted needs of older adults. By working together, psychologists can benefit from the expertise and perspectives of other professionals, enhancing the quality of care provided to older adults. Practicing integrated teams may consider development and implementation of brown bag consultation series, as this may foster professional identity development and interprofessional teamwork at all levels of professional development (Halli-Tierney et al., 2021).

Cultural Competence: Recognize the importance of cultural and social contexts in aging. Be attentive to the diversity within the older adult population, including differences in cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and values. Consider how these factors may influence the experiences, preferences, and needs of older adults when developing treatment plans and interventions.

Promote Aging Well: Be aware of the components that promote late life development and well-being (e.g., Bundick, Yeager, King, & Damon, 2010; Liverman et al., 2015). While aging includes the need to adapt to physical changes, functional limitations, and other changes in psychological and social functioning, the majority of older adults adapt successfully to these changes and have resiliencies to assist in meeting these challenges (Manning et al., 2019; Ong et al., 2018). Despite biological decrements associated with aging, considerable potential exists for positive psychological growth and maturation in late life (Hill, 2005; Steverink,