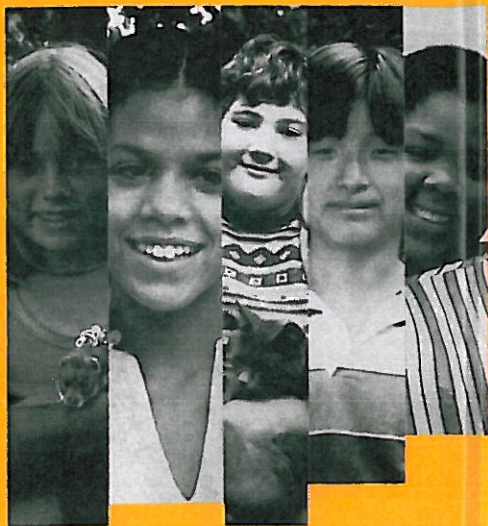


Families

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A Celebration of Diversity, Commitment, and Love

Jenness



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Aylette Jenness Photographs by the author

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To Elaine Heumann Gurian, who started this,
and to Sam Bowles, who sustained it.

and to that battered, joyous, struggling, evolving,
and sustaining institution — the family

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Many thanks are due to:

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My own family, for what I have learned from them: my parents, my brother and niece, my ex-husband and his family, my ex-and-thankfully-forever mother-in-law, my children and stepchildren and their spouses, my partner and his family, and, not least, my dearest friends.

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Introduction

Families — what are they? Your family is the people who take care of you, who care about you. Your family may be the person who adopted you. Your family may be your birth mother or father. Your family may include people who joined you, like stepparents and stepbrothers and stepsisters. Your family may be your grandparents, your aunt or uncle, or your guardian. Some kids are able to ask friends to act as family for them — sometimes temporarily — and this can be a big help.

Families change over time. This can be painful, if you miss someone who's moved out of your life. In other ways, it's fine. At different times in your life, when you will have new needs and interests, you may find new people to call on.

Families are spread out over space. Members may move all over the world. You may be able to write to, or telephone, or visit, relatives who live in different kinds of places. It can be a big network you have, a way of learning about places far from your hometown.

Some people think a family is supposed to be a mom and a dad and their children. This can cause a lot of hurt feelings. In school, you may be asked to make a Mother's Day card; but lots of kids don't live with their mothers. You may be asked to bring your dad to work on the school playground for a day; but lots of kids don't live with their dads. Most kids know

that, really, families are often very different from "Mom 'n' Dad".

And that "very different" can be a nice thing. A family of two can be close and cozy. A big family can mean there are many people to go to for help or for fun. A family that changes over time means there are different people to be with over your life. A family whose members are very different from each other means you can learn a wide variety of things.

What do you think a family is?

Here are some kids' answers to the question.

What makes a family is being loved. And cared for. And it doesn't matter how many people are in a family, it could be from 2-10.

Marriage, children, and many more things make families.

My dog and cat are really parts of my family.

Love can form a family. You don't even have to be related to the other person. You can have a baby or adopt a kid.

What do families do?

Families care for each other. And they encourage each other.

Most families have quarrels.

Family members help each other.

They get you into trouble.

They really like each other.

They provide for each other.

They watch out for one another.

They protect each other.

They only punish each other as much as they deserve. Never more.

Never less. No family is completely perfect. No fights. No arguments. etc. etc. etc.

What do you think the purpose of a family is, anyway?

The purpose of families is to love people.

To have fun with each other.

If you have a brother or sister look after them.

Families are for company.

Families are for looking up to somebody.

The purpose of a family is to bring more people into the world. And to have someone to talk to.

On the following pages, seventeen kids will tell you about their families. How have they answered these questions? And how are they like your family? Different from your family?

Tam

Tam says, "I have a big family. Ari and Chessie aren't adopted, but the rest of us are. We were adopted when we were babies. Kri — she's up on the swing next to me — likes drawing rainbows.

Ari — she's standing next to me in front of Mom — she likes to swim. Tasha's sitting on the ground in front of Ari. She likes horses. Chessie is two — she's in the little swing in front of Dad — she likes to name animals. I like dissecting things and trying out experiments.

"When someone in our family has a birthday, they get to pick out a dinner that they want, and they open presents at the end of the meal. Sometimes we buy the presents, and sometimes we make them. Everyone gets a lot of presents!"

Tam's mother says that from time to time, Tasha, Kri, and Tam have asked the questions that adopted children often ask: "Where did I come from? Who was my mother?" She explains that they were born to another woman, and as they've grown older, she talks about their ethnic backgrounds. But she emphasizes that *she* is their mother, their parent.

"A parent is a person who takes care of you, raises you, looks after you, and loves you," she says.

And that's what she and her husband are for Tasha, Kri, and Tam, just as they are for Ari and Chessie.

