

Introduction

Hi. I'm an online advisor at a Web site for teens (www.thesite.org). A lot of the email I receive is about family issues. "How can I get my parents to quit being overprotective?" "What do I do to win back my mom's trust?" "I have the most annoying brother (or sister) in the entire world!"

Every once in a while teens will disagree with adults at home and siblings will drive each other crazy. Okay, it probably happens more often than that, but the point is, it happens . . . *in every family*. It's normal for family members to have trouble getting along all of the time. But normal doesn't have to mean *necessary*. If you need some new strategies for making peace at home you've come to the right place.

In addition to the usual clashes of personality and opinion, serious issues can also come up in families. Parents might fight a lot and eventually separate or divorce. Maybe you've experienced other tough family situations—like getting used to life with a stepparent, facing the loss of a loved one, or dealing with money or health issues at home. Perhaps you'd just like to feel closer to the people you live with but you don't know how.

No matter what's up with your family, you can find out a lot in these stories about six teens dealing with their own challenges at home. You'll also find quotes and advice from real teens, quizzes, tips, and insider tools for doing your part to make your family happier and stronger. If you have any questions that aren't addressed in this book, feel free to email me at help4kids@freespirit.com. I'd also enjoy hearing any stories or suggestions of your own.

In friendship,

Annie

P.S. I often use the word *parents*, but the advice here can help whether you live with one or two parents, a stepparent, a foster family, an aunt or uncle, grandparents, or other people. When you see the word *parents*, just think of the adults you live with—that's who I'm talking about.



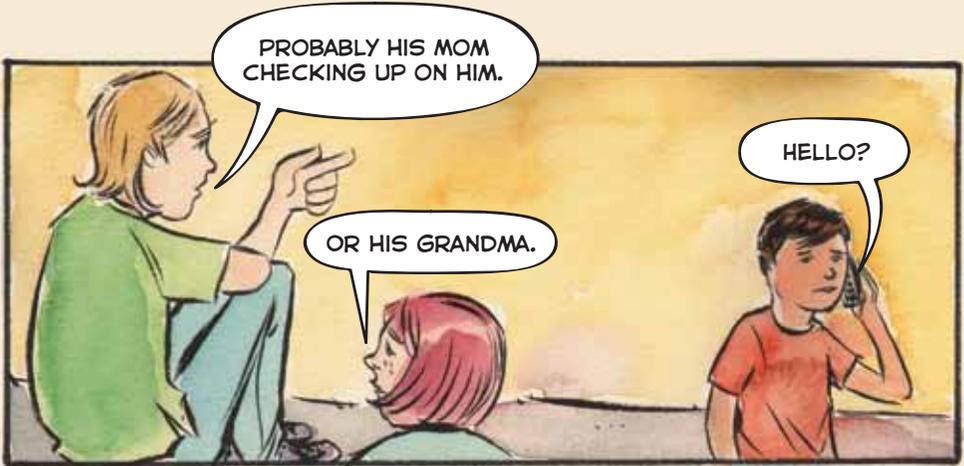
2 What's Up with My Family?

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**We were at Jack's house waiting for Jen,
when Mateo's phone rang. . . .**



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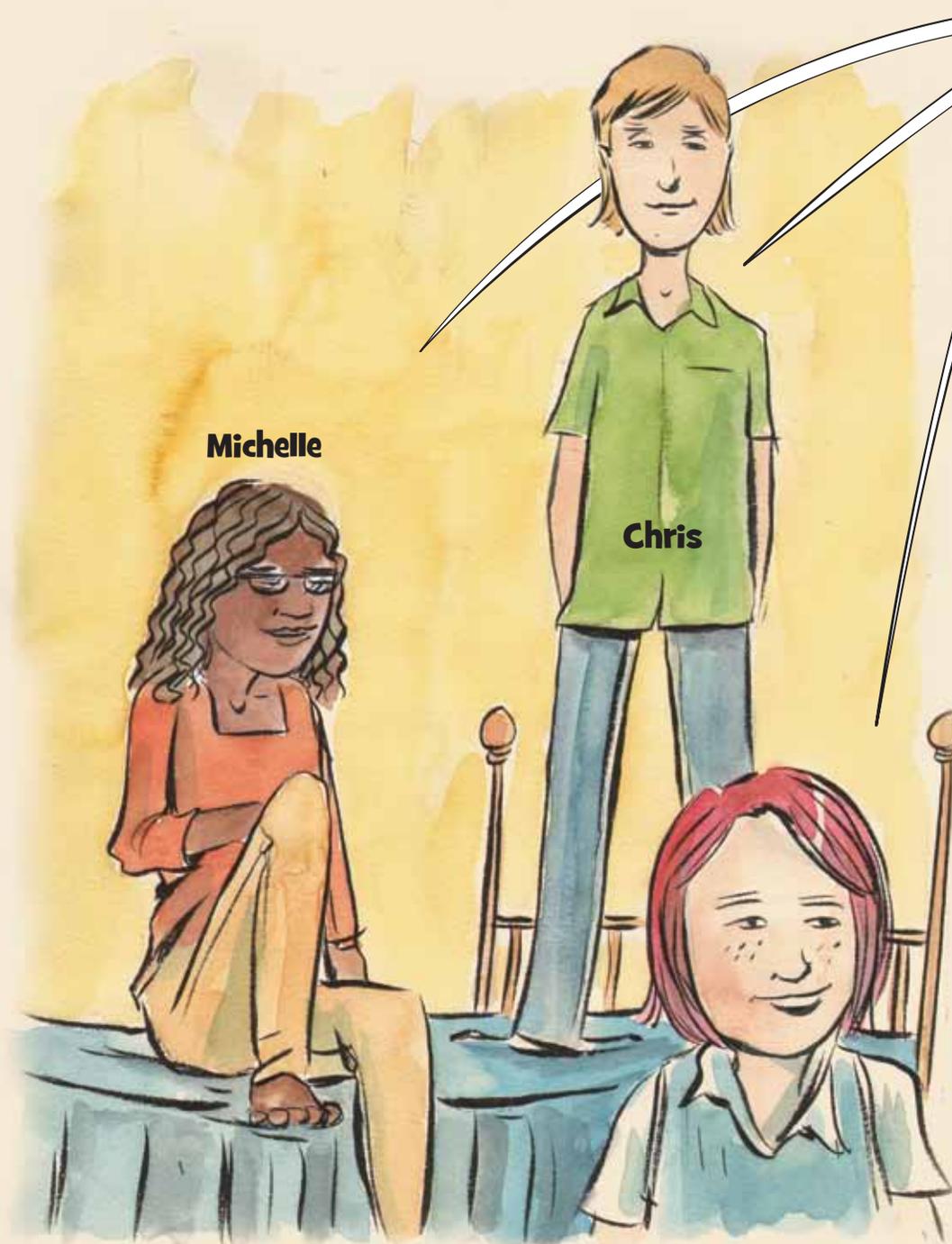
We know that no family is perfect. Jen hardly ever agrees with her parents about anything. Abby's fed up with her mom's "helpful hints" about losing weight. Jack can't stand how his sister gets away with everything. Mateo feels like his huge family is always in his business. Michelle would love to have a family bigger than just her and her mom. Chris, on the other hand, wants it just to be him and his mom again because with a new stepdad and stepbrother, it's not the same.

At times, we've all wished things were different at home, but none of us had a clue how to change what we don't like. Then Michelle asked one of her famous probing questions:



ASSUMING THAT EVERYONE'S GOT AT LEAST ONE FAMILY COMPLAINT, WHY NOT ASK OTHER TEENS HOW THEY DEAL?

So we asked. And we learned some really useful stuff that we wish we'd known sooner. But better late than never. And lately, things are better.



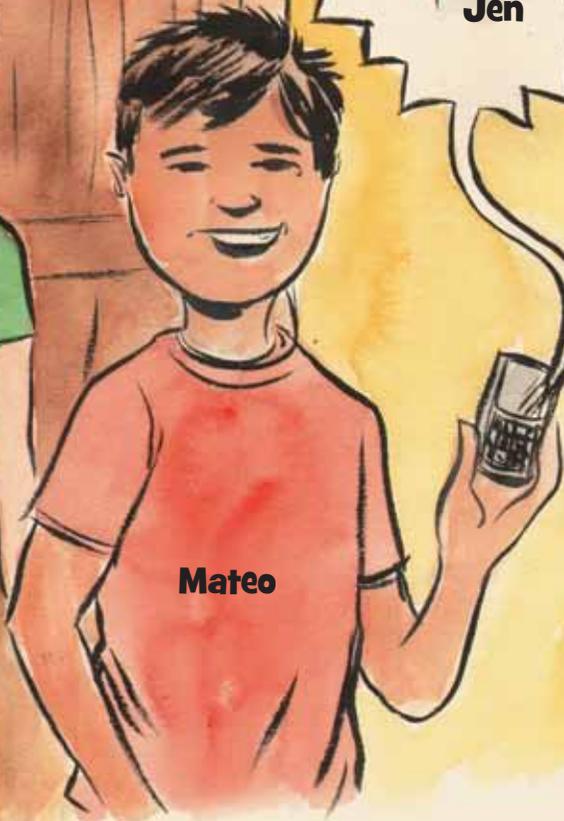
Michelle

Chris

Abby

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PEACE.



5 TIPS FOR GETTING MORE RESPONSIBILITY

- 1. Keep your promises.** Whenever you make an agreement with your parents, follow through. This shows that you can be counted on. When they trust you, you earn more independence. You also gain self-respect—that's win-win.
- 2. Look for more ways to help out at home.** Adults appreciate it when everyone in the family lends a hand. Want to earn bonus points? Do something that's not one of your regular chores just to help out. Parents love that!
- 3. Get along with siblings.** Do your part to make the peace with brothers and sisters, and adults may notice something has changed for the better. In their minds, getting along equals maturity. And maturity gets you more responsibility.
- 4. Try to have a positive attitude.** It's not like you have to smile and act 100 percent happy all of the time, but cooperating with adults at home will make them more likely to cooperate with you. That's just the way it works.
- 5. Show family adults they've done a good job raising you.** When you ask for new freedom and meet your responsibilities head-on, you prove to your parents that you've learned what they taught you. That makes them proud. It should make you proud, too.

With every family, there will be times when situations at home change and things get shaken up (a little or a lot). Maybe parents begin to fight and split up temporarily or for good. A stepparent might become part of your life and leave you trying to figure out where you fit within a blended family. Other events—like a long-distance move or a parent losing a job—can also lead to major changes in the family.

The tough part about these situations is that you probably didn't have anything to do with why they happened. Even so, you have to deal along with everyone else. Change isn't always easy for people. **It can be especially hard if things are moving fast and it feels like you don't have much control over what's going on.**

“Things are different now . . .”

“My grandma died last month. Sometimes I just can't believe she's gone. She was my mom's best friend, so it's affecting her the most. It's hard for my sister, my brother, and me to see Mom so sad.”

—Juan, 13

“My dad just moved back in with us after being gone for two years and it has turned my world upside down.”

—Bibi, 12

“I'm stressed because of my parents' divorce. It's hard because of the scheduling.”

—Raj, 11

“We just moved here and I hate it. My new school is terrible because it is so strict. Now my parents are splitting up, too.”

—Aiden, 13

“I just found out my mom is pregnant! They already have my little sister and me. I'm so angry because things are going to have to change again and I don't want them to. Plus they're planning on making my sister move into my room with me so the baby can have its own room!”

—Cheri, 14

“I like my mom's fiancé, but things are moving really fast. They've been together less than two months—it's a lot for me to take in.”

—Wallace, 12

“Recently my dad went into rehab and I'm going through a lot right now. It's weird, too, because I'm living with my grandparents and I don't really know them.”

—James, 11

How Flexible Are You?



1. Your family just moved to a new town. You:

- a) assume that you're going to hate your new school.
- b) blame your parents for ruining your life.
- c) decide to make the best of it and see what happens.
- d) refuse to unpack and give everyone the silent treatment.

2. Your new stepsister asks to borrow a sweatshirt that you don't wear any more. You:

- a) let her borrow it.
- b) refuse because you don't want her to get in the habit of borrowing your stuff.
- c) say yes even though you don't totally trust her yet.
- d) make a deal—she can borrow it if you can see her playlist.

3. Your aunt and her kids moved in with your family. You don't know for how long. You:

- a) silently resent the extra people, the noise, and the lack of privacy.
- b) tell your parents how you feel.
- c) stay away from home as much as possible.
- d) retaliate against your cousins.

4. Your stepmom is more particular about keeping things neat than your mom. You:

- a) leave stuff around just to annoy her.
- b) clean up partway but leave the rest.
- c) complain to your friends about her.
- d) talk to your dad about the situation.

5. Your dad hurt his leg. He can't go to work and may lose his job. You:

- a) worry about whether your family will have enough money.
- b) resent that he gets to sit home and watch TV all day.
- c) ask how you can help the family.
- d) pretend you don't care when you really do.

Answers:

- 1. c.** An open mind and a positive outlook can help smooth a rough transition.
- 2. a.** Kindness helps newly blended families bond.
 - d.** Another smart move that lets you expand your playlist while keeping the peace.
- 3. b.** Communicating about tough situations can help everyone weather the storm. You'll get information you can use to deal with what's happening.
- 4. d.** In a new living situation, it may take time to get used to everyone else's way of doing things. Talking through rules can prevent them from becoming big issues.
- 5. c.** Working together helps families grow stronger during times of change.

Need to Know!

100 Things Guys Need to Know by Bill Zimmerman. Part graphic novel, part practical advice, this book for guys has information for handling all kinds of tough situations—including ideas for earning more privileges and getting along with adults at home.

It's My Life—Family

www.pbskids.org/itsmylife/family

Visit this Web site for the lowdown on topics that cause challenges in families. Find suggestions on everything from communicating with parents and siblings to dealing with a family move and other transitions.

***Real Families: Figuring Out Your Family and Where You Fit In* by Amy Lynch.** Families have their good moments, but some other times aren't so fun or easy. This book for girls features ideas for dealing when adults at home have issues with friends, dating, and other topics.

It's normal to feel annoyed with adults in your family if they sometimes treat you like you're much less mature than you are.

If you're patient and follow their rules, though, they should eventually get with the program. Because the truth is, adults at home don't want to be checking up on you forever. But they won't feel ready to step back until they believe you've proven you're ready to make more of your own decisions.

So that's the deal. The more you can show adults at home that you're responsible, the more they'll relax and see that you're ready for more freedom.