ESL LAB

Family Conversation Cards

Thirty family questions for adults, in five sets: who is in the family, growing up, who does what at home, family gatherings and how families are changing. Every set comes with one talk rule that keeps answers going past three words, and a Careful line, because family is one of the most personal topics in any course. The numbers match the blog post on esllaboratory.com.

LEVEL	STUDENTS	GROUPING	TIME
A2 to C1	Adults and older teens	Pairs, groups, 1-to-1	10 to 15 minutes a set

What's inside, in the order of the blog post

1	**Who's in Your Family**	Family members and how close they are, with who's-who words	**Pages 2-3**
2	**Growing Up**	Family stories and childhood, told in a relative's voice	**Page 4**
3	**Who Does What at Home**	Chores, bills and birthdays, with words for jobs at home	**Page 5**
4	**Family Gatherings**	Nosy questions and how to get out of them politely	**Page 6**
5	**How Families Are Changing**	Duty, care and choice, across three generations	**Page 7**
	All 30 on screen	Every question and rule on one page, for online lessons	**Page 8**

How to play

In pairs: cut out the eight cards of one set. Put the green rule card face up in the middle and the six questions face down. One student takes a card and answers it. Their partner holds them to the rule, then takes the next card. The white card is for a question of your own. The word strip under the cards gives the language the rule asks for. **Alone:** pick three cards from a set and answer each one in writing, in at least four sentences, using two phrases from the strip.

For the teacher

Read the five Careful lines before class: they take a minute and save an awkward twenty. Model each rule once by answering a card yourself. Any question can be skipped, and saying so at the start makes students answer more, not less. One-to-one, you and your student both answer every card. Online, share page 8 and work down the list.

The five rules

SET 1 · WHO'S IN YOUR FAMILY	SET 2 · GROWING UP	SET 3 · WHO DOES WHAT AT HOME	SET 4 · FAMILY GATHERINGS	SET 5 · HOW FAMILIES ARE CHANGING
Draw it, don't ask	Tell their version	Three sentences, then zoom in	Three ways out	Three generations

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SET 1

Who's in Your Family

A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min · questions 1 to 6

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 1 · THE RULE

Draw it, don't ask

Your partner draws your family while you talk, names and lines only, and may not ask a question. Then you correct the drawing.

A2-B1 · 1

Who is in your family, and which of them do you see most often?

A2-B1 · 2

Who are you closest to, and who are you related to but hardly know?

A2-B1 · 3

Which of them lives furthest away, and how do you stay in touch?

A2-B1 · 4

Who in your family is most like you?

A2-B1 · 5

Who holds the family together?

A2-B1 · 6

Who in your family would you call first with good news?

A2-B1 · YOUR QUESTION

Careful. Let students define family as widely as they want, and say so before you start. The question is who is in your family, not who you are related to.

WORDS FOR WHO'S WHO

Close family
my parents, my siblings
an only child
a stepbrother, a half-sister
my partner, my kids

The wider family
my grandparents
an aunt, an uncle, a cousin
my in-laws
my niece, my nephew

How close
We're very close.
I hardly know her.
We lost touch.
We see each other every week.

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SET 1 · WORKSHEET

The family tree

A2-B1 · draw while you listen · eight people at most

In pairs: your partner answers cards 1 to 6. You draw their family here while you listen, names and lines only, and ask nothing. Then show the drawing, and your partner corrects it out loud. **Alone:** draw your own family, eight people at most, then write four sentences about it under the tree, one with *closest to* and one with *hardly know*.

LINES
A line down for parents and children. A line across for a couple or for brothers and sisters.

NAMES ONLY
Write names and one word: *mom, uncle, cousin*. No sentences, no questions.

CORRECT IT
The speaker points at what is wrong and says it: *No, Ana is my cousin, not my sister.*

GRANDPARENTS

PARENTS, AUNTS, UNCLES

Me

CHILDREN, NIECES, NEPHEWS

SET 2

Growing Up

A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min · questions 7 to 12

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 2 · THE RULE

Tell their version

After each answer, your partner retells it the way your relative would tell it. You say what the relative leaves out.

A2-B1 · 7

What story does your family tell again every time it gets together?

A2-B1 · 8

Who tells it, and who corrects them halfway through?

A2-B1 · 9

What were you like as a child, according to your family?

A2-B1 · 10

Do you agree with that description?

A2-B1 · 11

What has a relative got wrong about you and never checked?

A2-B1 · 12

Which rule from your childhood home do you still follow?

A2-B1 · YOUR QUESTION

Careful. If a student says their family has no stories, ask what gets repeated whenever the family eats together. Drop question 11 with a group that has only just met.

TELLING A FAMILY STORY

Starting	In their voice	Putting it right
Every time we get together, ...	According to my mom, ...	That's not quite how it happened.
When I was little, I...	My grandma always says I...	What she leaves out is...
There's a story about the time...	In my dad's version, ...	Actually, it was my idea.

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SET 3

Who Does What at Home

B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min · questions 13 to 18

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 3 · THE RULE

Three sentences, then zoom in

Answer in three sentences and stop. Your partner picks one of the three and asks for the long version of that one.

B1-B2 · 13

Who does the cooking in your home, and who does the dishes?

B1-B2 · 14

Who pays the bills, and who remembers the birthdays?

B1-B2 · 15

How was the work at home divided when you were a child?

B1-B2 · 16

Which job at home does nobody notice until it isn't done?

B1-B2 · 17

Who looks after the oldest and the youngest people in your family?

B1-B2 · 18

If one person stopped doing their jobs for a week, who would the family miss most?

B1-B2 · YOUR QUESTION

Careful. Housework can show who does too much. Students talk about jobs, not about people who fail at them, and naming the job without the person is a full answer.

JOBS AT HOME

Chores	Organizing	Who does it
do the dishes, do the laundry	pay the bills	It's always my dad who...
take out the trash	book the appointments	We take turns.
cook dinner, clean up	remember the birthdays	We split it fifty-fifty.
do the grocery shopping	plan the holidays	Nobody notices until...

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SET 4

Family Gatherings

B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min · questions 19 to 24

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 4 · THE RULE

Three ways out

Your partner plays the relative who asks question 20 and won't take a short answer. Get out of it three different ways without being rude.

B1-B2 · 19

Which family get-together do you look forward to most, and which do you dread?

B1-B2 · 20

What does your family always ask that you have stopped answering properly?

B1-B2 · 21

What do relatives assume about your life that is not true?

B1-B2 · 22

What subject does your family quietly avoid at the table?

B1-B2 · 23

What would you rather be asked instead?

B1-B2 · 24

What object has been passed down in your family, and who will get it next?

B1-B2 · YOUR QUESTION

Careful. The partner is persistent, never unkind. Stop the role-play the moment a real answer starts coming out. You want the deflecting, not the disclosure.

THREE WAYS OUT OF A QUESTION

Answer a different question	Turn it back	Honest but brief
What I can tell you is...	And what about you?	I'd rather not get into that.
Speaking of work, ...	Why do you ask?	It's still early days.
The bigger news is...	How's your new job going?	I'll let you know.

SET 5

How Families Are Changing

B2-C1 · Groups of 3-4 · 15 min · questions 25 to 30

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 5 · THE RULE

Three generations

Answer each question three times: as your grandparents would have, as your parents would, and as you do. Then say where it changed.

B2-C1 · 25

What does a family owe its adult children?

B2-C1 · 26

What do adult children owe their parents?

B2-C1 · 27

Who should look after older relatives, and who decides that?

B2-C1 · 28

Is choosing a pet instead of a child a smaller decision, or just a different one?

B2-C1 · 29

Has the old division of work at home come back, or did it never leave?

B2-C1 · 30

Should a family have any say in a person's career or partner?

B2-C1 · YOUR QUESTION

Careful. A student who did not know their grandparents uses the oldest person they did know. The set needs three points in time, not three blood relatives.

LANGUAGE FOR THREE GENERATIONS

Your grandparents	Your parents	You
For my grandparents, it was a duty.	My parents see it differently.	For me, it's more of a choice.
They would have said...	By their time, ...	What changed it was...
Back then, nobody asked.	They were the first to...	I'm not sure I agree with any of them.

ALL 30 · ON SCREEN

Family conversation questions

For online and one-to-one lessons. Share this page and work down one set at a time. Any question can be skipped.

1. Who's in Your Family A2-B1

Rule: Draw it, don't ask. Your partner draws your family while you talk, names and lines only, with no questions. Then you correct the drawing.

1. Who is in your family, and which of them do you see most often?
2. Who are you closest to, and who are you related to but hardly know?
3. Which of them lives furthest away, and how do you stay in touch?
4. Who in your family is most like you?
5. Who holds the family together?
6. Who in your family would you call first with good news?

2. Growing Up A2-B1

Rule: Tell their version. After each answer, your partner retells it the way your relative would. You say what the relative leaves out.

7. What story does your family tell again every time it gets together?
8. Who tells it, and who corrects them halfway through?
9. What were you like as a child, according to your family?
10. Do you agree with that description?
11. What has a relative got wrong about you and never checked?
12. Which rule from your childhood home do you still follow?

3. Who Does What at Home B1-B2

Rule: Three sentences, then zoom in. Answer in three sentences and stop. Your partner picks one and asks for the long version of it.

13. Who does the cooking in your home, and who does the dishes?
14. Who pays the bills, and who remembers the birthdays?
15. How was the work at home divided when you were a child?
16. Which job at home does nobody notice until it isn't done?
17. Who looks after the oldest and the youngest people in your family?
18. If one person stopped doing their jobs for a week, who would the family miss most?

4. Family Gatherings B1-B2

Rule: Three ways out. Your partner plays the relative who asks question 20. Get out of it three different ways without being rude.

19. Which family get-together do you look forward to most, and which do you dread?
20. What does your family always ask that you have stopped answering properly?
21. What do relatives assume about your life that is not true?
22. What subject does your family quietly avoid at the table?
23. What would you rather be asked instead?
24. What object has been passed down in your family, and who will get it next?

5. How Families Are Changing B2-C1

Rule: Three generations. Answer as your grandparents would have, as your parents would, and as you do. Then say where it changed.

25. What does a family owe its adult children?
26. What do adult children owe their parents?
27. Who should look after older relatives, and who decides that?
28. Is choosing a pet instead of a child a smaller decision, or just a different one?
29. Has the old division of work at home come back, or did it never leave?
30. Should a family have any say in a person's career or partner?

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