



**How could I celebrate
the 100th Day of
School?!**

What is the 100th Day of School?

The 100th Day of School celebrates all that students have learned and how they've grown since the start of the school year. It was originally intended to help young students develop number sense and recognize numbers up to 100.

Many schools now mark the day as an occasion as "Dress Like a 100-Year-Old Day." Sometimes accompanied by teachers, students don gray wigs, shawls, fake spectacles and suspenders. Some pretend to be hard of hearing. Some imitate physical impairment by using walkers and canes. Some act cognitively impaired, pretending to be slow or confused. This might seem like harmless fun. It's not.

Kids love dress-up! What's wrong with pretending to be old people?

These costumes and behaviors rely on simplistic and demeaning stereotypes that ignore the uniqueness of older people and the diversity of the aging process. In other words, Dress Like a 100-Year-Old Day is ageist. "We're being ageist any time we make an assumption about people based on how old we think they are," explains ageism expert Ashton Applewhite.

Dress Like a 100-Year-Old Day is ageist and also ableist: it contributes to stereotypes and stigma around physical and cognitive ability. We're being ableist any time we make an assumption about people based on how we think their minds or bodies work. Canes and walkers and glasses and hearing aids aren't props or toys. They're devices that people of all ages depend on to make their way in the world.

Why is this a big deal?

Attitudes toward aging, like attitudes toward race and gender, form in early childhood. We live in a culture that barrages us with negative messages about age and aging, starting with children's books and Disney movies. When we allow or encourage kids to dress and act in ways that demean or stereotype older people, we set the stage for a lifetime of fear and denial around growing older. (Here's [a geriatrician's take](#) on why this harms us all. Hint: everyone is old or future old.) It's not unusual for American girls to start using Botox in their teens!

On the other hand, when we teach kids that aging is a lifelong process of growth and evolution, we set them up to be open-minded and curious about it. Everyone deserves respect and compassion, after all, and discrimination on the basis of age or ability is as unacceptable as racism, sexism, homophobia, or any other form of bias.

Why not celebrate student accomplishment? Or use the occasion to consider all the experiences a long life makes possible.



What are some better ways to celebrate the 100th Day of School??

If you want to mark the number 100 in other creative ways ...

- STEM: build a tower using 100 building blocks
- Language: write a story or poem that is exactly 100 words long.
- Language: use exactly 100 words to tell us about yourself, or your favorite activity, or a topic that is important for everyone to know about
- Reading: read 100 words of a story and predict what's going to happen
- Math: group 100 different objects in as many ways as possible
- Phys.Ed: balance on one leg for 100 seconds (eyes open or closed)
- Art: as a class, draw 100 faces or trees or friendly monsters and display them in the classroom or the hallway
- Music: set a metronome to 100 beats per minute and play clapping games

If you want to use the day as an opportunity to celebrate longevity and the passage of time ...

- List 100 things you know now that you didn't know a year ago.
- List 100 experiences you would like to have in your life.
- Compare what takes 100 seconds to accomplish vs.100 minutes, vs.100 days vs.100 months vs.100 years.

A few things we can all do every day to make the world more liveable for people of all ages...

- Have a real conversation with someone at least 10 years older or 10 years younger. People of all ages can be insightful, interesting and wise.
- Think about how you use the words "old" and "young." Our youth-centric culture equates "old" with negative. It's fine to talk about age! It's an important aspect of identity, especially to kids. We get into trouble, though, when we suggest that some ages are better than others. All ages have both challenges and opportunities.
- Resist the temptation to categorize people with generational labels. Instead, look for common ground.
- Say your age and/or your birth year. Treat it as a simple descriptor in the same way that you might talk about your height or the colour of your eyes or how many dogs you have.

