

Family dynamics as an adult

Moderate · 10 min to read; practice for years · Free

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A calm time to talk, not in the middle of a fight
- ☐ A friend or counselor to talk things through with
- ☐ Clear ideas about what you want to change

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Expect the relationship to change.** Psychologist Laurence Steinberg says most conflicts between parents and grown children are about autonomy and independence.
- 2 **Living at home?** Talk about expectations early. Steinberg says the first order of business when you move back in is talking through your expectations and theirs, so nobody slides back into old teenage patterns. Common topics: guests, chores, meals and whether you're expected at family dinner.
- 3 **Put the money deal in words.** If family helps you financially, say what the help is, how long it lasts and what (if anything) is expected back. Unclear money is a common source of friction (our observation, not a study).
- 4 **Know why you're having the conversation.** APA's article says that if your goal is to win an argument or prove someone wrong, you've already lost. Aim to understand how the other person came to see it their way.
- 5 **Fight fair.** Stick to one issue at a time, state it clearly with facts, use "I" statements instead of blaming "you" statements, invite their side, and listen without interrupting.
- 6 **Disagree without attacking.** You can disagree about a topic without putting the person down. NIH's checklist says the same: conflicts shouldn't turn into personal attacks.
- 7 **Ask for what you need, and set limits.** NIH's healthy-relationship checklist: share your feelings honestly, ask for what you need, decide what you are and aren't willing to do, and know it's OK to say no. See Setting a boundary.
- 8 **Agree to disagree when you need to.** You won't settle every family argument over dinner, and you can still walk away understanding each other better.
- 9 **Try their view, and ask them to try yours.** Steinberg's advice for both generations is to be compassionate and look at the situation from the other generation's perspective.

Watch out If a family member is violent, threatening or abusive, you don't owe them a fair-fight conversation. NIH's checklist says to protect yourself from violent and abusive people. The National Domestic Violence Hotline can help you make a safety plan. In immediate danger, call 911.

DAD NOTE *You can love your family and still close the door to your own room. Both are allowed.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/people/family-as-an-adult/family-dynamics-as-an-adult/

Checked October 3, 2026. Sources: American Psychological Association; National Institutes of Health; National Domestic Violence Hotline.