

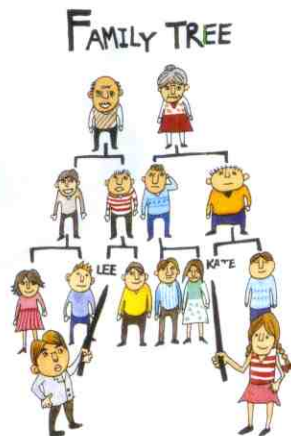
ISSUE 30

Are Relatives Important to You?

Like it or not, we have to deal with the relatives we have, not the relatives we would like to have. Most families have one or more black sheep, whom the rest of the clan would disinherit if they could. It used to be that families were very extensive, with dozens of cousins, aunts, and uncles; a person needed a program just to keep track of them all. Now, as families are becoming considerably smaller, and as divorce and remarriage rates climb, instead of trying to remember who the relatives are, the new difficulty is trying to straighten out how they are related.

How important are your relatives to you?

- (1) Very important
- (2) Somewhat important
- (3) Not important at all
- (4) Some of them are more important than others.



→ **black sheep** : undesirable member of a family

→ **clan** : group of families claiming a common ancestor

→ **disinherit** : exclude (an heir) from inheriting

→ **extensive** : very large → **straighten out** : deal with a problem or confused situation

Sample Answers

(A)

Some of my cousins are in the “my best friends” category. We all live near each other and have spent our lives in close contact. Others are *vague*, distant memories; we never see each other on a regular basis and don’t keep in touch.

(B)

Just because two people are closely related does not mean they are close. Their personalities may *clash*; they may have quite different interests or opinions on sensitive issues. On the other hand, people usually choose their friends on the basis of compatibility and shared concerns.

Speak Your Mind

1. Why do you think relatives should (or should not) be important?
2. Who are your most important relatives? Why?
3. Which ones do you meet most frequently? Why?
4. Do you volunteer to help your relatives when they are in financial trouble?
5. When are you bothered by your relatives?
6. Do you have a close relationship with your in-laws? In what ways?
7. What’s the difference in your life between friends and relatives?
8. Is blood thicker than water?

→ *vague* : not clear

→ *clash* : conflict; disagree

Speak Your Mind

Speak Your Mind Helpers

1. Why do you think relatives should (or should not) be important?

(A)

We have a shared identity and a common *heritage* that must be *preserved*. For that reason, if for no other, we must work together with our relatives. There is a family *obligation* to help one another out of personal difficulties. One person alone would be terribly burdened to assist the one in need, but an entire network of relatives can help out with little difficulty.

(B)

When family members stayed together in the same village over many *generations*, relatives were the most important social contacts one had; without them would have been orphan-like. But the value of distant family relationships has declined with the *advent* of modernity. Except for parents, siblings, and one's own children, few relatives matter very much any more.

2. Who are your most important relatives? Why?

(A)

The obvious answer, of course, is my mother and father. Without them, I wouldn't even be here! They spent many years and a lot of money taking care of me and teaching me how to be the person I am, and they *endured* many sacrifices on my behalf.

(B)

My sister is the only relative who *matters* to me. We grew up in a home in which we were abused, neglected, and scorned. But, *through it all*, we always had each other. No one else will understand our particular situation as intimately as we ourselves do.

→ **heritage** : traditional beliefs, values, customs, etc. of a family, country, or society

→ **preserve** : maintain (sth/sb) in safety; protect → **obligation** : moral or legal duty

→ **generation** : all people of about the same age → **advent** : coming or arrival of (sth)

→ **endure** : put up with (sb/sth); tolerate → **matter** : be of importance → **through it all** : despite everything

3. Which ones do you meet most frequently? Why?

(A)

Sadly, I seldom see any of my relatives anymore. I'm an only child and my parents already *passed away*. My aunt and my uncle never did pay much attention to me, and most of my cousins have moved away. But I'm still very close to my grandfather. I go to his home every day and help out around the house.

(B)

I have a cousin who was born 24 hours after me, in the same house. We have followed each other closely ever since. We started walking and talking at the same time. We went to school together. We used to have a *crush* on the same boys. It is as though we are each other's shadow, we're so close.

4. Do you volunteer to help your relatives when they are in financial trouble?

(A)

I always try to help out to the extent I can. That's what family is for, isn't it? If we can't depend on our relatives, who can we depend on?

(B)

Not usually. Maybe you think I'm being selfish, but I remember when I needed help and none of them came to my assistance. So why should I come to their aid?

5. When are you bothered by your relatives?

(A)

I love my relatives, all of them. But sometimes they can be a real *nuisance*. If I want to have some intimate, private time with my girlfriend, they can always be *counted on* to see me with her and tell my parents. If I'm getting ready to go out with a buddy, I know that one of my cousins will show up and want to *tag along*. I love my relatives; I just wish sometimes we weren't so close.

(B)

Almost every week has somebody's birthday or anniversary that I have to celebrate. The *get-togethers* are nice, but it's always the same people who attend. We ran out of interesting new things to say to each other years ago.

Speak Your Mind

Speak Your Mind Helpers

6. Do you have a close relationship with your in-laws? In what ways?

(A)

As far as I'm concerned, my in-laws are outlaws. They never seemed very interested in getting to know me better. It's almost as if they *resent* my joining the family, as though I'm not good enough for them.

(B)

I'm extremely lucky, I guess. Even before I got married, my future in-laws have been like my own family. We take vacations together, we *speculate* on stocks and real estate together, we vote the same way, and *root* for the same sports teams. Sometimes I think I get along with my in-laws better than my spouse does.

7. What's the difference in your life between friends and relatives?

(A)

I've chosen my friends; my relatives have been *thrust* upon me, whether I like them or not. As far as I'm concerned, we have far too many family reunions.

(B)

Friends may come and go, but our relatives are always with us. They provide most of the continuity we enjoy throughout our varied lives. Even when relatives fight, they still understand one another; but when friends fight they become *mortal enemies*.



- **resent** : feel or show displeasure or anger at (sth/sb)

- **speculate** : buy or sell, esp. at the risk of a loss, in the hope of making a large profit

- **root** : strongly support a team or player - **thrust** : push forcefully

- **mortal enemy** : enemy to the death

8. Is blood thicker than water?

M : “Blood is thicker than water.” What a silly saying. Anybody can see that.

F : It’s not supposed to be taken literally. It’s a kind of *metaphor*.

M : For what?

F : Well, “blood” is one’s relatives. They are more important than anyone else.

M : Oh, so that’s what it means! But I still think it’s silly.

F : Really? Why?

M : Most times, being related to somebody else is just an artificial category. Most of my relatives barely know who I am, and I don’t know them very well either.

F : You must have some relatives you’re close too.

M : Well, of course, my parents and my brother. And I’m close to a few of my cousins. But most of them are almost strangers.

F : That’s odd. In my case, even though there are a lot of us, we stay in very close contact. I’d be lost without my relatives.

M : Maybe it’s because my family has a lot of divorces. Whenever some of us get together we have to first *figure out* who’s “yours, mine, or ours.”

F : But don’t your relatives help you out when you’re in a *jam*? I know mine do.

M : Sure they do. I have to admit that. But, you know, they have to do it, just because they’re relatives. It’s not because they want to. But I can always tell who my real friends are, because they volunteer to help me out even though they aren’t *obligated*.

F : I’m glad you have friends you can rely on. But I’m grateful that I’m part of an *involuntary* system, as you call it, because then I never have to worry about whether or not I have any *genuine* friends. I will always have relatives!

-**metaphor** : way of describing (sth) by comparing it to (sth) else

-**figure out** : understand; solve -**jam** : difficult situation

-**be obligated** : feel that one has to do (sth)

-**involuntary** : happening or done without being intended -**genuine** : real