

# *Community Living & Social Connection*

**Your Key to Positive Aging**



**ALDRSGATE**

**This book is courtesy of Aldersgate.**

**[AldersgateLiving.org](http://AldersgateLiving.org)**



**Whether you're a lone wolf or a social butterfly, planning your lifestyle around meaningful social connections adds quality years to your life.**

### *Taking a proactive approach to your aging process.*

If there's one thing that unites us all, it's aging. Although aging isn't optional, HOW you age is up to you. The need for social connection is right up there with air, food, water and sunshine. This can be counterintuitive for some of us, especially those who have spent their years busy with careers and raising children, all the while thinking, "I can't wait to have time alone."



According to the Medical Advisory Secretariat's analysis of 11 research studies on aging and isolation: "Social and family relationships are a core element of quality of life for seniors, and these relationships have been ranked second, next to health, as the most important area of life."<sup>1</sup>

Being socially connected doesn't mean you have to spend every waking hour with others. And not every connection is created equal. Being socially connected means having relationships that make you feel comfortable because you can show your true self. Science tells us that meaningful connections are nature's antidepressants; they improve our mood by allowing us to give and receive emotional care. In other words, healthy relationships give our lives meaning.

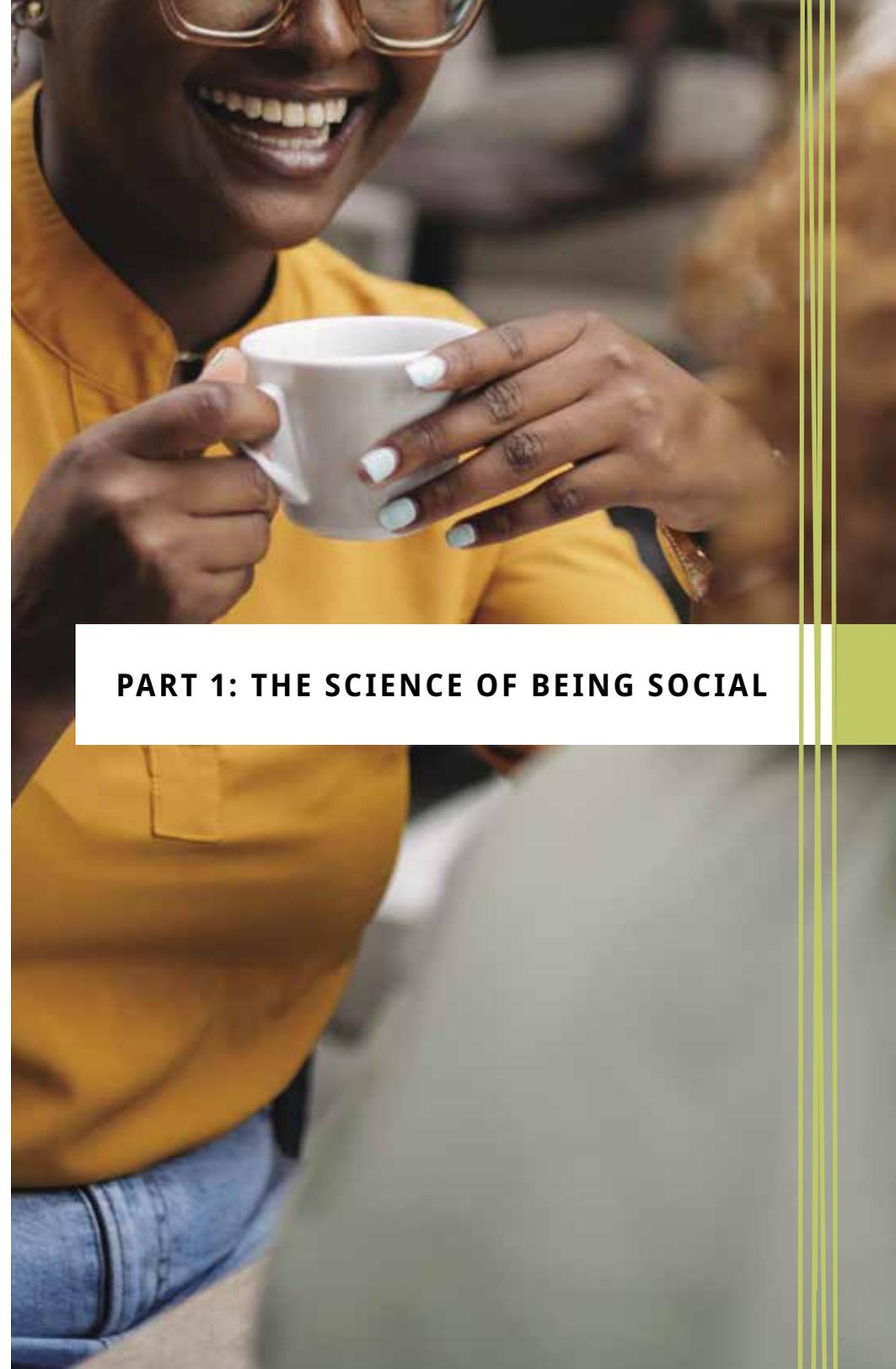


The experts agree. Dr. Kristine Theurer, a leading expert on the value of social connection for older adults, highlights the necessity of giving and receiving emotional care. In her *Journal of Aging Studies* article she describes how social reciprocity is an integral part of aging well:

*“Through reaching out and tending to the needs of others, residents may regain a sense of self and purpose, view themselves and their problems from a new perspective and find that they are not alone.”<sup>2</sup>*

Our mission is to help you age well whether you live at Aldersgate or choose to stay in your current home. That’s why we’ve created this collection of our best advice when considering healthy aging and your social life. We want to spark inspiration for your future social network with a little bit of science.

Enjoy and cheers to happy aging!



## PART 1: THE SCIENCE OF BEING SOCIAL



## *Socialization is healthy.*

**Loneliness increases your risk for dementia, heart disease, anxiety and degraded mental health.**

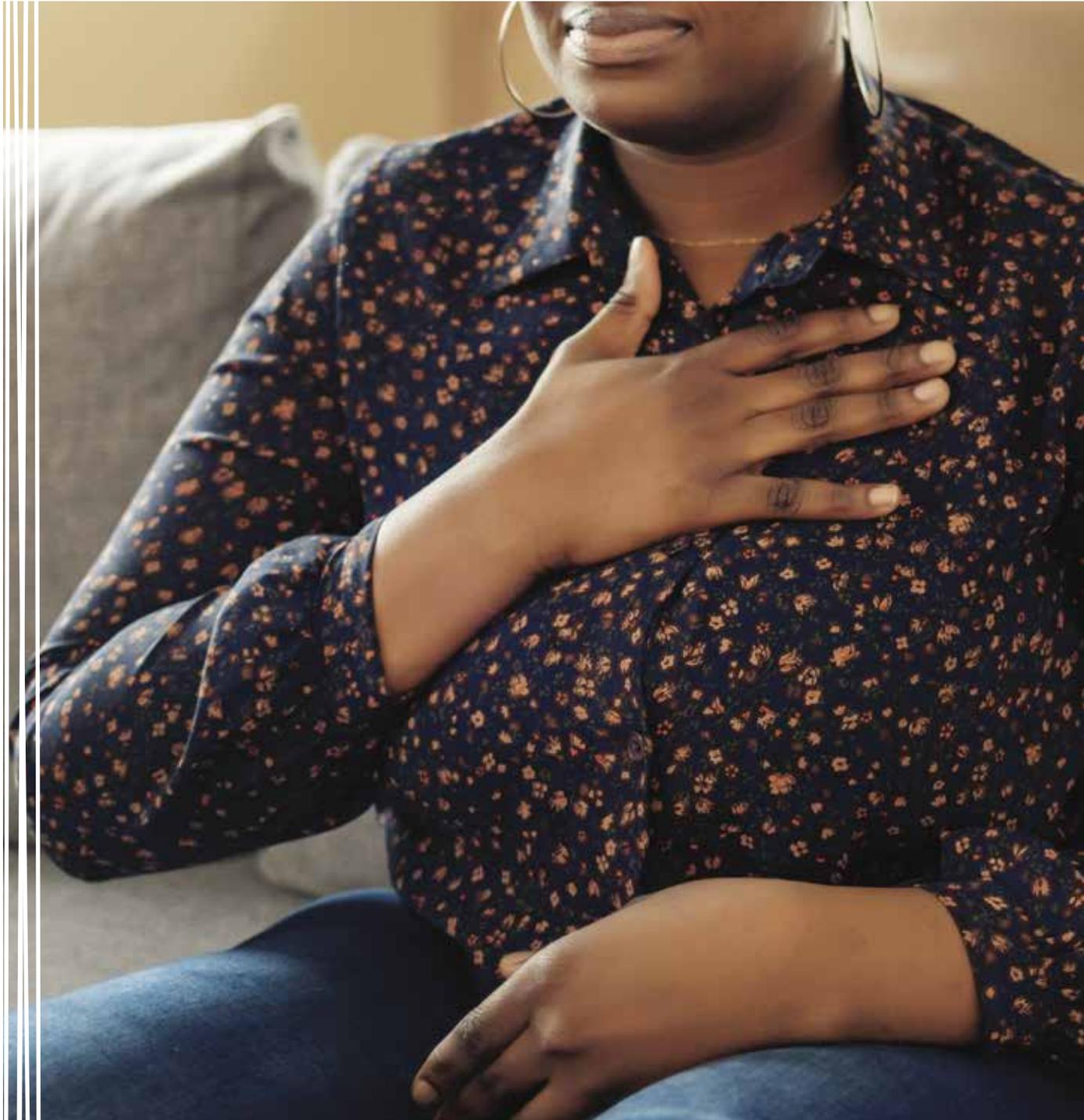
### **What does being social really mean?**

To quote “What is Social Connection” in UC Berkeley’s *Greater Good Magazine*, “... humans are a profoundly social species; our drive to connect with others is embedded in our biology and evolutionary history. It begins at birth, in our relationship with our caregiver—and the effects of this relationship seem to reverberate throughout our lives. When we’re cared for as children, we’re more likely to have healthy, secure attachments as we get older.”<sup>3</sup>

Social isolation can increase worry-making cortisol levels. According to the Mayo Clinic, cortisol is a stress hormone, and too much of it can negatively affect our immune and digestive systems.<sup>4</sup>

The Mayo Clinic also notes that when we experience chronic stress, we are at an increased risk of several things:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Digestive problems
- Headaches
- Muscle tension and pain
- Heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure and stroke
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain
- Memory and concentration impairment<sup>4</sup>





## **Cruising Facebook is not socializing.**

According to the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan policy institute for research, in 2021, approximately 72% of all adults were engaged in at least one social media platform. The most common type of social media platform being used was listed as Facebook, with 70% of adults saying they use the platform every day. What's more, approximately 50% of all people 65 years and older say they use Facebook.<sup>6</sup>

While social media can provide a wonderful doorway to reconnecting with old friends, it can also set you up to feel socially isolated. Constant viewing of social media can make you feel inadequate, left out and isolated because you're comparing your reality to one that doesn't exist.

We invite you to check how you feel when you use it. Do you find yourself constantly checking the Facebook feed? Feeling the fear of missing out (FOMO)? Feeling jealous of other people who have

a lot of kids and grandchildren in their lives? If this describes you, then it's time to start building an in-person network. It's good to remember that people only post about their best lives, the best photos and all of the coolest things they're doing online. You aren't viewing their "real lives". Founding Facebook President Sean Parker once described Facebook as a "social-validation feedback loop ... exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology."<sup>7</sup> Parker is describing the "fake reality" of Facebook, and the way it can actually close us off to new people and ideas.

Facebook and other social platforms can connect us to distant friends and family, but to maintain a healthy balance you should choose to be an informed social media consumer. Enjoy social media in moderation. But also invest in your real life by nurturing real relationships and by becoming the best version of yourself.



## **PART 2: THE SOCIAL CIRCLE OF LIFE**

## *Embracing our life cycle helps us stay connected.*

If you haven't heard the term "mortality awareness," it is a state of mind that can help you make important decisions about how you want to spend your time.

Perceptions about death vary wildly from culture to culture.

Tibetan Buddhists practice an intentional, liminal phase called "bardo" which is a time for planning to exit one life and move into another. Western culture typically avoids the subject of death completely, which can create a variety of troubles.

Mortality awareness serves a purpose; it helps us identify social goals that can be freeing and positive. It helps to raise our awareness of our time on earth and helps us define how we want to spend our time. Do we want to waste time on fruitless, draining relationships? Or prioritize people and hobbies that feed our souls?

Often, people define themselves by their role as a parent to their children or grandchildren. But even if you have children and grandchildren, you can't rely on them to give your life meaning. After all, they are in their own liminal phases of discovery and focused on their own lives.

### **To help you gain a deeper understanding of your social circle and how it feeds you, ask yourself:**

- If I transitioned today, who would I be thankful to have spent time with? Is it possible for me to do that again?
- What qualities do my favorite friends have in common?
- If I have 1,000 weeks, who do I want to spend them with?
- What kinds of memories would I like to make now?

**Journal Prompt:**

Ask yourself a few questions about what you value most in a companion.



### **PART 3: FINDING A SOCIAL SOLUTION WHERE YOU ARE**

*Aging in place within a  
community environment  
versus your current residence.*

The tricky part about planning for our later years is that we just don't know what life will choose for us.

Community living isn't for everyone. Aging in place is another option, and it refers to growing old in your own home. Each option has its pros and cons.



No matter how much time and effort we spend on staying healthy, sometimes a medical event can change our aging trajectory, leaving us dependent on others for mobility, transportation, food and personal care. Aging favors the prepared, and there are several thought exercises you can do today that can help your aging tomorrow.

Consider the location of your home. Do you have to drive everywhere? Or can you walk a few blocks to a store, pharmacy or restaurant? Are there a lot of hills on your property and stairs in your home? Do you live in a snowy, icy climate that would prohibit you from moving around during the winter? Can you easily meet with people and join activities that keep you socially connected?

**Bonus:** Aldersgate offers a free book titled *Rightsizing Your Life* to help readers consider their physical space and determine if it's right for their lifestyle. Ask us and we'll provide you with a copy!

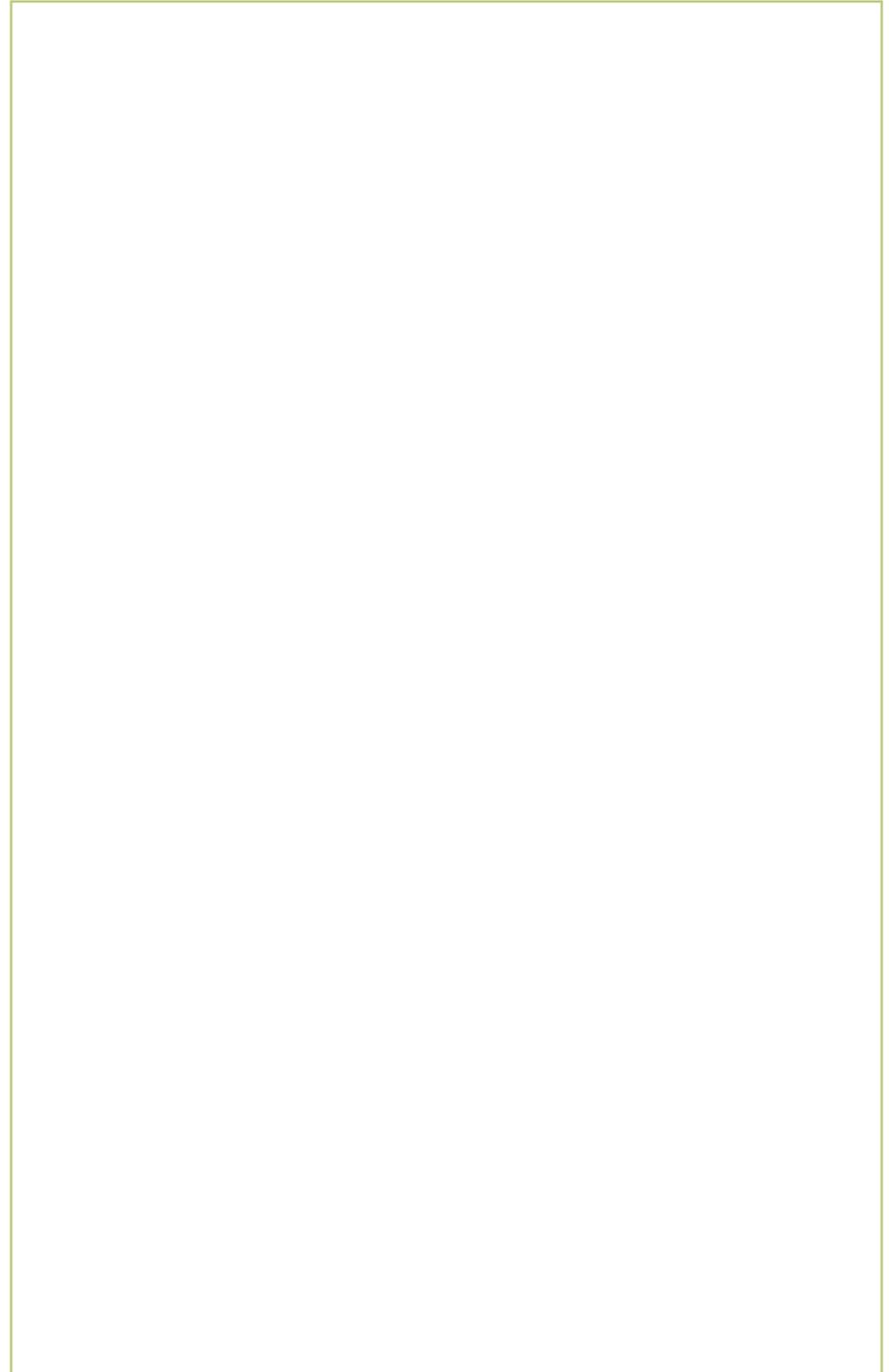
We recommend taking preventative steps now to avoid isolation if you choose to age in place.

Remember, alone time does not equal isolation, and isolation does not equal independence. Isolation is a lack of support in case of emergencies, both physical and emotional.

## Reflect on your support connections:

- Who can I call on when I need a friend? Are they able to reach me where I am?
- Does my current place of residence allow me to host friends?
- If I were to get injured, could friends and family reach me to help?
- What are the casual social outings I enjoy, such as visiting my local coffee shop, bakery, bookstore or other businesses?
- How do I feel day-to-day? Am I bored? Do I crave intellectual stimulation? Or am I satisfied with my current routines and expect to feel this way for years to come?

Take some time to think through these questions and write your answers on the next pages.



**If you plan to age in place within a single-family residence or condo, versus a retirement community, choose a home base that gives you easy access to people.**

Perhaps your perfect arrangement is a condo community in a safe, walkable and urban neighborhood. Or, invite roommates into your home, à la *Friends* or *Golden Girls* so your social connections are built-in. A single-story home in a vibrant neighborhood near shops, public transit and a senior center is also a great option. There is no “one way” to age in place. But there are ways to ensure a higher chance at happiness and good health.

Good news! Planning gives you options. The key to success is thinking ahead and taking a practical approach for all of the “what ifs” that life can bring.





**Aldersgate offers two wonderful services that will ensure success if you wish to age in place.**

## LifeGevity

This is a hybrid approach created for people who want to age in their current residence, but who like the idea of having a support system and social network within reach. LifeGevity members receive access to the Aldersgate campus for fitness classes, social events, intellectual courses (both virtual and in-person), and even some home services like cleaning gutters and landscaping, to make living in your residence easier as you age.

## Aldersgate at Home

For people who simply need care and services to age in their homes, consider Aldersgate At Home. Services like transportation to shopping, medical appointments and more; home care services such as housekeeping; cooking and shopping and some health services such as aided bathing, medication management and companionship are all provided in your home, and come with the same quality, care and dependability that Aldersgate delivers with all services.





## **Community living brings opportunities to create a network of your own!**

If you haven't fully considered the differences between living in a community versus living alone in a single-family dwelling, let's first define what community living actually is.

There are often a lot of misconceptions around community living due to our own internalized ageism. Memories of grandparents or even parents' aging experiences can equate community living with a "nursing home". That can't be further from the truth about today's modern lifestyle communities like Aldersgate, which are designed for active living with a built-in continuum of care.

### **Both introverts and extroverts can gain a lot from community living.**

- The ability to cast a wide net to make new and meaningful friendships
- Life-enriching opportunities that stretch your brain and boost your mood
- The support of a dedicated health services and life enrichment team that come together to empower your independence

## What is life like in a community?

Imagine you have a beautiful apartment home that is one elevator ride and a walk away from restaurants, a pub, your pea patch garden, a dog park, a fitness center and an art studio. All of these amenities and more exist at Aldersgate.

For some, moving into a community can feel intimidating. "How will I make new friends?" There is a process for moving that includes a welcoming committee of residents who greet you and spend time helping you to get to know others and learn the ropes.

There is also a wide variety of activities that encourage easy participation. These opportunities are the first step to embracing community life. They allow you to meet new people while exploring new sides of yourself. Consider the classic options, or invent something entirely new.

- Arts & entertainment
- Volunteerism
- Walking groups
- Dog play times
- Happy hours
- Classes and learning opportunities



**Plus, built-in social events are always happening.**

Cocktail parties, celebrations, concerts... a variety of ways to meet new people. There are also clubs that residents operate and manage on their own. Imagine joining the Environmental Club that discusses issues around our blue planet, or the

Current Events discussion group that gets together over coffee or a beer to talk about today's geopolitical issues. It's all built-in and helps you to create a new network or simply add people to your already existing group.





However, not all communities offer the right kinds of life enrichment experiences. When evaluating communities, look for diversity in activities. Are there opportunities to foster and encourage deeper conversations between residents? Are there peer support opportunities to allow residents to discuss challenges? Find out if leadership consistently asks the residents for new ideas. Aldersgate offers all of these experiences and more. Resident well-being is our number one priority, and we recognize that social connectedness requires more than just casual acquaintances.

Communities should not simply strive to “distract” residents with entertainment, but instead should diversify life enrichment to include meaningful conversations.

## Here are our best suggestions to help you grow into your new community.

No matter our age, entering new social situations can feel a little uncomfortable, especially if we're used to living alone. We might remember being the new kid at school and not knowing who we'll sit with at lunch.

Here are easy ways to integrate into community social life.

- Attend cocktail hour.
- Lead a club.
- Join a club.
- Serve on a board.
- Play in a band.
- Ask the restaurant host if anyone would like someone to sit with.
- Sit in the common area of the community with a book or magazine. If you're new, it's likely that residents will approach you and introduce themselves.



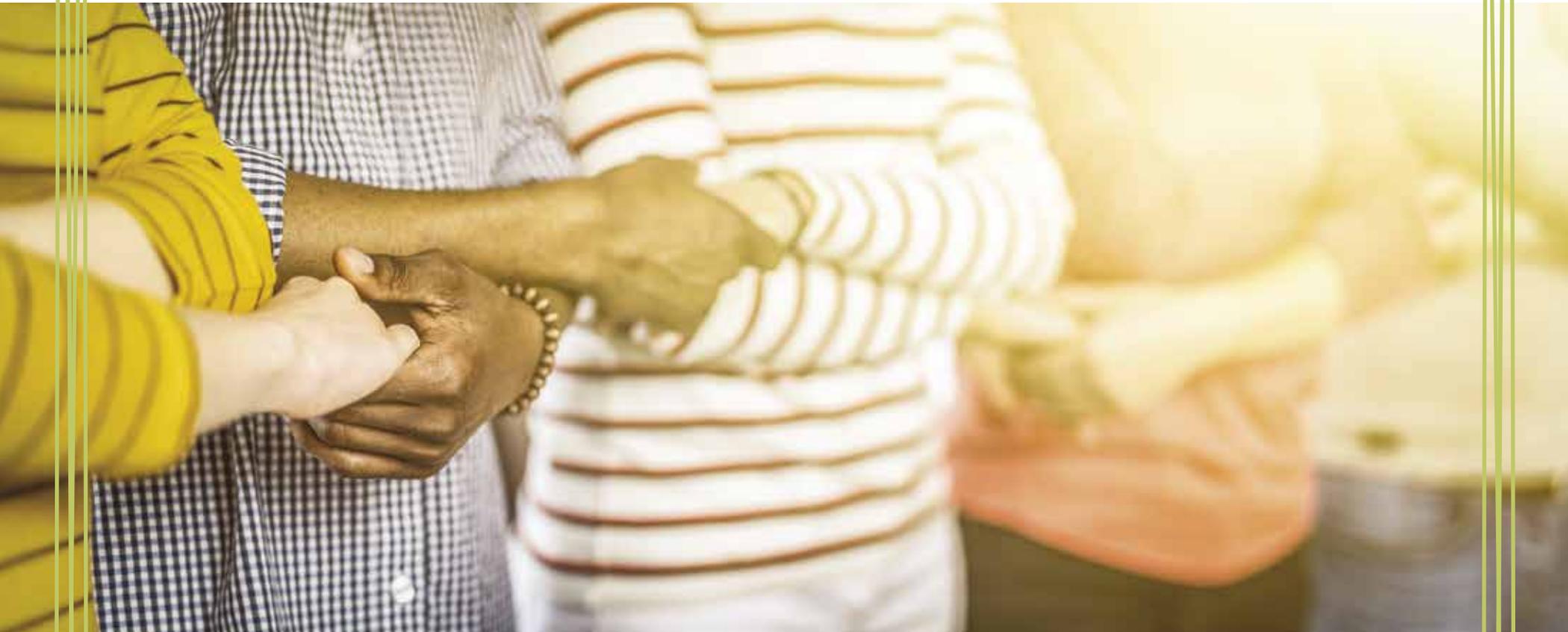


**Open to romance? It's very possible when you live in a community.**

Has there ever been a better time to fall in love than when we're older, wiser and have done our inner work? We feel confident in who we are and what we want, which makes finding a new partner in our third third of life very rewarding.

Living in a community that features a variety of dining venues, a pub, clubs and social activities means it's easy to casually meet people who share your interests. So much easier than online dating! We see frequently see new couples fall deeply in love (or spiritually in love).

Community living lends itself well to connections that blossom into romance. Aldersgate has previously hosted wedding ceremonies and receptions for residents. No matter your love philosophy, we believe there is always a time for you.



## **Community living comes with a built-in support system.**

Imagine having your own security house, concierge, mailroom and housekeepers. All of these support systems come with community living as part of the monthly service fee.

At Aldersgate, active, independent adults have the peace of mind of knowing that if they or their partner need additional

care, a full continuum of health services is available right where they live. These services include assisted living, memory care, skilled nursing, home care, a wellness clinic, and short-term rehabilitation after a surgery or medical event.



## *The choice is yours:*

### **Aging in your current residence or living in a community setting.**

Our number one recommendation for anyone over the age of 62 is to plan, plan and plan. No matter where you physically live, prioritize planning for your social network along with estate planning and health insurance. It's a critical piece of healthy aging.

Consider the differences between a non-profit organization and a for-profit company. Non-profits invest funds back into the community to keep it updated, upscale and tend to offer a much more robust activities program.

Aldersgate is here for you. Visit [AldersgateLiving.org](https://AldersgateLiving.org) to get on our email list and learn about ongoing educational events designed to help you decide. Attend and learn what a Life Plan Community (formerly known as a Continuing Care Retirement Community) is all about. Reach out to a life plan counselor, and they can show you around.

Cheers to happy, healthy and successful social aging!

## **Miles from ordinary. Full of extraordinary.**

Aldersgate is a 62+, nonprofit Life Plan community offering hundreds of acres of stunning nature. We offer beautiful design, plentiful amenities and a full continuum of care like no other. Close by, you'll find eclectic East Charlotte restaurants in historic, artsy neighborhoods where there's always more to explore.

- A variety of independent living options from stand-alone cottages to a variety of apartments, some brand new, and villas offering a full continuum of care including independent living, assisted living, memory care, skilled nursing and rehabilitation.
- Indoor swimming pool, wood shop, exercise classes, ice cream parlor, dog park, walking trails, lake, salon and spa.
- Six dining venues: The Gatehouse Dining Room, Gatehouse Bar, Market Place Café, The Rose & The Ivy Pub, On Common Grounds Coffee Shop and Scoops Ice Cream Parlor.
- Asbury Health and Rehabilitation Center on Aldersgate's campus has a top rating by Medicare and was ranked "Best in Nursing" by U.S. News in 2019.



**ALDRSGATE**

**Visit our website at [AldersgateLiving.org](https://AldersgateLiving.org)**

**or call (704) 396-5703 to learn more.**

this booklet is licensed to Aldersgate Life Plan Services. © 3rdThird Marketing.

Aldersgate, 3800 Shamrock Dr, Charlotte, NC 28215