

---

# Late Adulthood: The Social Convoy

---

## **Overview**

The social convoy is comprised of the people with whom we make the journey of life. Its composition changes over one's lifetime when members die or move away. And it changes as we add new members to our social group. In late adulthood, friends take on special meaning as individuals look back over the long lives they have led.

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of human relationships. As people continue to live longer, we see more and more families consisting of multiple generations. Most people can expect to live long enough to see their grandchildren grow up. The downside of longevity is that it can result in stress as younger family members are called upon or feel responsible for caring for their elders.

Long-term marriages are, by definition, found among older adults with many lasting fifty years and longer. Intimate relationships are especially important during late adulthood. Conflicts tend to be fewer, and the rewards of companionship appreciated more than ever.

The never-married late adult population is also on the increase as the baby boom generation moves through middle age into old age. This group prefers single life and are not lonely when compared to older divorced and widowed individuals.

Sibling relationships, those with one's adult children and with one's grandchildren also take on special meaning during this last stage of the lifespan. Past conflicts are sometimes, but not always, put to rest with siblings and children. As for grand-parenthood, there are a variety of forms that it can, and does, take. The non-normative event of parenting one's grandchildren is on the rise in our society and involves unique stresses. And the issue of grandparents' visitation rights has emerged.

Friendships are unique in one's life experience. They have the major impact on seniors' reported life satisfaction for a variety of reasons. Those who have a satisfactory circle of friends are healthier and happier than those who do not.

## **Questions to Consider**

1. Identify the members of your social convoy so far in your life. Have there been many changes in its makeup?
2. What meaning do your personal relationships have for you?
3. What function do they serve in your life?
4. Are you currently satisfied with the quality and quantity of your personal relationships?
5. Describe the long-term marriages you have known, if any.
6. What type of grandparent is (was)/are(were) yours? If you yourself are a grandparent, what type are you?
7. Do you think grandparents have a right to have visitation with their grandchildren?

---

## Vocabulary

Read these terms with their definitions before viewing the program.

**Social Convoy** The family members, friends and acquaintances who collectively move through life with us.

**Formal Grandparent** The grandparent who who plays a proper, formal role in the family.

**Fun-seeking Grandparent** The grandparent who is informal and playful when interacting with their grandchildren.

**Distant Grandparent** The grandparent who has infrequent contact and interaction with their grandchildren.

## Instructional Objectives

When you have successfully completed this module, you will be able to:

1. Describe the social convoy and the function it serves for individuals.
2. Discuss why and how personal relationships are important for human beings.
3. Describe long-term marriages.
4. Describe older never-married adults and compare them to divorced and widowed seniors.
5. Describe sibling relationships in late adulthood.
6. Describe late adults in their relationship with their adult children.
7. Describe friendships in late adulthood and discuss their importance to life satisfaction.
8. Describe grandparenting.
9. Identify and define types of grandparenting.
10. Discuss the phenomena of grandparents raising their grandchildren and grandparents demanding visitation rights with their grandchildren.

## Self-Test

After studying the objectives and watching the video, take the self-test to check your progress.

**Multiple Choice:** Select the phrase which best completes each statement.

The term "social convoy" refers to the truism that

- a. he travels fastest who travels alone.
- b. it is not healthy to spend time alone.
- c. we travel through life in the company of others.
- d. we all need a strong leader to take us through life.

The elderly individual who is most likely to be the healthiest and happiest is

- a. Jan, who never married.
- b. Annette, who is married.
- c. Carl, who is a widower.
- d. Susan, who is divorced.

Many studies of marriages of long duration find that the elderly tend to be

- a. happier in their marriages than before.
- b. more open to the possibility of divorcing than before.
- c. unhappy, but not inclined to divorce.
- d. less committed to marriage as an institution than before.

---

Today, the single older adult usually is

- a. pitied or ridiculed.
- b. immature or selfish.
- c. in need of supervision.
- d. happy and active.

Of the following, the most important buffer against loss of status and roles that comes from such experiences as retirement and widowhood is

- a. having several grandchildren.
- b. the presence of at least one close friend.
- c. adult children who are living nearby
- d. neighbors of varying ages and backgrounds.

Research on sibling relationships in late adulthood indicates that

- a. conflicts tend to fade and closeness increases.
- b. conflicts tend to increase.
- c. closeness to siblings occurs automatically.
- d. brothers become closer than sisters do.

Typically, the relationship between middle-aged adults and their elderly parents

- a. stays about the same.
- b. improves for men but not for women.
- c. improves with age.
- d. worsens with age.

The grandparenting style called "formal" is one in which the grandparent

- a. is very informal and playful with his or her grandchildren.
- b. plays a prescribed role and stays away from childrearing issues with their adult children.
- c. is kind to his or her grandchildren but has infrequent contact.
- d. none of the above.

The grandparenting style called "fun-seeking" is one in which the grandparent

- a. is very informal and playful with his or her grandchildren.
- b. plays a prescribed role and stays away from childrearing issues with their adult children.
- c. is kind to his or her grandchildren but has infrequent contact.
- d. none of the above.

The grandparenting style called "distant" is one in which the grandparent

- a. is very informal and playful with his or her grandchildren.
- b. plays a prescribed role and stays away from childrearing issues with their adult children.
- c. is kind to his or her grandchildren but has infrequent contact.
- d. none of the above.