



**Mind:** Expanding Definition of Family

**Body:** Managing Our Biology

**Spirit:** Trust

## Expanding Definition of Family



As we age, the need for connection, acknowledgement, and engagement becomes even more pronounced. At the heart of this connection is the construct of family, becoming increasingly vital to our sense of self and well-being as we travel through all life stages. But what is ‘family’ in our modern context? Are we ready to embrace a broader definition?

### Redefining Family: Beyond the Traditional

Traditionally, the notion of family was tied to our nuclear family, established through blood, adoption, or marriage. Today, it has transformed significantly, becoming a blend of chosen relationships defined through shared experiences and mutual respect. While our traditional family may still form our key association, additional definitions of family are emerging and offering meaningful places within our inner circles. Indeed, those estranged from their traditional families for any variety of reasons can develop new families to provide a critical environment

of caring, support, comfort, and connectedness.

### Creating Our Own Families

Our families, by design, can emerge from any number of associations. Friends, especially long-time friends, have known us through good times, bad times and everything in between. There is often a sense of unconditional love and acceptance, holding a space for our challenges while encouraging an even grander vision of ourselves. The workplace can present a ready-made family with a shared commitment to the objectives and goals of the company, business, or organization. During our working life, we spend more waking time with our colleagues per week than with our own nuclear family, presenting an engineered opportunity to develop family types of relationships.

At a community level, service clubs can foster special friendships as we band together in expressions of shared values of service and mutual commitment to social causes.

### Embracing a Broader Family

This broader interpretation of family has a unique significance for many boomers and seniors. As we journey through life, we experience a variety of losses. It could be the loss of a spouse, other loved

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ones, or children moving away, leading to loneliness and isolation. Embracing the idea of a more comprehensive family network can help mitigate these feelings and provide a rich continued social engagement.

Adopting a pet, for instance, can not only contribute toward keeping us active, a pet typically offers a unique type of companionship and unconditional love. Volunteering in community services and joining hobby groups or special interest clubs provides new opportunities for connection, fun, and belonging. In the era of digital connection, many also find a sense of family in online communities, bringing together like-minded individuals without the limits of geographical boundaries. While a digital family cannot bring over chicken soup when you are ill, these ‘families’ can still provide levels of support, love, and engagement. Don’t underestimate the ability of social media to create new communities with the potential to grow into deeper qualities of interactions and perhaps even establish new families.

## **Cherishing Our Families**

Whether our families are traditional, non-traditional, childless, multigenerational, blended, step, or families of choice, they contribute to our happiness and well-being. They provide a sense of identity, a feeling of belonging, and a network of support that is invaluable today, especially in later years. After all, it’s not just about who’s in our family—it’s about how we nurture and cherish these

relationships that truly counts.

So let’s consider, develop, and embrace this broader, more inclusive definition of family. Let’s cherish the diverse connections we already have and continue to foster new ones. Because, after all is said and done, family is less about who we share our genes with and more about who we choose to share our lives with.

Rhonda Latreille, MBA, CPCA  
Founder & CEO  
Age-Friendly Business<sup>®</sup>

## **Managing Our Biology**



We can manage our biology! To trigger a hit of oxytocin to ‘feel the love,’ try playing with a dog, holding hands with someone, giving a hug, enjoying a baby, or complimenting someone.

## **Trust**

“Trust is earned in the smallest of moments. It is earned not through heroic deeds, or even highly visible actions, but through paying attention, listening, and gestures of genuine care and connection.”

Brene Brown