

Chapter 8

A Look at Your Family

If someone asked you to define the word *family*, what would you say? Would you say that a family is a group of related animals or plants? Would you say that a family is a group of things which have some shared characteristics?

Well, those definitions are correct, but probably aren't what popped into your mind. Every one of us comes from a family, and the word itself may bring many thoughts to your mind. Family is an important word, and it is an essential part of most peoples' lives.

A family is usually made up of a man and woman who are married, and their children. It also includes the grandparents and relatives of both the husband and wife. A family may be overflowing with aunts, uncles, cousins, sisters, brothers, grandchildren and so on. Or a family may be very small. Sometimes a family is changed because one of the parents has died or the parents have divorced. In such cases, there may be a stepmother or a stepfather, a person who was not originally part of the family but who joins it later. Some people grow up in the home of an aunt or an uncle. Many people are adopted into families. Others are raised by an older sister or brother. Almost one-fifth of all children in America live with one or both of their grandparents.

In some countries, many relatives may live together in one place and the children grow up with both their parents and grandparents around them. When family members of several generations live together like this, they can help one another learn to accept and love people of different ages and personalities. In other situations, family members may live far away from each other and only meet during the holidays or on other special occasions. Because people in America move so often, it is likely that you

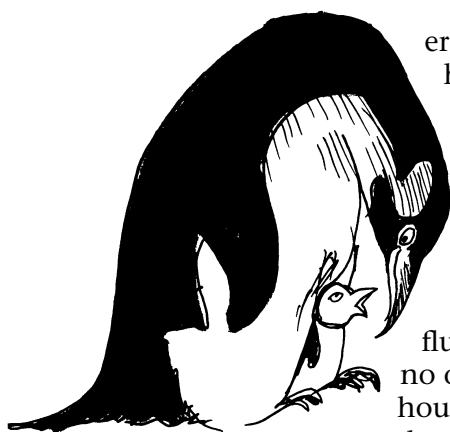
have family members in many other states, or maybe even other countries. What is your family like?

Family is Our First School

When you were a little baby, you were probably with your mother almost all of the time. As you grew older, you spent more and more time with other people. Your parents taught you things, and they wanted you to learn from them. The family is the first place where we learn about love and how to get along with other people. It is the love of parents for each other and their children which creates a peaceful and happy atmosphere for a child to grow up in.

The family is where:

- ☉ *Children learn basic things from their parents*
- ☉ *Traditions are created and passed on*
- ☉ *People take care of each other*
- ☉ *People spend most of their time*



In your family, you learn how to treat others, how to get along, how to share, and how to love other people. When you are happy, you probably want to run to your parents and tell them about your day. When you are sad or sick you probably just want to go home and get into bed, and have one of your parents take care of you.

Imagine that you come down with the flu during school. You call your parents but no one is home, so you go to the neighbor's house. Chances are that you would much rather just go home and be in your own bed with one of your parents there to look after you. Usually you will feel most comfortable with your own family. With your family, you can be yourself. You can let them see your best and your worst and they still love you.

Families are the starting-point for the neighborhood, town, state and so on. So it is natural that society in many ways is a reflection of the families that create it, both their strengths and their weaknesses. Because of divorce and other family situations, some young people have someone else they depend on aside from

their biological parents. It is not unusual for people who are unrelated to become as close as a blood-related family.

What Roles Might You Have in a Family?

- ☉ Son to my parents
- ☉ Daughter to my parents
- ☉ Brother to my sister
- ☉ Sister to my brother
- ☉ Husband to my wife
- ☉ Wife to my husband
- ☉ Father to my children
- ☉ Mother to my children
- ☉ Grandparents to my grandchild
- ☉ Grandchild to my grandparents



Your Ancestors

Imagine that you wake up one morning. You find that you are in a small apartment. The noise on the street rises to meet you. You crawl out of bed, pushing away a scratchy wool blanket. Walking into a tiny kitchen, you see a young couple eating breakfast and talking. They don't see you at first. You notice that the woman looks a lot like your grandmother. They look tired, but in a good mood. Suddenly the woman turns to you. She smiles, and in a heavy foreign accent calls you to the table to join them. You eat cheese, bread and sliced meat with hot tea. You discover that you are with your great-grandparents in New York City, not long after they arrived from Poland.

Where did you come from? Who are the people who made up your family for the past hundred years? Where did they live and what did they do? Did they have big families or small ones? What did they look like? Do you look similar to them? Did they speak the same language as you do? If you could talk to someone from

your family who lived two hundred years ago, what would you want to know?

We all have parents, and our parents have parents, and their parents have parents, and their parents have parents, and so on. Yet often we do not know who the people before our grandparents were. But we are closely connected to these people. Wouldn't you like to know who your family is?

America is a country of immigrants. The Native Americans were the first people here, but now there are people here from all over the world. Do you know how your family came here, and from where?

Your Family Tree



Ask your parents and your grandparents to help you draw a family tree, including as many of your relatives as you can. Your family tree will have two sides: your mother's and your father's. If you don't have a way to find out about one side of your family, try to focus on the side of the family you do know about. You may want to ask your parents the questions below. They may have stories about the past that you've never heard before. If you live near your grandparents, or talk to them over the phone or the Internet, ask them questions as well. Grandparents are often a wonderful source of stories and information about the family. Here are some questions to help you get started:

- ② *What are the names of your family members?*
- ② *Where did they originally come from (cities, large towns, small towns, near the ocean, in the Midwest?). Do you know which of your ancestors were first to immigrate to America? Do you know why they originally left their homeland?*
- ② *What types of jobs did they have?*
- ② *Did any of your grandparents marry someone of a different race, nationality or religion?*
- ② *Did they have many children?*
- ② *How do your parents and aunts and uncles describe their parents (your grandparents)? Do you see some of the same character traits in your parents or in yourself that you see in your grandparents?*

- ☞ *Does your family practice any traditions which were passed down to you from your parents or grandparents? If so, what are they? Do you like these traditions? Would you like to pass them down to your family when you are older?*

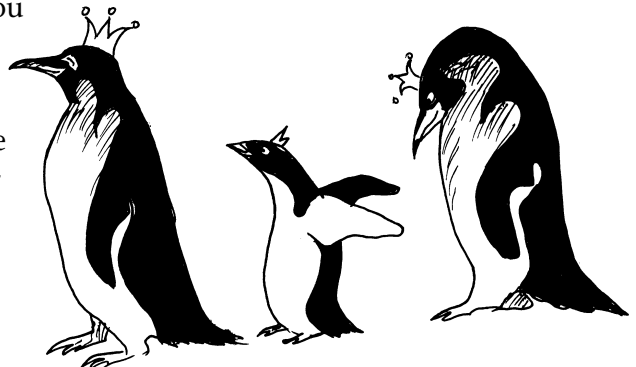
The Royal Family in Your House

You may be able to imagine how royal people behaved because of movies you have watched. Did you ever try to imagine yourself as King or Queen of the Land? It can be fun to pretend, and sometimes pretending can help us to see life from a slightly different angle. Now, imagine that you were a prince or a princess a long time ago, and your parents are the king and queen. Your grandparents are also living in your palace, and they have retired from being the active king and queen. They are referred to as the *king father* and *queen mother*. You are royalty—not just typical everyday royalty, but the real thing, top of the charts. What would it be like?

The king father and queen mother: They were the rulers when your parents were younger. Because of their age, wisdom and kindness, many people still come to them for guidance and advice. They are very trusted and loved. You go to them sometimes when you disagree with your parents because they are always willing to listen to you and have many good ideas about how you can work things out.

The king and the queen: They have many things to take care of. They raise you and sometimes ask you to do things that you do not want to do. They love you no matter how you behave, although sometimes they punish you. They expect a lot from you. You will someday rule in their place.

The prince and the princess: You and your brothers and sisters are the children of the king and the queen. Although you are still growing up, you know that one day you will have many things to take care of. If you are one of the older children in your family, you have to take care of the younger children and teach them the proper way to act. If you are one of the



younger children, you want to help your older brothers and sisters.

All of the other children in the kingdom are watching you. They want to see how you behave, because they want to be like you. You know that you cannot just act any way you want; you want to be a good example for all of the children in your kingdom.

What is Your Kingdom Like?

So, you are on the top of the world, part of the royal family, and next in line to rule. Play a secret game with your own family for a day (or two days if you're a very disciplined person). Try to treat your parents like the king and queen of the house, your grandparents (if you live near them) like the grand king and queen, and your brothers and sisters like respected young royals. Think over these questions:

Before you play your secret game:

How do you think a prince and princess should behave? How do you think they would show people that they loved and respected their parents? Do you think that they would behave better than an "average" person? If you were going to be the next ruler of a country, would you change the way you behave? Why or why not?

After you play your secret game:

- *How did you act differently than you normally do? Did you like the way you felt when you acted this way? Would you like to behave like this all the time?*
- *Did your parents or grandparents notice? What did they notice? How did they respond to you?*
- *In what way is every family like a royal family? Would you like to be around a family that treated each other like kings and queens, princes and princesses?*

What Will They Say about You?

It may be hard to believe, but your ancestors were once young. Like you, they walked to school, or rode the bus, felt happy, sad, had crushes on boys and girls and did all of those things that make you human. When you look at them in old pictures, they may be sitting up very prim and proper, in their best clothes—but

they were still living, breathing, thinking human beings like the rest of us.

You are young now and may not have thought so far into the future, but let's speculate for a moment, and ask: *What will your family say about you in the future?* Maybe your ancestors never thought about this either, but perhaps they did. When your descendants are gathered around the table at a holiday meal telling family stories, what do you want them to say about you? How would you like them to speak about you? What would you like them to remember about your character or your accomplishments? Would you want them to be proud to be a blood relative to you? What choices in your life will you make now, and in the future, that will determine what kind of a person you become and what you do with your life?

Journal

Imagine that you could use a time machine and go back in time. What year would you go back to? Imagine that you visited your family, the people who came before you. What do you think they would be like? What would you like to talk to them about or do with them? Would you tell them who you are?



To Do

1. On a piece of paper write down all the names of your relatives whom you know well. Can you see any traits that you have inherited from them?
 - *Good or poor health*
 - *Physical features, such as curly hair, blue eyes, etc.*
 - *Certain manners, such as the way you walk or talk*
 - *Any good or bad habits, such as eating too much, or being on time*
 - *Any particular personal characteristics, such as being honest, hospitable or generous, stubborn, shy or hot-tempered*
2. Talk to one of your parents or grandparents about your family and record a family story to read to the class. You may want to ask about a family tradition, a particular person or some other part of your family's history. After talking to one of your parents or grandparents, try to make a



list of the way things were and the way things are now in your family.

3. Make a list of the ways the people in your family help one another. As a class, make a big list on the board of all of the possible ways people in a family can help one another. What do you think it would be like if everyone did these things all the time? Why do we need other people's help so badly? Can you imagine what would happen if you didn't have anyone to take care of you?
4. Imagine that you have landed on Mars and the Martians are fascinated with Earth families. Martians don't have families like you do. You have been asked to be interviewed by the Martians, and your interview will be watched all over the planet. In pairs, take turns being the Martian interviewer and the Earthling.

Interview questions:

- *Explain in your own words what a family is.*
 - *What do families do together?*
 - *Why do people in a family need each other?*
 - *What do you like the most about your family?*
5. Choose one of your parents and make a list of characteristics that describe him or her. Who are your parents? When you have finished share that list with one of your friends and see ways your parents are similar and how they are different.



Key Points

- 🔑 Families are like a first school.
- 🔑 Some day you are going to be the ancestor of the people in the next generation of your family and they will look back at your life and want to know what kind of person you were.



The family is one of nature's masterpieces.

George Santayana

