

# GENERATION GAP

## ARTICLE

Many grandparents grew up in an era of angry confrontations between the generations. As they ease into the role of family patriarchs and matriarchs, they may wonder: What happened to the generation gap? Is it gone or just on hiatus? Or it is still present but mostly underground? A generation gap is commonly perceived to refer to differences between generations that cause conflict and complicate communication, creating a "gap." From their position in the family, and with more life experience than younger family members, grandparents are uniquely poised to see that differences between generations can be positive for all those concerned.

## HISTORY

Although there have always been differences between the generations, the drastic differences that the term implies were not much in evidence until the twentieth century. Before that time, society was not very mobile. Young people typically lived near their extended families, worshiped in their childhood churches and often worked on the family farm or in a family business. With the advent of television and movies, young people were exposed to cultural influences alien to their own families and cultures.

## THE GENERATION GAP TODAY

Today, however, although more Americans see generational differences, most do not see them as divisive. That is partly because of the areas of difference. The top areas of disagreement

between young and old, according to the Pew Research Study, are use of technology and taste in music. Grandparents are likely to have observed these differences in their grandchildren who are tweens, teens, and young adults. Slightly behind these areas of difference are listed the following:

- Work ethic
- Moral values
- Respect for others
- Political views
- Attitudes toward different races and groups
- Religious beliefs.

## DIFFERENCES BUT LITTLE DIVISION

If large differences between the generations exist, why don't they spawn conflict? The answer is twofold. First, the two largest areas of

difference—technology and music—are less emotionally charged than political issues. The older generation is likely to be proud of the younger generation's prowess in technology rather than to view it as a problem. As for the musical differences, each generation wants its own style of music, and the older generation generally can relate to that desire. Second, in the other areas of difference, According to the Pew study, all generations regard older Americans as superior in moral values, work ethic and respect for others.

In one area those surveyed did regard the younger generation as superior—intolerance for different races and groups. A different survey by the Pew Research Center identifies "increasing acceptance of gays and lesbians" as a particular area of difference, with almost half of those up to age 49 seeing it as a good thing,

but only 37% of those aged 50 to 64 agreeing and only 21% of those 65+.

## QUESTIONS

1. When do you feel the generation gap the most?
2. Is it possible to overcome a generation gap?
3. At what point in life does the generation gap seem to be the largest?
4. Do you think you can be a better parent than your own parents in future?
5. Do you think it is OK to date or marry someone of a different generation to yourself, either older or younger? How would you feel if your father was a generation older than your mother? Do you know a family where this is the case? What could be some problems with a partnership or marriage of different generations?
6. What do you think are some of the advantages or disadvantages of another generation?
7. When did you first become an adult in your mind?

8. When is an age gap beneficial, and when is it a hindrance?
9. Can you talk to your parents about everything? Do you ever disagree with your parents/grandparents about topics such as values?
10. Is it possible for parents and children to be friends?
11. What influences the styles, values and interests of a generation?
12. Are people from the "older" generation always more wise and correct in their ways of thinking and choices? Why or why not?