

Life Course Discrimination

Full Lesson Resource Pack

Cambridge OCR A Level Sociology - Component 2 Section B: Understanding Social Inequalities

Life Course Discrimination

The diagram illustrates the life course with a central wavy path. Along the path, there are several illustrations of people at different stages of life, each flanked by a large empty box for notes:

- Top left: A child playing with blocks.
- Top right: Two children talking.
- Second row left: A student at school.
- Second row right: A person with a backpack.
- Third row left: A person at a desk.
- Third row right: A group of people.
- Fourth row left: A person at a door.
- Fourth row right: A person at a laptop.
- Fifth row left: A person at a bench.
- Fifth row right: A group of people.
- Bottom: A person sitting on a bench.

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Lesson focus

Students identify age-based forms of discrimination across the life course and explain how these can affect life chances in education, employment, housing, health, public space, media and political voice.



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helping students understand society

Time	Group size	Assessment focus	Core outcome
60 minutes	Pairs or groups of 3-4	AO1, AO2, AO3	A completed life course timeline and a judgement about which stage is most affected



Teacher overview

This lesson uses a life course timeline to help students see age as a social category, not simply a biological fact.

Students place examples of ageism and age-based discrimination onto different stages of life, then explain the stereotypes, institutions and life-chance consequences involved. The activity works well because it allows students to compare discrimination against children, young people, adults in work and older people, rather than assuming age inequality only happens in later life.

Learning objectives

- Define ageism and age-based discrimination.
- Identify age-based inequalities across different stages of the life course.
- Apply examples of discrimination to schools, workplaces, housing, healthcare, media and public space.
- Explain how age affects life chances.
- Evaluate whether age inequality is most serious for the young, the old, or across the whole life course.

Key concepts

Age	Ageism	Age discrimination	Life course
Stereotyping	Prejudice	Inequality	Life chances
Dependency	Retirement	Youth marginalisation	Structural inequality

OCR assessment links

AO1 Knowledge	AO2 Application	AO3 Evaluation
Students define and recognise ageism, stereotyping, dependency, youth marginalisation and life chances.	Students place scenario cards on the timeline and connect each example to institutions such as school, work, housing, healthcare and media.	Students judge which forms of age discrimination are most damaging, visible or hidden, and consider overlaps with class, gender, disability and ethnicity.



60-minute lesson sequence

Timing	Activity	Teacher role	Student outcome
0-5 mins	Starter: What counts as age discrimination?	Ask students to write one example affecting young people and one affecting older people.	Students recognise that ageism can operate at several stages of life.
5-10 mins	Concept framing	Briefly define ageism, life course and life chances. Emphasise that age is socially constructed through expectations and stereotypes.	Students can use the key terms accurately.
10-30 mins	Main card sort: Life Course Timeline	Give out the worksheet, cards and instruction diagram. Students place cards onto the timeline and write responses in boxes.	Students classify examples by age stage and institution.
30-40 mins	Explanation grid	Students complete the summary grid for selected cards.	Students move from identification to sociological explanation.
40-50 mins	Group judgement	Each group answers: At which stage is age discrimination most damaging to life chances?	Students build AO3 judgement.
50-60 mins	Plenary / written paragraph	Students write a short evaluation paragraph or answer the exit question.	Students consolidate the link between ageism and life chances.

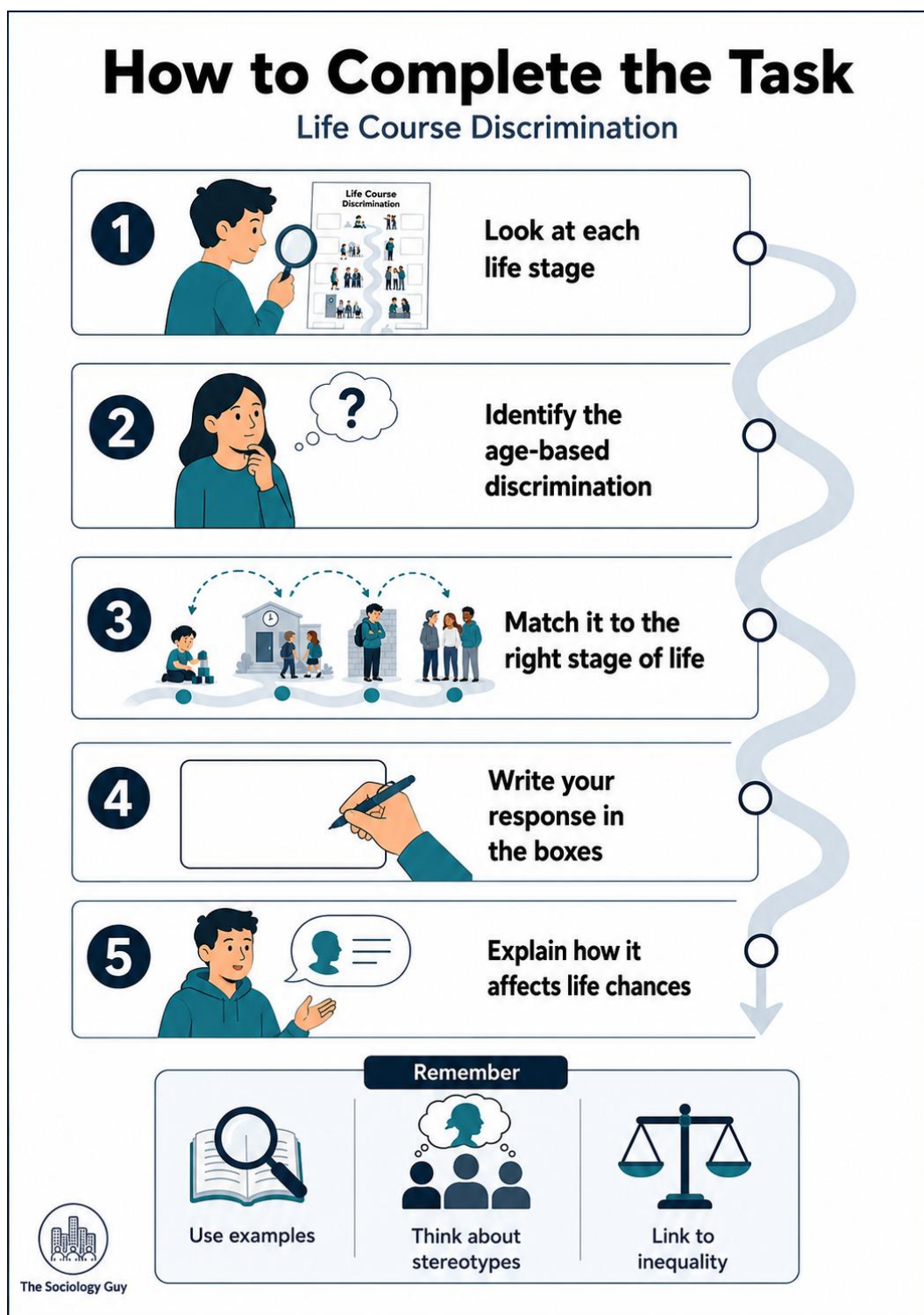
Teacher script: setting up the activity

1. Explain that age discrimination is not only about being old. Young children, teenagers, young adults, workers in mid-life and older people can all face different forms of judgement and exclusion.
2. Ask students to treat the timeline as a sociological map. They are not just finding the right age band; they are explaining why that age group is stereotyped or disadvantaged.
3. Remind students that one card can sometimes fit more than one life stage. They should justify their choice rather than look for a single correct answer.
4. Push students to use life chances language: income, education, housing, health, status, confidence, freedom, political voice and access to services.



Student instruction diagram

Display this on the board or print it as the front page of the student pack.



Printable worksheet: Life Course Discrimination

Students write their responses into the blank boxes. This can be printed as a standalone A4 worksheet.

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Student worksheet: Blank Life Course Timeline

Task 1: Place each discrimination card onto the timeline

Write the card title in the age band where you think it most commonly applies. Be ready to justify your decisions.

Life stage	Approximate age	Forms of age discrimination
Early childhood	0-4	
Primary years	5-11	
Teen years	12-17	
Young adulthood	18-24	
Early working adulthood	25-39	
Mid-life	40-59	
Early older age	60-74	
Later life	75+	

Task 2: Add explanation notes

- What is happening?
- Why is this age group affected?
- What stereotype may be behind it?
- How might it affect life chances?

Student summary grid

Card / example	Age group affected	Type of discrimination	Main setting	Possible effect on life chances
Example: Too young to be taken seriously	18-24	Stereotyping / indirect discrimination	Workplace	Reduced confidence and fewer opportunities



Printable scenario cards

Cut these out and give one set to each pair or group. The likely life stage is removed from this student-facing version.

Card 1: Too young to be taken seriously A 19-year-old employee has good ideas in meetings, but older colleagues dismiss them as inexperienced and immature.	Card 2: Excluded from jobs because of age A 58-year-old applicant is overlooked for a new role because the employer wants someone “more energetic” and “a better fit for the future”.
Card 3: Stereotyped as troublesome Teenagers in hoodies are asked to leave a shopping centre because security staff assume they are likely to cause trouble.	Card 4: Paid less because they are young A young worker is legally paid less because of age-related minimum wage rates, even though they do similar work to older staff.
Card 5: Refused private housing A landlord is reluctant to rent to students or young adults because they are seen as unreliable and irresponsible.	Card 6: Digital exclusion in later life An older person struggles to access services because appointments, banking and benefits systems are increasingly online.



Card 7: Too old to train A worker in their early sixties is not offered training because management assume it is not worth investing in them before retirement.	Card 8: Young people ignored in politics Young people are often described as politically apathetic, so their interests are taken less seriously by decision-makers.
Card 9: Retirement expectations Even where formal retirement rules are weaker, some workers feel pushed out because colleagues assume they should step aside for younger staff.	Card 10: Age restrictions and distrust A teenager is constantly followed by shop staff who assume they are more likely to steal.
Card 11: Health concerns dismissed as just old age An older patient reports pain, but it is not taken as seriously because health professionals assume deterioration is simply part of ageing.	Card 12: Pressure to grow up A young adult is criticised for still living at home, even though housing costs make independent living difficult.



Card 13: Workplace beauty and age expectations A woman in her fifties feels disadvantaged at work because her employer values youthful appearance and presentation.	Card 14: Young children seen as incapable Adults dismiss children's opinions in family or school decisions because they assume children cannot contribute meaningfully.
Card 15: Insurance costs linked to age A young driver faces high insurance costs because of assumptions about risk associated with their age group.	Card 16: Older people represented as a burden Media coverage describes an ageing population mainly as a cost or burden on welfare and healthcare services.
Card 17: Youth voice excluded from school decisions Students complain that rules are made about them without any real consultation.	Card 18: Assumptions about memory and competence An older employee is left out of tasks involving technology because colleagues assume they will struggle.



Discussion and extension tasks

Whole-class discussion questions

5. Which age group had the highest number of discrimination examples?
6. Which examples are based on stereotypes rather than formal rules?
7. Which forms of age discrimination are most visible?
8. Which forms are most hidden?
9. How does age discrimination affect life chances in education, work, health and housing?
10. Is age discrimination more severe for the young or the old?
11. How might age discrimination overlap with class, gender, disability or ethnicity?

Extension: ranking activity

Students rank the top five forms of age discrimination from most serious to least serious. They must justify their top choice using one of the following criteria:

- long-term impact
- effect on income
- effect on wellbeing
- effect on opportunities
- effect on identity and self-esteem

AO3 exam-style judgement question

Evaluate this view

“Age inequality is most serious in old age.”

Students should consider discrimination against children and teenagers, labour market inequalities for younger adults, ageism in healthcare and employment for older adults, and the fact that age inequality changes across the life course.



Teacher answer guide

There is no single perfect answer. Students should be rewarded for justified placement and clear sociological explanation.

Life stage	Likely examples	Possible sociological explanation
0-11	Young children seen as incapable; adults dismissing children's views	Children may be constructed as dependent and not fully competent. This can reduce participation in family and school decision-making.
12-17	Stereotyped as troublesome; youth voice excluded; shop surveillance	Young people may be labelled as risky, irresponsible or anti-social, producing informal social control and exclusion from public space.
18-24	Too young to be taken seriously; lower pay; refused private housing; pressure to grow up; high insurance costs	Young adults may be treated as inexperienced and irresponsible, which can restrict income, housing and early career opportunities.
25-39	Less obvious direct age discrimination, but age expectations around career and family may operate	Social expectations may create pressure to follow a "normal" adult life course involving work, independence and family formation.
40-59	Excluded from jobs; workplace beauty and age expectations	Mid-life workers may face assumptions about adaptability, appearance or energy, especially where age intersects with gender.
60-74	Too old to train; retirement expectations; assumptions about technology	Older workers may be constructed as less productive or less worth investing in, reducing access to training and promotion.
75+	Health concerns dismissed as just old age; older people represented as a burden	Later life may be associated with dependency, decline and cost, which can affect dignity, care and access to services.

Common misconceptions to challenge

- Age discrimination only affects old people. In reality, young people can also face age-based exclusion and stereotyping.
- Age is purely biological. Sociology examines how age categories are socially constructed and given different meanings.



- All older people experience the same level of disadvantage. Class, gender, ethnicity, disability and family support shape ageing differently.
- Stereotypes are harmless. Stereotypes can affect real access to jobs, housing, services, political voice and respect.

Model conclusion

Age discrimination is experienced differently across the life course. Young people may face suspicion, low pay and lack of voice, while older people may face exclusion from training, healthcare dismissal and dependency stereotypes. The most sociological answer is therefore not simply that one age group suffers more, but that the form and effect of discrimination changes as people move through different stages of life.

Optional plenary

Ask students to complete one of the following exit sentences:

- One important thing I learned about age discrimination is...
- The life stage most affected by age discrimination is... because...
- One example of ageism that affects life chances is...



Short written response scaffold

Point	Evidence / example	Explanation	Evaluation
One form of age discrimination is...	This can be seen when...	This affects life chances because...	However, this may depend on...

Resource notes

Designed for Cambridge OCR A Level Sociology: Understanding Social Inequalities. The graphics are included as student-facing printable resources and classroom display materials. Teachers may adapt timings and card selections depending on the group.

