

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY FOR COAS

Building Connection Through Conversation

Simple Discussion Starters for Older Adults

Loneliness is one of the quietest health risks facing older adults. Programs, meals, and rides matter, but the deepest form of connection often comes from being asked a real question — and being heard while answering it. Philosophy is unusually good at supplying real questions.

What makes a philosophical question different from small talk isn't difficulty. It's that the question takes the person seriously. *Did you have a good week?* invites a polite answer. *What is something you understand now that you didn't at twenty?* invites a person to share who they are. The first question fills time. The second one can change a room.

Older adults have something most younger people lack: decades of lived material to draw from. A philosophical question lets that material come forward. The role of the COA staff member or volunteer isn't to teach philosophy. It is to ask a question and then make space.

Five Discussion Starters to Try

1. What is something you've changed your mind about over your life?
2. Looking back, what turned out to matter more than you expected?
3. If you could tell your twenty-year-old self one thing, what would it be — and would they listen?
4. What does a good day look like to you now?
5. What is something small that brings you joy that you wouldn't have noticed when you were younger?

TRY THIS WEEK

At your next coffee hour, lunch program, or group activity, try one of the questions above. Don't introduce it as philosophy — just ask. Then listen for at least a full minute before saying anything in response. The silence does a lot of the work. You may be surprised by what opens up.

A contribution to the MCOA Aging Matters series

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