

Multi-Generational Living: How to Live with Family and Not Fight

Almost 50 million people live in a multigenerational home, which means there's bound to be conflict. Here's how to smooth out the most common issues.

By Jennifer Kelly Geddes



Living side by side with your grown child can test even the calmest of souls, but it's a situation that's gaining in popularity—and necessity. Whether it's due to divorce, the recent recession, or a greater emphasis placed on togetherness, today's American homes are more multigenerational than ever. According to a report from the Pew Research Center, **49 million people live in a multigenerational home**, up from 28 million in 1980. "Money is probably the biggest reason for these situations, but they're also the result of the "sandwich generation's" culture—people in their mid 30s and 40s who are raising kids with a parent living in the same home," says April Masini, a relationship expert, author and founder of [AskApril.com](http://www.askapril.com) (<http://www.askapril.com/>).

To make it work, it's important to be upfront right from the start because temperatures tend to run high in close quarters. "Put what you decide in writing and refer to this document as issues arise," suggests Christina Steinorth-Powell, a psychotherapist in Dallas and author of [Cue Cards For Life](http://amzn.to/1jdFjMF) (<http://amzn.to/1jdFjMF>). Need help getting your list started? Here are **5 of the most common hot-button issues** and smart ways keep the peace:

Issue #1: It's the money, honey

Gas, electric, cable, phone—who pays for what can be a bit sticky.

Make it work!

There's not one right way to split the bills, but the most common approach is probably 'rough justice'. "Whoever appears able to pay certain expenses does so while others contribute as best they can," explains Masini. Dividing bills makes sense if everyone has an income, or the

overage could be charged to the member who joins the household. But helping to pay doesn't always mean cash. A grandparent may have more time to wait for a repairman or care for a child home sick from school, just two ways that time is a valuable asset in lieu of money.

Issue #2: The chore war

Meals, yard work, and laundry that never seems to end.

Make it work!

Whether you're an ace in the kitchen or have the greenest thumb around, by the time you're in a multigenerational home, you probably know your strengths. But an enthusiastic 'chef' may whip up meals that few can stomach, so taking turns is a good solution. "Making dinner isn't open-heart surgery—it's not vital that the best cook is always on duty. It's more important to have a happy home, where everyone gets a chance to try what they like," points out Masini.

Issue #3: Quiet!!

Everyone needs some peace now and then, but the din in multi-gen homes can be deafening.

Make it work!

Let common sense be your guide when it comes to TV, computers and music. "Get together and come up with a list of household rules regarding acceptable noise levels and a schedule of quiet times," suggests Steinorth-Powell. And for those who want to stay up later and still listen to loud music or a loud television, the fix is rather simple: headphones. "They've come a long way in terms of quality and are the perfect solution here.

Issue #4: A clean sweep

Clothes all over, dishes in the sink, and an overflowing garbage pail...

Make it work!

Some "clean" issues are a matter of safety—food needs refrigerating before it spoils and toys must be cleared to prevent falls—but others are a matter of esthetics (clutter can seem horrible to some, an affront to a properly kept home). Determine which camps your multi-gen family is in and then discuss ways to satisfy all parties. One idea is to designate a "clean zone" in the main living area. Kids can be tasked with hanging up coats and storing backpacks in their rooms; dishes and garbage duty could rotate weekly so one person isn't always stuck with sticky plates and rank bags.

Issue #5: Manners matter

Common courtesy for one person may not even register for another.

Make it work!

"Believe it or not, many people aren't used to knocking on the door and waiting for a response before entering," says Masini. And then there's the issue of privacy during phone calls or bringing up sore subjects (a recent divorce, a child's behavior). Talk about possible situations so you can clarify expectations and air feelings. And know that solving all the issues definitely takes time. "It could be 6 months to a year before a multigenerational home is settled in—it doesn't happen overnight," reminds Masini.
