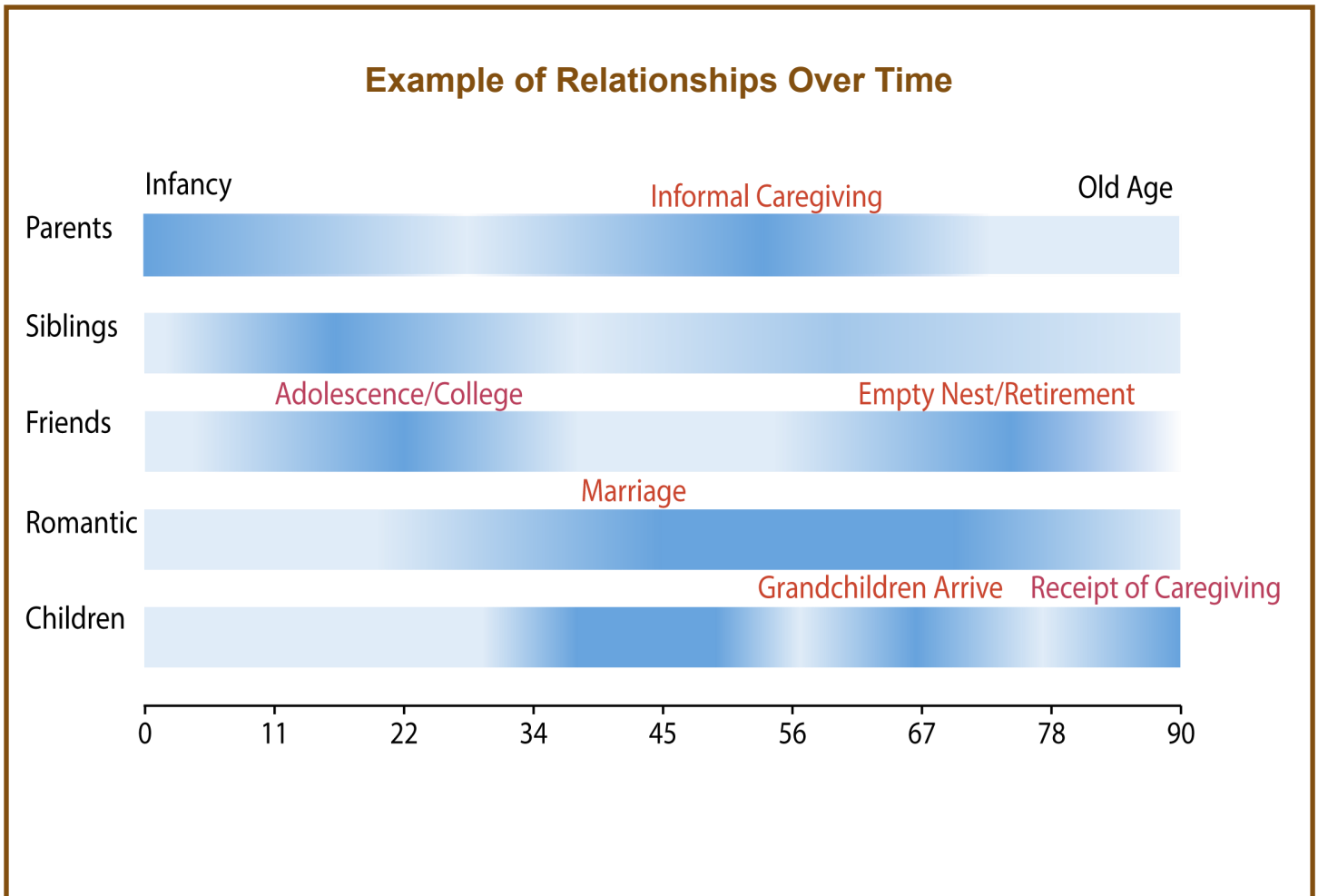


## Longitudinal Changes in Relationships



**There are many different types of social relationships, with differing levels of importance over time.**

(See figure above for a conceptual illustration.)

Although older adults tend to report smaller social networks, they also tend to report better or more satisfying relationships (See “Better with Age: Social Relationships Across Adulthood” by Gloria Luong et al. for a good overview).

### **Why might this be the case?**

- 1) Social pruning – older adults often limit their social network to optimize positive relationships and limit negative relationships (this process seems to begin as early as one’s thirties).
  - 2) Positivity bias – older adults may tend to pay attention to positive experiences, and avoid or ignore negative experiences.
  - 3) Reciprocal social cues – older adults often have social expertise to smooth over potential conflict; older adults are often also treated with more kindness and magnanimity than younger adults, which leads to more kindness and positive feelings in return.
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# Longitudinal Changes in Relationships

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## What about social isolation?

- Those with fewer than three close social partners are at increased risk of loneliness.
- Social isolation and loneliness are health risks, possibly on par with other risk factors such as living alone, health problems/disability, sensory impairments (e.g., hearing loss), and major life events (e.g., losing a spouse).
- Older adults are at increased risk of social isolation/loneliness.

## What does this mean for Extension and Family Living Educators?

- Many Extension programs and partnerships play a critical role in creating and maintaining social ties for older adults.
- Older adults who are socially isolated, connecting them with aging programming and functional resources (e.g., transportation services) can help them connect with others.
- Extension's work connecting diverse partners and facilitating systems-level change may play an equally important role, as it builds community capacity to support independent living and older adults' ability to age on their own terms.

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## Resource: McMaster Optimal Aging Portal

<https://www.mcmasteroptimalaging.org/>

## Sources:

- Luong, Gloria, Susan T. Charles, and Karen L. Fingerma. "Better with age: Social relationships across adulthood." *Journal of social and personal relationships* (2010). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3291125/>
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- McMaster University. "Loneliness and social isolation are important health risks in the elderly." McMaster Optimal Aging Portal (2016). <https://www.mcmasteroptimalaging.org/blog/detail/professionals-blog/2016/04/08/loneliness-and-social-isolation-are-important-health-risks-in-the-elderly>



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