



Friends and family vocabulary and cultural differences

Warmer

Choose one person you know (well or not so well) and describe them and your interactions with them until someone guesses who you are talking about. Things you could mention:

- When you last met them, what you talked about, and what you did
- How often you meet and what you usually do together
- How well you get on/ got on
- How long you have known each other
- What you usually talk about
- How important that person is to you
- If they are someone you turn to in a crisis/ for a shoulder to cry on or not
- Things in common and differences
- Appearance and personality

Suggestions for people to talk about

An older sibling	A younger sibling
A half brother or sister	A stepmother or stepfather
A cousin	A niece or nephew
A classmate	A colleague (= workmate)
An acquaintance	A friend
Your best friend	An old friend
A good/ close friend	A school friend
A grandparent or great grandparent	One of your in-laws
Your spouse/ partner	A boyfriend or girlfriend
A male friend or female friend	An ex
Your direct boss/ line manager	A boss/ line manager/ superior
Someone in your department/ section/ team	A godparent
An aunt or uncle	A child or grandchild
A babysitter	A private tutor
Your fiancé/ fiancée	Housemate/ Flatmate/ Roommate
(Next door) neighbour	Pen pal
A crush	A fling
Your lover/ mistress	A distant relation
Someone who entered the company at the same time as you	
Someone who graduated from the same school, university or course as you	
A drinking partner	

Ask about any words above which you don't understand, are not sure of the differences between, etc.

Vocabulary questions:

What's the difference between each of these pairs of words and expressions?

- A girlfriend and a female friend
- A boyfriend/ girlfriend and a lover
- A school friend and a classmate
- A friend and an acquaintance
- A direct boss and a boss

Cultural differences discussion

- Do all of the words above directly translate into your language? Are those words and expressions often used? Are the concepts exactly the same as in English?
- Are any of those expressions used more in your own language than in English? Is that because the concept is more important?
- Are there any relationship words in your language which don't translate directly into English?
- What other cultural differences can you think of in the concepts of friends and family?

Suggestions:

Status Leaving home Gender roles and mixing of the sexes
 Attitudes towards ancestors and distant relatives Manners at home
 Titles and ways of addressing people What friendship means
 Family gatherings Dating and marriage

Do men and women in your country have different attitudes to friends and family? Do you think that might be the same in other countries?

How is friendship changing in your country? What are the main reasons for those changes, do you think?

Cultural differences Guess the relationship

Try to guess what family vocabulary should go into each of the gaps below:

- In Saudi Arabia you can't ask how a man's _____ or _____ is.
- Italians say that your first love is usually your _____.
- Most Japanese women nowadays say that they want their first child to be a _____.
- In Japan, you rarely use your older or younger _____s' names, just calling them "Older _____", "Younger _____" etc.
- British comedians traditionally make lots of jokes about their _____.
- In Saudi Arabia, you can't go for a coffee with your girlfriend unless she is with her _____ or _____.
- In most countries you can't marry your _____, but in other places it is quite common.
- French President Mitterrand's _____ lived in the presidential palace and no one seemed to mind. In the UK it would have been a huge scandal.
- Most British people have at least one _____ in Australia.
- In Japan it is usual to use family names with your _____ mates and _____ mates, but in the UK you would only use first names.
- In some countries, if you dump your _____ they can sue you for breaking a promise (which is like breaking a contract). The same thing used to be true in the UK.
- In some parts of America it is normal to go round and see your _____(s) when they move in, usually with a small gift like homemade cookies.
- A stereotypical British family has an _____ who is the black sheep of the family.



Suggested answers

Vocabulary exercise

- A “girlfriend” usually means a romantic relationship, whereas a “female friend” is just a friendship. However, some females use “girlfriend” to mean “female friend”
- The expression “lover” emphasises the physical connection, and so is used to mean that it isn’t a real relationship or when you have a real partner (e.g. husband or wife)
- In common with many of the words with “mate”, “classmate” just means someone that you share a classmate with rather than a real friend.
- An acquaintance is someone who you don’t know very well
- Your direct boss is someone directly above you who you report to. A boss could be anyone above you in the company, e.g. the CEO.

Cultural differences Guess the family member

In Saudi Arabia you can’t ask how a man’s wife or daughter is.

Italians say that your first love is usually your cousin.

Most Japanese women nowadays say that they want their first child to be a daughter/ girl.

In Japan, you rarely use your older or younger siblings’ names, just calling them “Older brother/ sister”, “Younger brother/ sister” etc.

British comedians traditionally make lots of jokes about their mothers-in-law.

In Saudi Arabia, you can’t go for a coffee with your girlfriend unless she is with her brother or father.

In most countries you can’t marry your cousin, but in other places it is quite common.

French President Mitterrand’s mistress lived in the presidential palace and no one seemed to mind. In the UK it would have been a huge scandal.

Most British people have at least one distant relation in Australia.

In Japan it is usual to use family names with your classmates and workmates, but in the UK you would only use first names.

In some countries, if you dump your fiancée they can sue you for breaking a promise (which is like breaking a contract). The same thing used to be true in the UK.

In some parts of America it is normal to go round and see your neighbour(s) when they move in, usually with a small gift like homemade cookies.

A stereotypical British family has an uncle who is the black sheep of the family.