



The Social Portfolio

Why friendships are so important to aging well



Most people age well not because of what they've saved, or because they follow their doctor's orders, but because of a strong social network of support.

—Dr. Joe Coughlin,
Director of the MIT AgeLab





- Multidisciplinary research program that works with business, government, and non-government organizations
- Seeks to understand longevity challenges and opportunities
- Invents solutions enabling people to do more throughout their lives
- Aims to improve quality of life for older people and those who care for them





Agenda

1. Friend Trends
2. What's a Social Portfolio?
3. Investing in Your Social Portfolio



Friend Trends

Why We Need Friends as We Age



Benefits of friends¹

- Fun
- Learning new things
- Better health
- Emotional support
- Sounding board



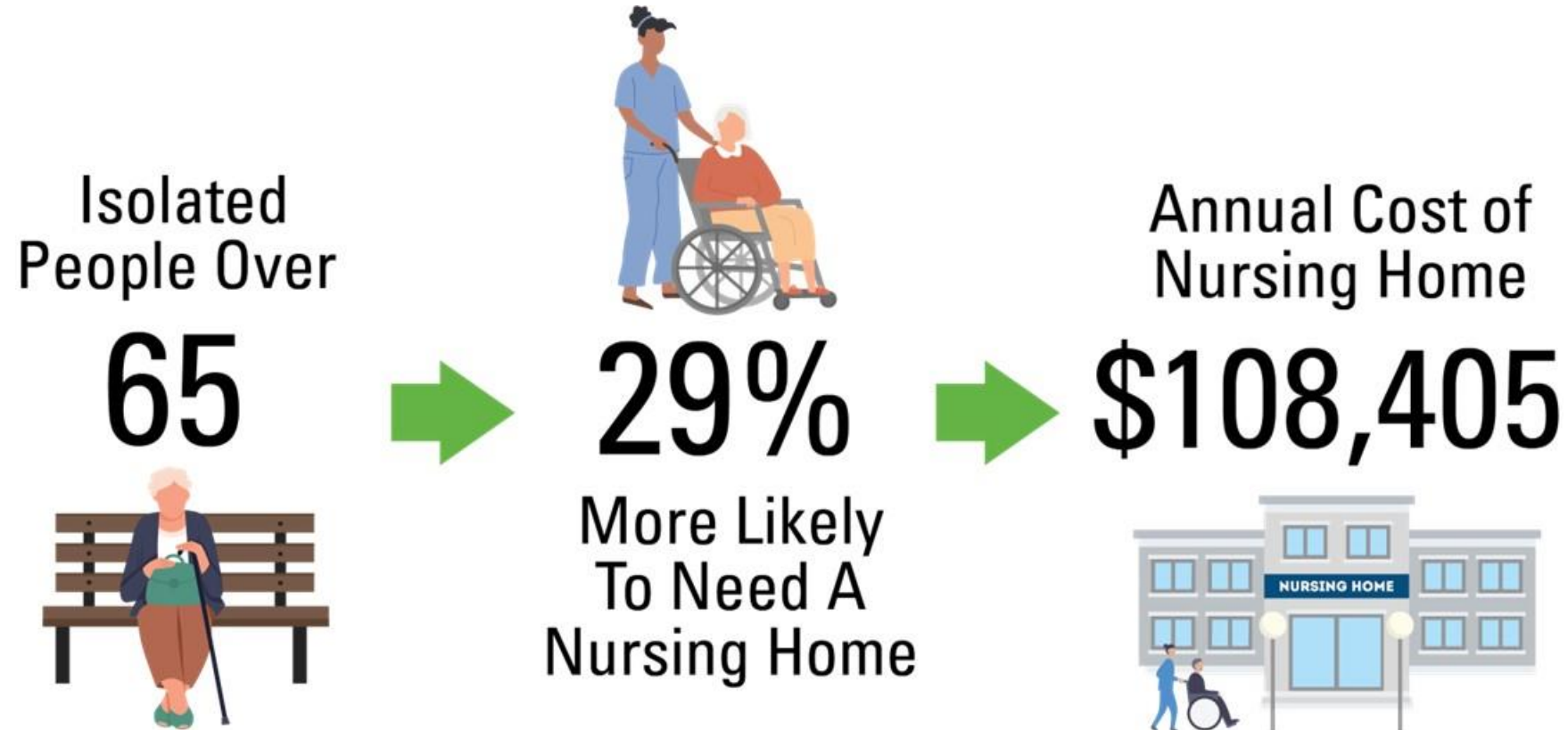
Risks of not having friends²

- Cardiovascular disease & stroke
- Cognitive decline
- Depression, anxiety, addiction
- Increased mortality
- Financial fraud

¹Why Friendships Are So Important for Health and Well-Being, Everyday Health, 8/25/21

²Loneliness: Causes and Health Consequences, Verywell Mind, 9/1/21

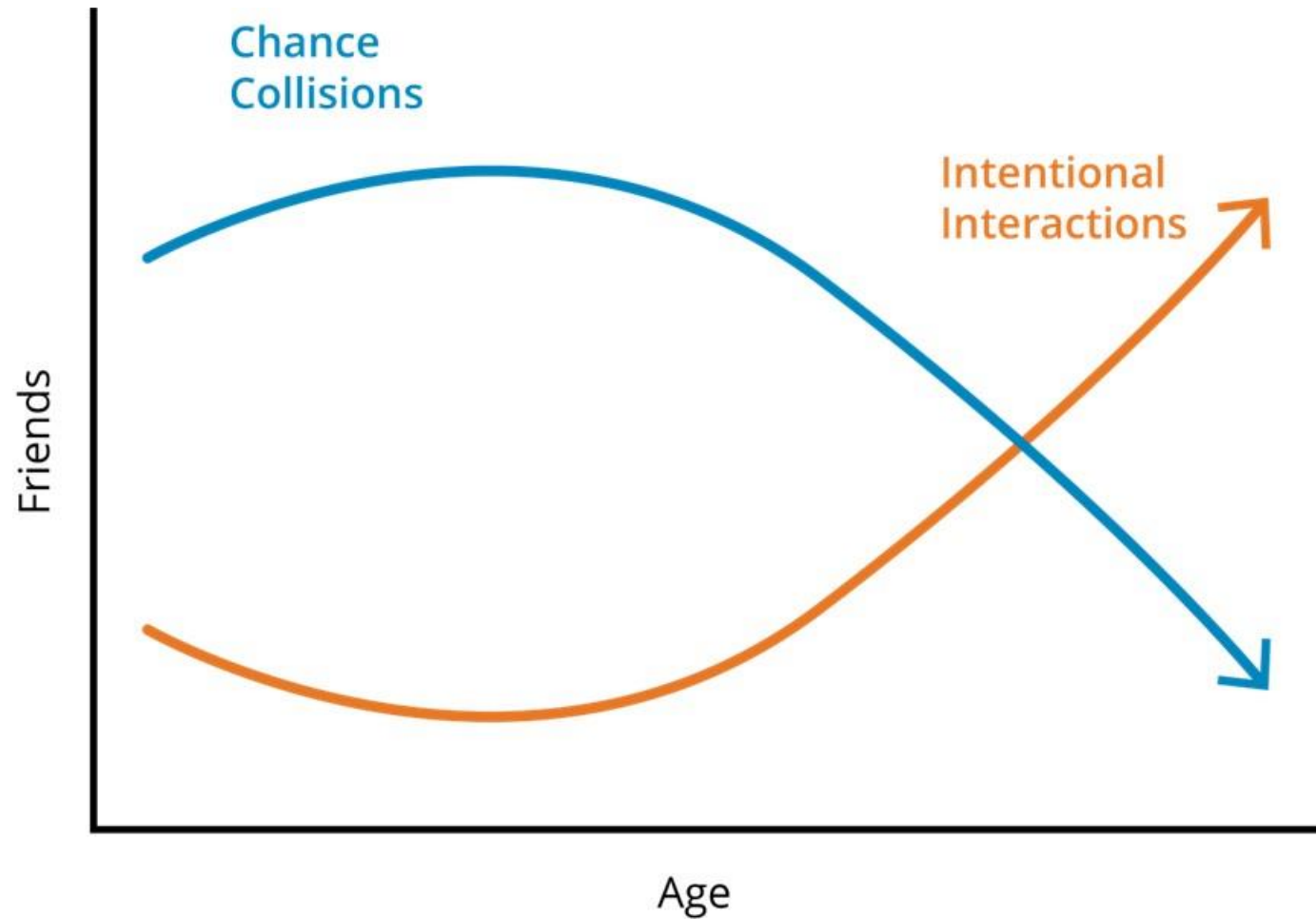
Isolation Can Lead to Expensive Care



Source: Medicare Spends More on Socially Isolated Older Adults, AARP, Nov. 2017

Source: Cost of Care Survey, Genworth, 2022

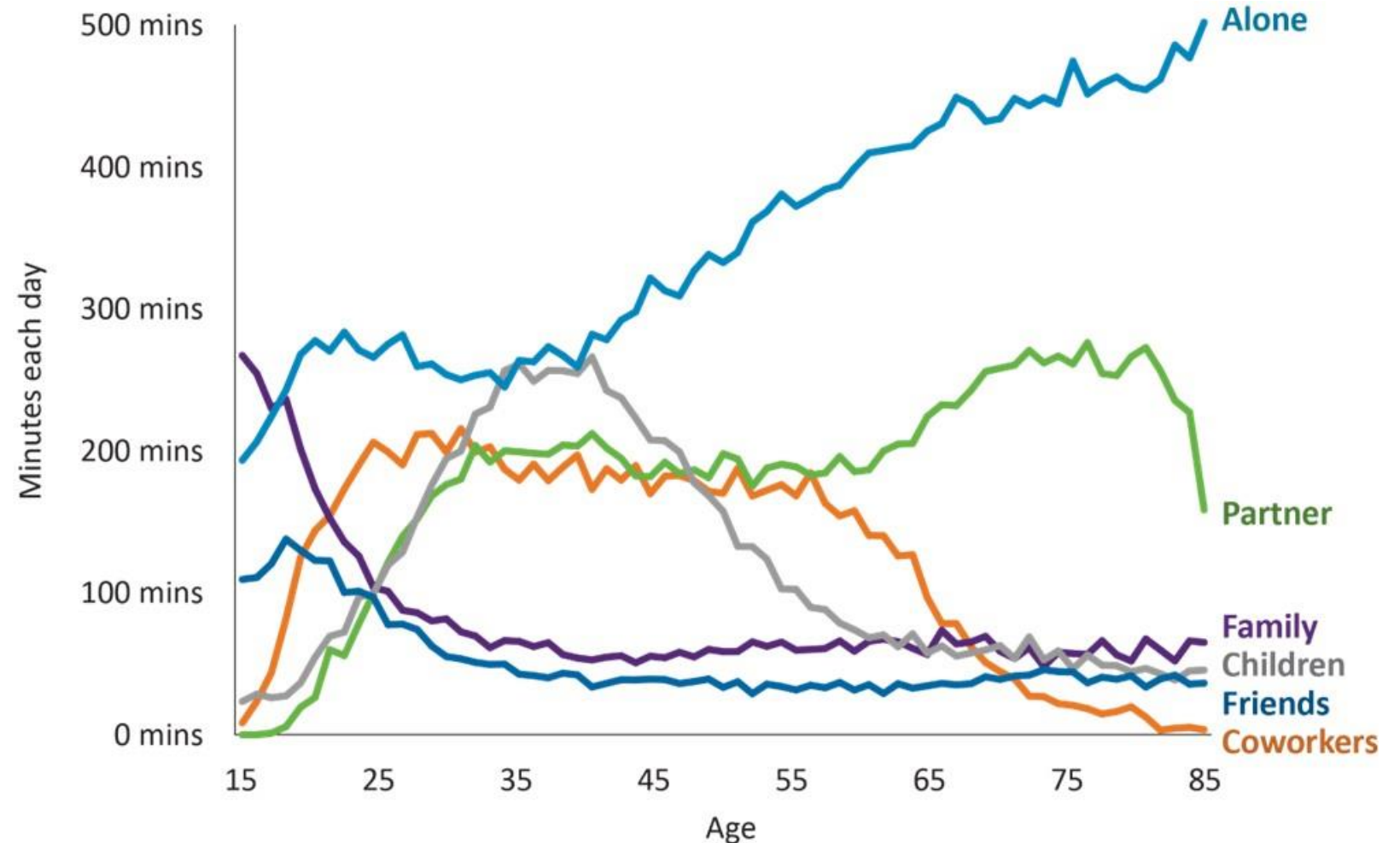
**As We Age,
Friendships
Require
More Effort**



Source: MIT AgeLab, 2022

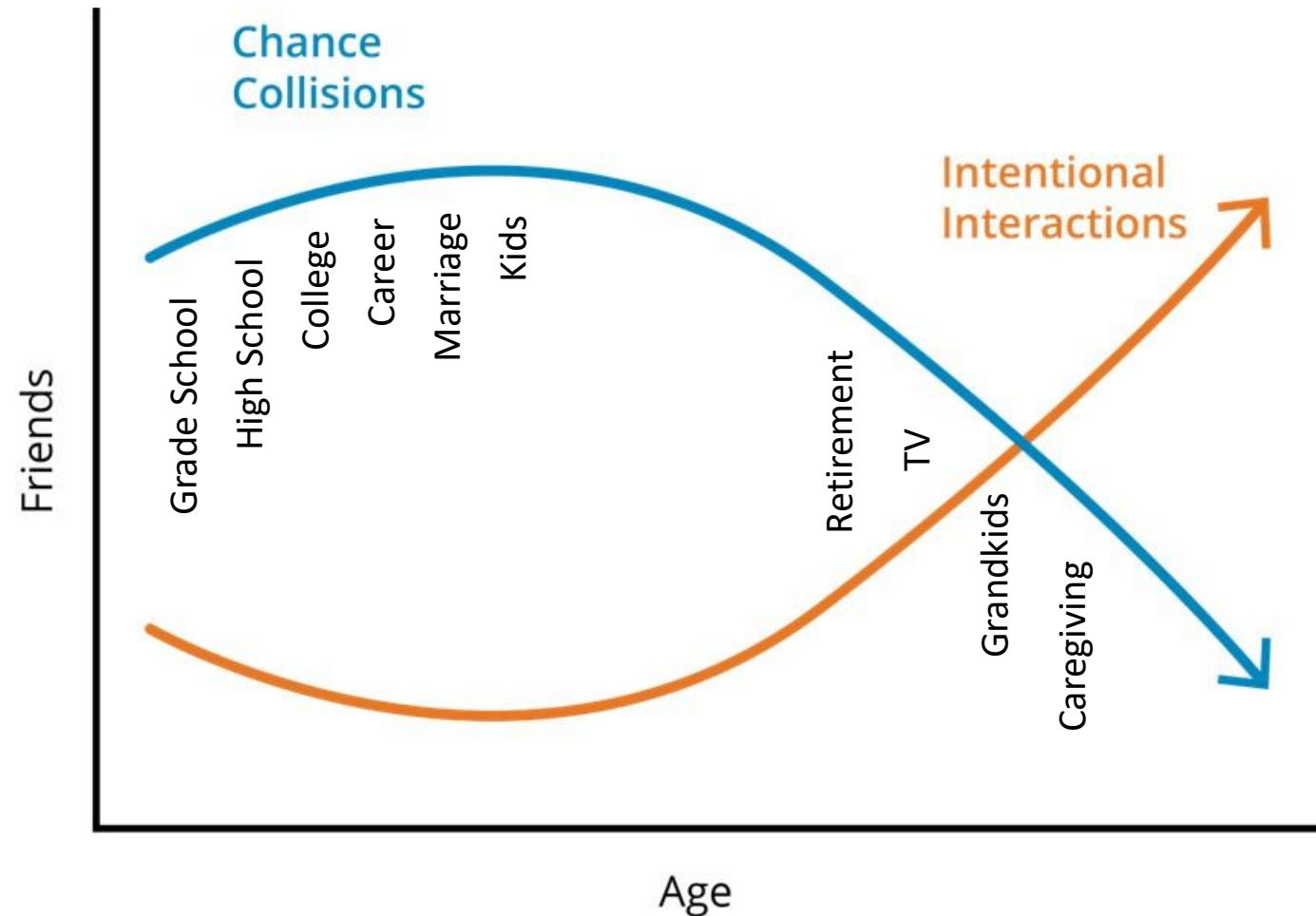
**As We Age,
Many Spend
More Time
Alone**

Who Americans Spend Their Time With by Age



Source: Visualized: Who Americans Spend Their Time With, Visual Capitalist, 10/28/22

As We Age, Friendships Require More Effort

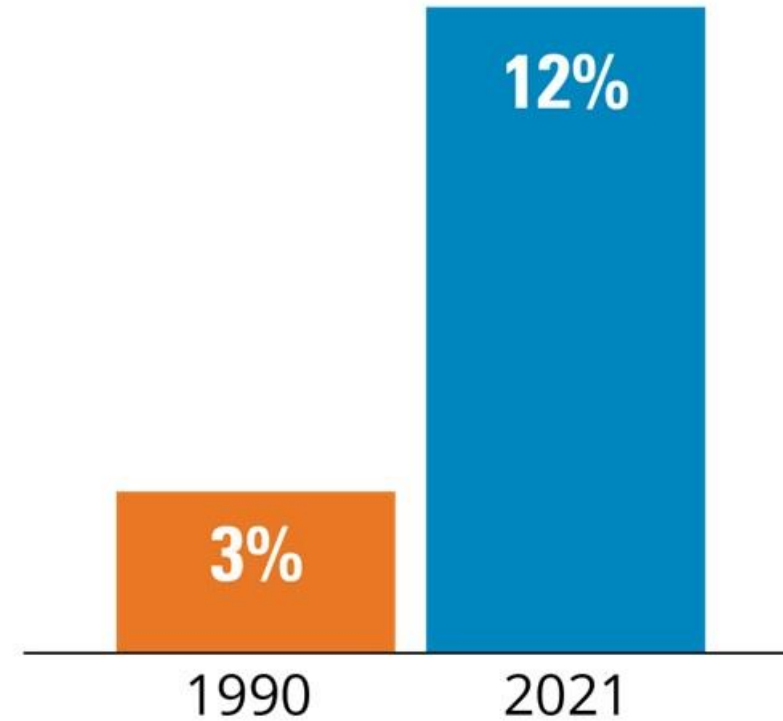


Source: MIT AgeLab, 2022

What Happened to Our Close Friends?



% of Americans who say they have **no close friends**



Source: The state of American friendship: Change, challenges, and loss, Survey Center on American Life, 6/8/21

We're Making Fewer New Friends

56%

of young adults (18–29) made a new friend in the past 12 months

41%

of older adults (65+) made a new friend in the past 12 months

31%

of older adults (65+) say it's been **5+ years** since they made a new friend

Source: The State of American Friendship: Change, challenges, and loss, Survey Center on American Life, 6/8/21



Dr. Vivek Murthy
US Surgeon General

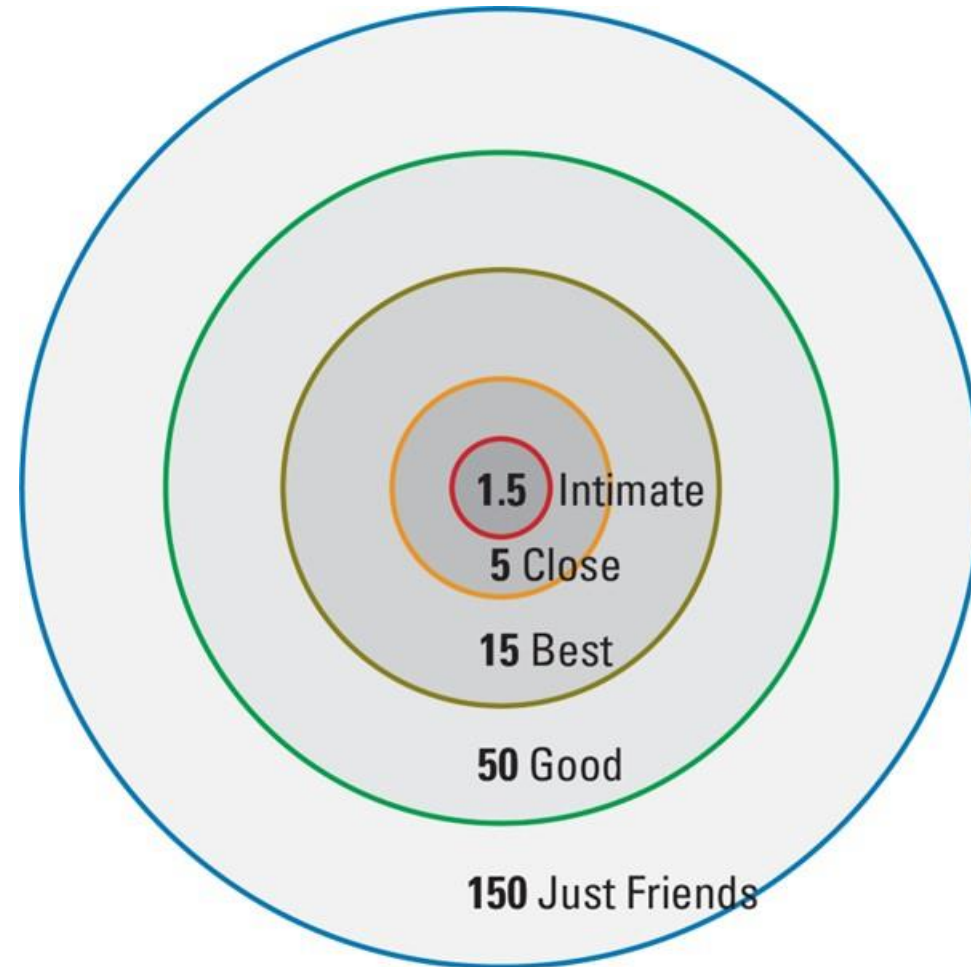
US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released an advisory Tuesday addressing the “epidemic of loneliness and isolation” affecting the country and laying out a framework for a “National Strategy to Advance Social Connection.”

CNN, May 3, 2023

A group of four diverse elderly people are walking and laughing on a cobblestone path in a park-like setting. From left to right: a man with white hair and glasses wearing a dark jacket and tan pants; a woman with white hair and sunglasses wearing a pink hoodie and a grey jacket; a woman with short grey hair and glasses wearing a white turtleneck and a brown jacket; and a man with white hair and glasses wearing a striped shirt, a grey scarf, and a dark jacket. The background shows a wooden pergola with white umbrellas and lush greenery.

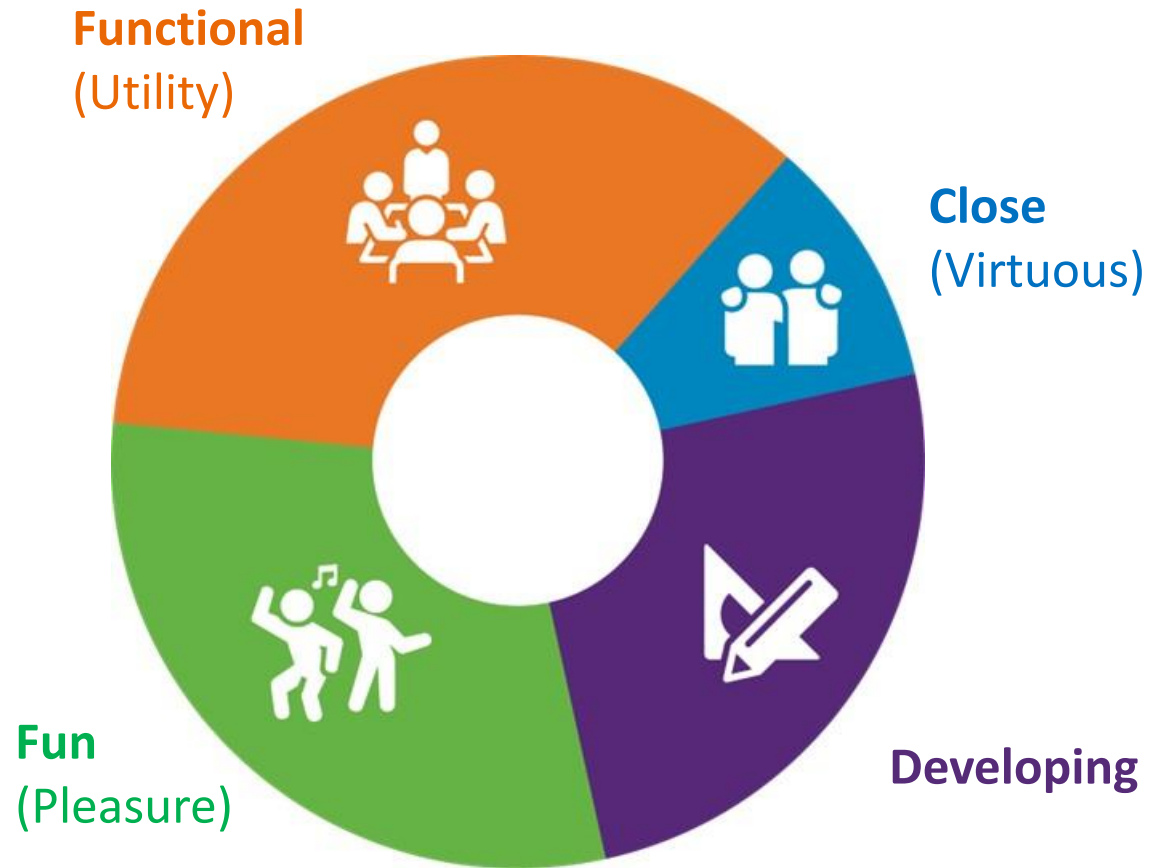
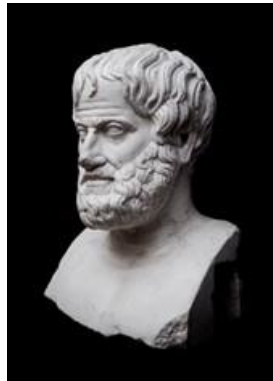
What's a Social Portfolio?

Dunbar's Circles of Friendship



Source: *You Can Only Maintain So Many Close Friendships*, The Atlantic, 5/20/21

A Social Portfolio



Methods of Developing Friendships



Rekindle



Repotting



Ritual

A group of diverse people are gathered outdoors, laughing and talking. In the foreground, a woman with curly hair, wearing a blue shirt, is laughing heartily with her hand on her chest. To her right, a man with grey hair is also laughing. In the background, other people are visible, including a man with glasses and a woman with long dark hair, all appearing to be in a joyful conversation. The background is filled with green foliage and colorful triangular flags, suggesting a festive outdoor event.

Investing in Your Social Portfolio

Assess Your Social Portfolio

Functional

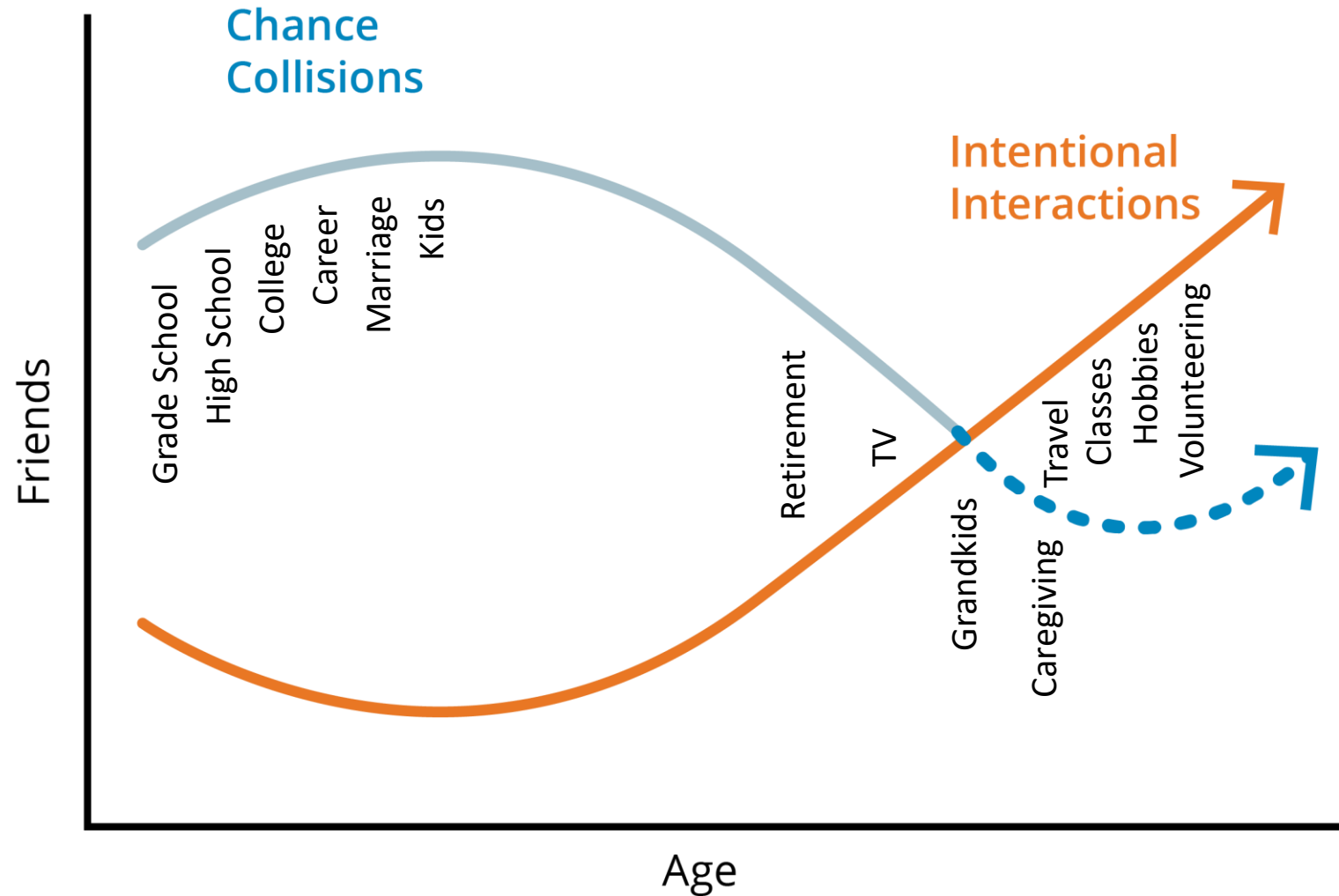
Fun



Close

Developing

Increase Chances of Making Friends





Investment Fundamentals

- Systematic Investing
- Diversification
- Monitoring

Time It Takes to Make a Friend

Systematic Investing

Consistent investments over a period of time



94 hrs.

Acquaintance
into a casual
friend

167 hrs.

Casual into a
friend

267 hrs.


Turn friends into
good friends

Source: *How many hours does it take to make a friend?*
Journal of social and personal relationships, 2019

Finding Time to Make Friends

Top weekday activities, in average minutes per day, of full-time workers and retirees

Full-time workers		Retirees	
Working	485	Sleeping	526
Sleeping	483	Watching TV	269
Watching TV	104	Eating and drinking	71
Eating and drinking	59	Food preparation and cleanup	41
Grooming	44	Grooming	38



Source: 2019 American Time Use Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Data retrieved 2021

Finding Time to Make Friends

Weekly Report Available

Sun 9:16 AM



Your screen time was up 33% last week, for an average of 2 hours, 45 minutes a day.

$165 \text{ min} \times 365 \text{ days} = \mathbf{42 \text{ days}}$

Diversification

Mixing a wide variety of investments within a portfolio



Forming New Connections

The Seven Pillars of Friendship

- Language/dialect
- Place of origin
- Educational trajectory
- Hobbies/interests
- Values
- Musical tastes
- Sense of humor



Source: Curry & Dunbar (2013a, b, Human Nature; Evol. Human Behav.) Launay & Dunbar (2016 PLoS One)

Monitoring

Things are changing all the time





Investing Comes With Risks

- Vulnerability
- Uncomfortable situations
- Unmet expectations
- Unplanned expenses

You May Be Thinking:

“I’ll always have my family.”



“...having supportive friendships as we age was found to be a stronger predictor of wellbeing than having strong family connections.”

Source: Why Friends May Be More Important Than Family, Time Magazine, 6/7/17. Most recent data available.



Summary

Friend Trends

Be intentional

What's a Social Portfolio?

Four categories

Investing in Your Social Portfolio

Time, place, and activity



Our real social security, in fact, is not an income stream provided by the government, but our social relationships—our friends.

— Dr. Joe Coughlin,
Director of the MIT AgeLab

Next Steps

1. Assess your social portfolio
2. Think about places and activities that could help you make or maintain friendships
3. Add them to your calendar this month and commit to doing them



MIT AGE LAB
Life Transitions



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The Social Portfolio Worksheet

Why friendships are so important to aging well

Most people age well not because of what they've saved, not necessarily because they follow doctor's orders, but because of a strong social network of support—our social portfolio. Actively seeking novel places and activities to meet new people can strengthen our social portfolio and increase our wellbeing as we age.

1 Evaluate Your Social Portfolio

Similar to how a well-diversified financial portfolio includes different types of investments, your social portfolio should include different types of friends. On the right is a list of categories from the MIT AgeLab.

UTILITY People you see during routine activities. Friends in this category could include co-workers, a local store employee, barber or hairstylist, barista, etc.

FUN Friends you enjoy hanging out with. When you're together, it's all about having fun.

VIRTUOUS Close friends you're most comfortable with. They have our permission to nudge us in the right direction or provide support when it's needed most.

DEVELOPING People you may not consider friends yet, but you'd like them to be. With effort, a friendship may be possible.

Categories of Friends



Action Steps

1. Think about your friends and write their names in the category that best describes your relationship
2. Are there any gaps? Do you have most of your friends in one category? There aren't hard-and-fast rules about how many friends you should have in each category, but it's good to have at least a few. If you feel like you're coming up short, we'll cover what to do in the next section.

1

MAI353 Worksheet