

Socializing helps elderly modify interactions

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Despite the stereotype that older adults often ramble or talk off topic, seniors who enjoy socializing are able to adapt their conversations to a listener's age, says a University of Michigan researcher.

Knowing what the [listener](#) will find relevant helps position a speaker as an attentive and sensitive conversational partner, says Deborah Keller-

Cohen, professor of education, linguistics and women's studies.

This is an important skill in many "life" situations, she says. For example, a senior who gives incomplete information or off-topic details to a doctor, rather than provide a succinct narrative about their health, may not receive the level of care needed.

Keller-Cohen analyzed whether [older adults](#) could modify their speech when speaking to a child or another adult. She also sought to address how seniors' social network and living arrangements affect the way they speak to listeners of different ages.

A sample of 34 adults, whose ages ranged from 75 to 90, rated their social interactions, such as the frequency, satisfaction and number of people with whom they interacted. Study participants were asked to describe how to make a grilled cheese or egg salad sandwich to two fictive listeners: a 10-year-old boy and a 30-year-old adult. Their words and phrases were then analyzed.

Older adults provided more information and a more restricted range of words when talking to a child. In contrast, when an adult was the listener, older adults often used a variety of different words in their explanations.

"This indicates they were sensitive to the diversity of vocabulary their listener was likely to possess," Keller-Cohen said.

Older adults with more frequent social interactions also provided more information to the child, the study indicated.

The findings appear in the current issue of *Research on Aging*.

More information: D. Keller-Cohen. "Audience Design and Social Relations in Aging," *Research on Aging* (2014). [DOI](#):

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