

Topics: Family
by Adrian Tennant

LEAD-IN

Can you find ten words connected to family in the word-snake?

uysistergbrohjuparentstweenadgemummbinlamswischilidrenfatopiqhusbandygradadroograhwifeeparefybrotherduigvifamtwindrando

FIRST SENTENCES

Read these sentences. They are the first sentences in letters to an agony aunt. Each author has a different problem. What do you think the problem is in each situation?

a. When I was young, I was adopted.

b. Last year, my mum got married again.

c. I'm 41 years old and my daughter is going to have a baby!

d. I live with my husband's family.

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READING: LETTERS

1. Read the letters sent to an agony aunt and fill in the gaps with the correct first sentences (a-d) from the previous exercise.

1. Dear Betty,

My new dad is called Bryan and he already has two children – Carly and Tony. Now they are my stepsister and stepbrother. I like Carly – she’s nice. But Tony is horrible – he keeps taking my things and breaking them. When I talk to my mum, she tells me I have to learn to share. What can I do?

Aaron

2. Dear Betty,

In my culture this is quite normal and usually it’s fine. I have two young children and it’s nice to have someone there to help me look after them. The problem is that my mother-in-law tells me how I should raise my children, so sometimes we argue. What can I do?

Safia

Dear Betty



3. Dear Betty,

I never knew my real parents. I didn’t have any brothers or sisters and I thought I was an only child. So, imagine my surprise when I bumped into someone who looked exactly like me! She’s my identical twin sister, Karen. Of course, I’d like to get to know her – but what happens if we don’t like each other? What should I do?

Trudy

4. Dear Betty,

She’s only 16. When I tell people, I think they blame me – that it’s my fault she became pregnant. I love her and I’ll look after her but becoming a grandmother makes me feel so old. Do you think I’m a bad mother?

Barbara

- b. Read the letters again. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

1. Aaron doesn’t like his stepsister.
2. Safia thinks living with her in-laws isn’t strange.
3. Trudy didn’t know she had a sister.
4. Barbara was only sixteen when she had her daughter.

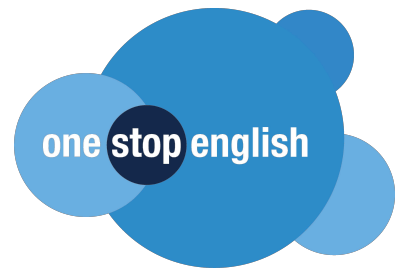
- c. Here are two replies from Betty that offer advice. Match the replies to the correct letters.

A.

No, not at all. It must be quite difficult for you and your family. Your daughter is very lucky to have a mother who supports and cares for her. It’s going to be tough for your daughter as she really is very young but I’m sure everything will be fine.

B.

I know it must be difficult for you, but it must be hard for the other children as well. How old are they? Are you the oldest? Your mum is right. If you’ve never had a brother or sister before, then it’s something you have to learn to live with. It might be a good idea to talk about it together.



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WORKING WITH THE LANGUAGE

Read these extracts from the letters and replies (1-5), and look at the underlined modal verbs. What function do they perform? Match each of the modal verbs to the correct function from the box.

advice	certainty	necessity
obligation	possibility	

- When I talk to my mum, she tells me I have to learn to share.
- ... my mother-in-law tells me how I should raise my children, ...
- What should I do?
- It must be quite difficult for you and your family.
- ... it might be a good idea to talk about it together.

WORKING WITH VOCABULARY

Focus 1: Meaning

Find words in the letters and replies that match the definitions below.

- to allow someone to use or have something that is yours (letter 1)
- to look after a child until he or she becomes an adult (letter 2)
- legally became the parent of another person's child (letter 3)
- met someone unexpectedly (letter 3)
- exactly the same (letter 3)
- to say or think that someone is responsible for a problem or situation (letter 4)
- difficult (reply A)

Focus 2: Topic-related words

Look back at the letters and replies and find other family words to complete the table.

male	female	either / both
dad	mum	parents

Do you know any more family words? Write them into the table.

LISTENING

Listen to the radio show and answer the questions.

- Which letter is it most closely related to?
- What are the differences between the letter to the agony aunt and the radio show?

SPEAKING

Look back at the two letters that Betty didn't respond to. In groups, discuss the advice you would give to the two people. Do you agree with each other?

PROJECT

Find an agony aunt column in a newspaper, magazine or online. What kind of problems do people have? Are there any letters about family problems? Bring them to the next class to discuss with the other students.