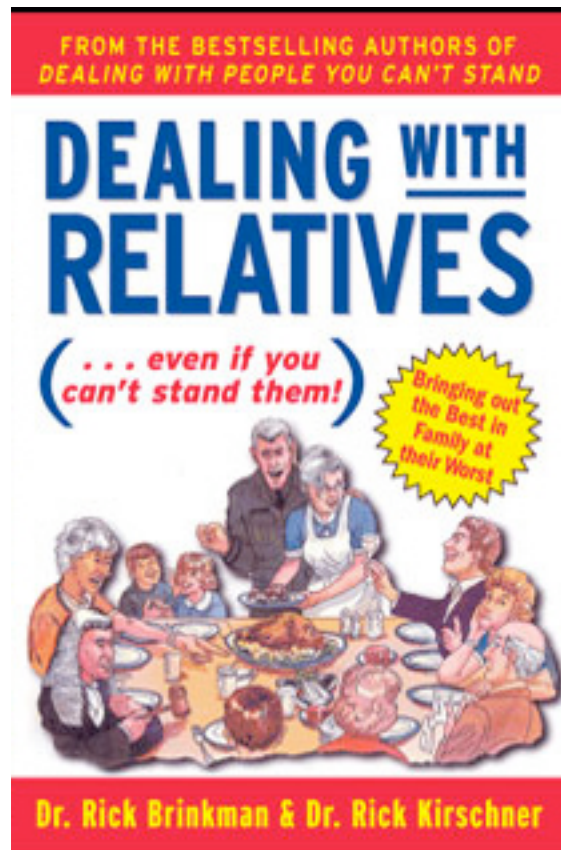


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## THE DIMENSION OF GREATNESS: Top Ten Qualities of Great Relatives



When conducting our interviews in the research stage of this book, we asked questions like 'If one of your family members was an ideal relative, what characteristics would they embody? What would they be like? What would they do?' Some of the people we talked to replied that they did have such a relative. Some said they had a whole family of them! Others told us they could only dream, so that's what we asked them to do. What follows are the top ten composite responses about what constitutes a great relative, in descending order of frequency.

## **1. A Great Relative Values Communication**

*“I am interested in what you have to say.”* The ideal relative is a good communicator and one of their greatest skills is the ability to listen. An ideal relative listens to what's being said. Not pretend to listen, or talk over you, but really listen.

*“I want you to be able to hear what I have to say.”* They pay attention to what they communicate, how they communicate, and the effects their communication has on you. When they start to say, "you should do this" and "you should do that", they catch themselves and rephrase so that what they want to say expresses what they think rather than what someone else 'needs' to do. They take your feelings into consideration before they give you advise or offer to help. They are tactful in what they say, and yet they don't lie, or skirt the issue. They approach sensitive subjects with both love and tact.

*“I won't impose my opinions on you.”* They provide feedback when asked to do so, but in way that is supportive and loving; never damaging to anyone's self esteem or in a way that could build walls. They get permission before offering feedback. They are able to talk openly and constructively about past conflicts without anyone assigning blame. They communicate directly with you about their own needs and requests, instead of using other people to manipulate a situation just to get what they want.

*“I value what we talk about.”* When you see them again, it seems like they pick up with you where you left off last, and begin sharing as if you have never been apart. And they maintain a sense of humor in their communications, even when what they discuss with you is serious.

## **2. A Great Relative Loves Unconditionally**

*“You can count on my love.”* The ideal relative loves you no matter what you do, or what kind of trouble you get yourself in to. If they have a problem with you, they talk

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about the actual problem instead of having opinions about it or about you. Their love is constant. They are non-judgmental. They don't point out flaws, but instead they understand that no one is perfect so they simply accept you. Their unconditional love also extends to your spouse or partner and your kids.

*"I won't make what you do more important than who you are in my life."* If you do something they don't like, they forgive you instead of holding on to a grudge or blaming you forever. They accept the imperfections that make us all human, and they don't need you to fulfill their expectations in order to be happy with you or love you. They don't take things you say or do personally, like when you can't make it to a family event. They maintain perspective in the relationship and understand that the life-long connection of family should not be derailed by petty short-term conflicts or disagreements.

*"I am here for you."* You could be anywhere in the world, day or night, in any kind of trouble, and the ideal relative would be there for you without question. They are loyal to you in their love for you, and appreciate you exactly for who you are instead of what you are not.

### **3. A Great Relative Accepting and Respectful**

*"You are someone special to me."* The ideal relative accepts, respects, and appreciates your individuality. They recognize the unique characteristics of other family members and don't need you to be the same as they are.

*"I respect your right to your own point of view."* They understand that people will have differences of opinions, and they can respect your opinions, even if they don't agree with them. If they think that a topic might polarize the family, they avoid it altogether. They are not threatened by, nor are they a threat to anyone's political or ideological or religious opinions, because they have no need to convince you of their point of view, or oppose you for your own.

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*“I recognize that times and styles change.”* They are flexible enough to realize that times change, so they can be open to the social norms and lifestyles of today instead of holding you to standards from other eras. They don’t impose their expectations on you to be a certain type of person, or fit a certain picture or stereotype, and they don’t require you to have a certain type of relationship with them.

*“I mind my own business.”* They don’t impose their dreams on you, and are considerate of your own dreams and aspirations. They are able to work out their relationship with you so that it speaks to your needs as well as their own. They know when to keep their opinions to themselves about how you run your life, trusting you to guide yourself and navigate through your own life without their interference. They can accept your choices and decisions, so they don’t try to manipulate or sway you to see things their way. They can have a discussion that is inclusive of your feelings and views instead of exclusive to their own. They allow their adult children to raise their children in their own way, without offhanded remarks about nutrition, clothing, grades and the like. They are not demanding, they do not try to make decisions for you. They show compassion and empathy while respecting your individuality.

*“When I am with you, I am responsible for myself.”* They are respectful of your personal space, so they call before they come over. They don’t overstay their welcome. They attend to their own needs. They accept your help when offered, but don’t wait for you to offer. If they need something, they let you know. They exercise their parental responsibility with their own small children, and make sure they behave properly when in the homes of their relatives.

### **4. A Great Relative Offers Support**

*“I’m on your side.”* The ideal relative finds out what kind of support you need and then supports you in that way. They are respectful and considerate of other family members' feelings and can express concern or joy for your life, and allow you to do the same with them. They are sensitive to offer advice only when asked, knowing when to step back and

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allow you space and yet are there when you need them. They would not remind you of your mistakes or shortcomings but be a source of praise and encouragement for your accomplishments. You know you can rely on them and they will be there when it all goes wrong and never say 'I told you so'. They are honest and trustworthy in this, so you feel safe and encouraged when they are around.

*"I won't put you down behind your back."* They don't participate in gossip about you or put you down behind your back or get into competition with you. You know they will stand up for you if others try to gossip about you. They say nice things about you when you are not there.

*"Tell me what you need from me."* They provide emotional support when needed. They don't withdraw their love, even when they disapprove of what you say or do. You can be honest with them, because you know they won't abandon you. They view your mistakes as learning opportunities. They offer reassurance. They don't give unsolicited advice.

### **5. A Great Relative Is Helpful**

*"I'm here if you need me."* They will help you when you are sick, pitch in when you are overwhelmed, provide guidance if you want them to, and coach you if you ask for direction. You trust them and count on them with one of the most precious of jobs, helping you with your children when you need it. At family functions / gatherings, such as dinners, parties, reunions, the ideal relative contributes to a group effort to make the event a success. They don't always wait for you to ask, and will offer their help if they think you need their assistance. They care but are not overbearing, they offer advice and experience if you ask, and there are no shades of 'disapproval' going along with their advice. Their help comes without strings and they do not act like you 'owe' them. They feel comfortable asking you for help when they need it, and want you to feel the same. They are not too busy to help you. They only give you the help you ask for, and don't impose their idea of 'help' on you 'for your own good.'

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*“If you give me your word, I will expect you to keep your word.”* The ideal relative is masterful at loving accountability. When you break a promise or don’t do what you’ve said you would do, they lovingly remind you of what you’ve promised and describe what you did, and ask you to explain. They express their concerns in a non-judgmental manner allowing you to take responsibility for your own mistakes. If they see that you may be harming yourself or others by your behavior, they will respectfully bring it your attention. They are able to give honest feedback and are able to accept honest feedback from you, even if it sometimes hurts.

### **6. A Great Relative Keeps In Touch**

*“I will stay in touch.”* The ideal relative finds the perfect balance of staying in touch. They are there when you want them, and not there when you don’t. They don’t pressure you to call, or expect you to feel obligated. They don’t try to make you feel bad if time passes between contact. They don’t wait to hear from you and then get angry when they do. They will reach out to you if they haven’t heard from you. They take responsibility for the continuity of the relationship.

*“Let me know how you want to stay in touch.”* They make efforts to stay in touch with you in a way that values your time, relationships, and other commitments. They take the time to learn how keeping in touch best fits into your life, whether through phone calls, emails, or occasional visits.

*“You have a right to some privacy.”* They are interested in you and your life, but not too much. You can genuinely be open with them about what is going on for you, but you don’t have to keep them informed of every development. You know they care because they ask questions about your life before talking about theirs. And though they are interested in your life, they are also sensitive when there are areas you would prefer not to share. When they come to visit, they also know when to leave, finding that perfect

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balance in frequency and time. The time you spend with them is valued, instead of clocked.

“I want to share some of my life with you.” They are willing to share their lives openly with you, providing you with the chance to celebrate with them in times of joy and victory, or offer compassion or empathy when they are going through a hard time. But they don’t lean on you to make their life work. They share both the good times and the bad, and invite you to do the same.

### **7. A Great Relative Is Wise With Money**

*“I’ll do what I can.”* If they loan you money, they don’t ask for it back right away. If they borrow money, they always repay it! If you are in need they would open their wallets; promptly forget they had loaned you money, and then act surprised when you pay back, Not to mention that they wouldn’t mention it to anyone else, and you wouldn’t keep hearing about it from them. At the same time, the ideal relative doesn’t ask for your financial help. On family trips they offer to pay their own way, and do their part to share in expenses.

### **8. A Great Relative Is Also A Friend**

*“I don’t just love you. I like you, too!”* Because of mutual respect and support, the ideal relative can also be your friend. A ‘good relative’ is a ‘good friend,’ to whom you happen to be related. As you each get older, the ideal relative looks to build common ground and nurture it. The rules of friendship are applied, so they don’t get privileges that are unacceptable in other relationships.

### **9. A Great Relative Doesn’t Hold On To The Past**

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*“I don’t define you by what you’ve done in the past.”* The ideal relative realizes that people can change and evolve and they don’t limit their idea of you to the past. They don’t keep reminding you of your mistakes or tell stories about your past, which make you uncomfortable. If there are any negative patterns from the past that concern them in the present, they address them straight on with you, and work with you to identify the evidence or actions they require of you to let it go and move on. They have no doubt that you have the capacity to grow as a human being. They treat you as an intellectual equal, not a son or daughter of 15 when you are over 30 years old. As your adult child, they are willing to forgive you for the past and discover who you are in the present as a person rather than limiting you to the role of parent.

### **10. A Great Relative is Fun, Optimistic and a Positive Influence**

*“I love life.”* The ideal relative is someone you just want to be around because they make you feel better about yourself and life in general. They help lighten your emotional load instead of add to it. You can go to them, depressed or concerned about something, and they laugh, smile, and let you know everything is ok, and everything is going to work out. They help you put your troubles in perspective by their sense of optimism. They are positive people, and they laugh and smile a lot. They find reasons and opportunities to laugh with you, and organize activities that family members can enjoy together. Their presence in the room tends to bring out the best in everyone.



And there you have it, the top ten qualities of an ideal relative. We don’t know what your personal list looks like, but we’re fairly certain that many of these qualities, if not all of them, would appear on it. Turn it around, and you can know how it is possible for you to be a great relative to your own family members. In the long term, this is likely to accomplish more for you than wishing one of them was a better relative to you. If there is truth to the aphorism that ‘we get what we give,’ then giving greatness should get you greatness in return.

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In the deepest sense, your family, our family, is the whole of humanity. Descended from common ancestors, sharing a common destiny, each of us has a part to play in building a world that works, a world worth sharing, a world in which our children and their children and their children's children can look back at us and admire our willingness to choose greatness over pettiness and love over difficulty. Peace in the world begins with peace in our hearts, then peace in our homes and with our families. This book represents our contribution to the betterment of the human family. The next step is yours. Will you take it?