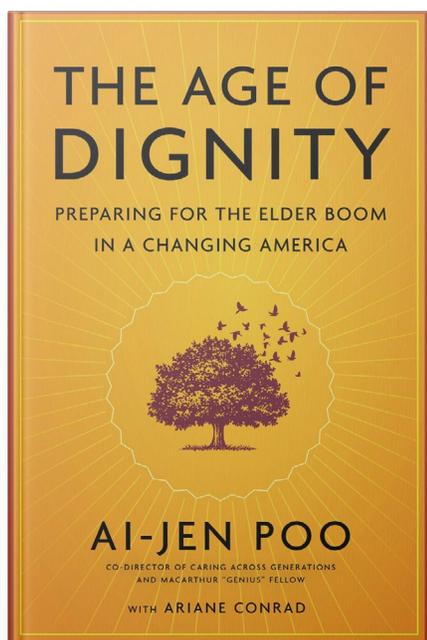




The Age Of Dignity

Book Club Tool Kit





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Conversations about how we want to live and care for one another with dignity are among the most important we can have with our families and communities. And they're becoming even more urgent as we all get older, or face the changing care needs of the people we love. Nationally, the number of seniors will more than double over the next 20 years, adding pressure to an already strained care system. But if we come together to begin these critical conversations before we're in the thick of caregiving, we can transform the way we care - in our personal lives, and as a society. That's where *The Age of Dignity: Preparing for the Elder Boom in a Changing America* and this Book Club Kit come in.

The Age of Dignity, by social visionary Ai-jen Poo, tells the stories of a growing majority of American families grappling with how to manage, choose and afford the care they want while presenting an empowering roadmap for how we can build a "caring majority" to live life on our own terms. This Kit will help readers use the book to spark constructive conversations about the issues and paths for change. You'll find tips, discussion prompts, and valuable ways to take action!

Have questions or want to get more involved? Send an email to:
Vanessa Faraj, National Membership Organizer, vanessa@caringacross.org
Janet Kim, Culture Change Director, janet@caringacross.org

1. Read the book!

Here are some things you can do as you read along in preparation for your book club.

- **Note any specific recurring questions** your book club plans to explore and keep them in mind.
- **Mark passages that strike you** with a sticky and note what it made you feel/understand in a new way.
- **Jot down questions** the reading raises for you.

2. Invite friends, family and community members

It's easy. Just take the following steps:

- **Determine a vision to guide the discussion**, i.e. creating a more caring society; exploring dignity; the future of women's work; envisioning a better future for working families; creating a network of support for family caregivers.
- **Confirm all logistics**, i.e. regular meeting place/times, the structure of the conversation, food, invite list . Will you host 1 meeting or 4?
- **Spread the word**. Invite 3 people to join and ask them to recruit 1-2 people each. Voila!

Sample Agenda (1-2 Hours)

Meet & Greet
15-30 mins
Logistics
15-20 mins
Discussion
30-60

You can also find an existing book club. Local libraries, bookstores, and senior centers can help direct you to listings. Online finders are also great resources. Be sure to check local listings.

Here are a few national listings:
www.readerscircle.org
www.meetup.com/topics/bookclub
www.my-bookclub.com
www.craigslist.org

3. Discuss with your group

Here are some discussion prompts you can use to guide your group. It's often a good idea to start general and then move into specifics. Check out the appendix for more questions by sub-topic.

General Questions

- What feelings did the reading bring up for you?
- What specific people or moments stood out and why?
- Were there people or situations that you could relate to the most? Please explain.
- How do the issues that were raised affect your life or your community (directly or indirectly)?
- Were there any ideas that surprised you? If so, what?
- What is the author's vision for the future? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
- Has the book changed your perspective in any way?
- If you could ask the author a question, what would it be?

4. Invite friends, family and community members

There are various ways to take meaningful action on these issues. Consider the following ideas.

Broaden the conversation. Reach out to other book clubs in the area and propose that they also read *The Age of Dignity*. Then organize a broader discussion and invite local experts to join.

Build a Family Care Plan. Start a conversation with your loved ones about the kind of care they will want so you can begin to build a plan together. Caring Across Generations suggests the prompts below. (Also consider *The Conversation Project Starter Kit*, which can help you with these sensitive conversations.)

"What is our family's plan for meeting our future caregiving needs? What will we need in 5, 10, or 20 years? Will we need to hire help? Can we afford the care we want?"

"What joys could getting older and caring for one another bring? Could caregiving bring our family, friends, and/or community closer together?"

Advocate and Organize to Ensure Long-term Care for All. Become an agent of change in your town or city by organizing a house meeting to discuss the issue of care, share your care story and then get trained in collecting other people's care stories, or identify opportunities to engage with your state legislators on this critical issue! And don't forget to encourage everyone to sign up with Caring Across Generations at www.caringacross.org, and follow on Facebook and Twitter.

Ground Rules

Coming up with rules in the beginning that everyone agrees to can help the conversation stay on track. For example:

Use "I" statements and avoid generalizing about people or groups. Balance sharing with listening so everyone has a chance to participate.

Allow others to speak without interruption.

Agree that we may disagree but we respect and learn from differences.

Any personal information shared in this group is confidential

Opportunity Holidays

The following holidays offer a great opportunity to suggest *Age of Dignity* to your Book Club:

International Women's Day (March)

Mother's Day (May)

Father's Day (June)

Senior Citizens Day (August 21)

Grandparent's Day (September)

Labor Day (September)

National Family Caregivers Month (November)

Appendix - More Questions By Theme

Family Caregivers

- Why does the author say that the traditional system of caring for elders, which renders it a private family responsibility, is a “holdover from another time”? What are the implications of continuing to rely on this informal system?
- The author highlights the tremendous toll (stress, guilt, exhaustion, etc.) that care work can take on a family caregiver. How would you answer the questions on pg. 60? Pick 1-2 to discuss.
- The author suggests that unpaid care, which is shouldered by families, drains our economy of an economic windfall (job creation, workforce productivity, etc.). What factors get in the way?

Professional Caregivers

- Based on what you know and read, how do professional caregivers contribute to the social and economic fabric of our society? To an individual and/or family’s personal and professional lives?
- Have you ever worked with a professional caregiver (for yourself or a loved one)? What did that relationship enable you to accomplish that you couldn’t have done on your own?
- The author explains that excluding caregivers from labor protections is rooted in the legacy of slavery. Does this historical perspective affect your understanding of the issues? If so, how?

Women

- Do you think that improving the care economy is a women’s issue? Why or why not?
- How does care work challenge our economy’s current measures of productivity? Please explain.
- The author, citing economist Nancy Folbre, suggests the division between things we do for love versus for money is a gendered distinction that justifies a “lack of respect and remuneration for work that involves love” (pg. 100). What do you think of this statement? Please explain.

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Appendix - More Questions By Theme

Immigrants in the Workforce

- Why does international labor migration flow to urban centers of industrialized nations? Why is the demand for immigrant labor so high in these places? Please explain.
- “The diverse and growing aging population and the growing immigrant population in this country need each other” (pp. 98-99). What do you think of this statement? Do you agree?
- Do you agree with the author’s position that we should adjust our immigration policies to meet the higher demand families have than our workforce can support? Please explain.

Innovations in Long-term Care

- Do you agree improved conditions for care workers could lead to improved conditions for our elders? Should we “invest in human potential” (pg. 164)? Why or why not.
- What is the “caring majority”? Who makes up the “caring majority” in your community?
- Which of the various creative solutions highlighted at the end of the book stood out to you (NORCs, Villages, Carepods, caregiving time-banks, etc.)? Please explain why.
- What do you think of the state and policy ideas proposed (i.e. cooperatives, social insurance, long-term care benefits and commissions, workforce training, secure social security, etc.)?
- What do you think of the author’s case for making investments in a caregiving infrastructure, or the “Care Grid,” on the scale of investments we’ve made in previous infrastructure like electricity and the Internet?

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