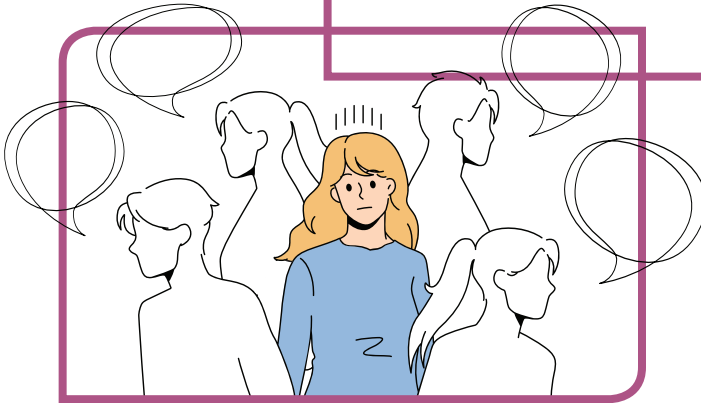




Lately I find that when I sit with our family, adult children, and teenage grandchildren, around the table, the conversation seems to go on around me, without me. I feel almost irrelevant. It's not a very good feeling. I'd be most grateful to hear suggestions on how I should deal with this seemingly new reality.

Many thanks.



Sarah Moses Spero:

I'm so sorry you are feeling like this.

As a parent, one of our greatest pleasures is spending time with children and grandchildren. Just the thought of it brings a smile to our faces.

How nice that you have this opportunity. Just think about how many people would love to be in your shoes.

How many generations are seated around this wonderful table? What time is this taking place? Has patience taken a vacation? Are you hosting or "guesting"?

We have to remember that as much as children are the center of our lives, we are not the center of theirs.

Feeling irrelevant? Is that because you can't give attention, you can't get attention or is it language? And, can we be honest? How is your hearing? If it is compromised, are you wearing your hearing aids?

Maybe we're not being fair to ourselves. As multi-talented as we all are it's becoming too difficult to try and weave relevant conversation into the social experience when you are dealing with different ages. Following the conversations, (forget the different lingo) of different generations all at the same time might require the acrobatic skills of a high-wire trapeze act.

Learn from past experiences. If you can, keep the crowd smaller. Perhaps one family at a time. If you can't, concentrate on one or two people at a time instead of trying to hop from one group to the next. Get your exercise someplace else.

Who said you can't teach an old... Want to stay in touch, outside of these settings, and you don't know how to text? Learn a new skill. The kids will have a great time deciphering your messages...and sharing them with each other!

One of the challenges we sometimes have is the expectations we drag with us to events or celebrations. Let's leave some of those behind so we can enjoy whenever we can!

Sarah Moses Spero is a current resident of Baltimore, Maryland, having recently moved from Cleveland, Ohio. In her previous life, she was an event planner and jack-of-all trades. Her business included invitations, graphic design, typesetting, and calligraphy. What makes her heart sing, however, is being a wife, mother, and grandmother. She also does some writing and likes to hum on the side...

Judy Kaiser:

This is not necessarily an age issue. Nobody likes to feel ignored or marginalized when sitting at the table with their loved ones. However, when a conversation gets animated, those of us who are less “animated” are more likely to be left sitting by the wayside.

To combat this problem, I would suggest a multi-pronged approach. One or more of these strategies may work for you:

Seat yourself in the center of the table instead of at one of the ends. If you are situated right between two of the most active talkers, it will be hard for them to converse without including you.

Hone up on the topics that seem to interest your kids. Perhaps your family senses that you don’t have much to add to the conversation because you don’t know much about the subject matter. Surprise them with a couple of astute observations about whatever topic it is they are discussing.

Have your ears checked for hearing loss. Perhaps it sounds to you like others are mumbling or speaking too softly, and you’ve been asking people to repeat themselves a tad too often. This doesn’t lend itself to easy participation in the fast-paced conversations of our younger generations. If that turns out to be the problem, there are likely many non-invasive solutions available.

Give the younger generations a little time and space to discuss things that matter to them. It’s normal and understandable that people at different life stages have different concerns and interests. You don’t have to be involved in every single table discussion. But if they’ve been talking around you for a while and you’re starting to feel invisible, it’s time to employ the following tactic:

Change the topic. Don’t allow yourself to feel ignored. Wait for a gap in the conversation and then bring up something totally unrelated to the subject at hand. If this is done in a good-natured way, more than likely, your family will get the “hint” and bring you into the conversation.

Judy Kaiser is an expatriate New Yorker who divides her time between Toronto, Jerusalem, and Boca Raton. She taught English literature and creative writing for many years and is the founder and Director of the Myra Vorhand Library in the Agudath Israel Shul in Toronto.

Miriam Liebermann:

I’m glad you brought this up, it’s a fairly common observation. For some, it’s the setting. With everyone talking at once, we’re a bit discombobulated. Multi conversations going on around the table can be unpleasant. Seat yourself at the end of the table and engage with those around you. Work your way around the table and focus on those within your immediate vicinity.

Is there a generation gap that we need to bridge? There is certainly plenty that we have in common with the younger set. It may be helpful to plan beforehand. Is there a particular insight or story you’d like to share? Are there memories from way back that would intrigue them?

We can share Torah thoughts also. Prepare beforehand and bring up a concept that can be discussed further. Think of points that beg discussion. Key questions can be presented.

We can enjoy meaningful time with a family version of “Show and Tell.” Bring along an item of sentimental value to share. Discuss the provenance of said article. And ask them to share with you in turn. Some families like to play games. Is there a particular game that you enjoy? Bonding over games is great fun. I’m into Upwards, a terrific word game. Check it out.

We’ve been focused on bonding with our adult children and grandchildren. However, while we all hope to be here till 120, iy”H, ultimately, our children will spend even more time with one another as they journey on. We should be concerned with strengthening their connections. Perhaps that should be our focus.

A final point — ultimately, as much as we cherish our family members, women need friends. We cannot rely on family members to fill all our emotional needs. We may have to be proactive in seeking out friends. We can join our local *Tehillim* group, attend *shiurim*, or join a gym. Our adult children are busy, caring for their children, and working. They are distracted. They may be living in distant communities. It may be time to recalibrate. It’s time to expand our world by reaching out to new friends, younger and older, and by reconnecting with old friends. This is a new chapter. Embrace it. And remember, iy”H, the best is yet to be!

Miriam Liebermann, MSW, shares her passion for life through her writing, her inspirational talks, her Tzipisa l’Yeshua tambourine workshops and her involvement with JWOW!



Reb. Faigie Horowitz:

The settings make a difference in this discussion of displacement. When we are in our own homes hosting children and grandchildren for *Shabbos*, *Yom Tov*, or family celebrations, our role is that of hostess. We want to create an environment where relationships are developed between the cousins, in-law children, and the other families in attendance. Hence we prepare easy-to-serve foods, use oven-to-table serving dishes, get as much help into the house, and work out as many details as possible in advance. We try to be ready with the tables set, supplies tucked away, and enough reading material for all.

By assigning rooms beforehand, buying a stash of appropriate snacks, and purchasing new toys, games, and books for the occasion, we facilitate the development of pleasant times, memory-making, and *shalom*. As the hostess, our primary role is not that of naturally exchanging ideas nor of sharing experiences and wisdom. We may be tired and overwhelmed and we cannot compete with the excitement of seeing the cousins and the other siblings.

Planning however can add to these gatherings. We can sit next to our spouses near the head of the table and share a *dvar Torah*, details of a *chessed* project we are involved with, or simply propose a good topic to the

participants. Obviously, it must be of interest to everyone. It's not always realistic, however, to expect everyone to engage in the discussion, no matter the subject. There are just too many people around of different ages and interest levels.

Conversations that develop organically will tend to follow the interests of participants. That is a fact of life. Don't take it personally if you are left out. The younger generations have their own interests such as *chinuch*, carpools, and costs.

Having real conversations with the older ones, be they children or grandchildren, is almost impossible when there are many around. That's why *melaveh malkas* for adults, having groups of grandchildren the same age come for *Shabbos*, and occasions out of the home when we are not serving, are much more conducive to conversation.

Being a guest in one family's home is usually much more valuable in terms of communication and relationship building. Without the responsibilities of hosting and with the adult children focused on you and your spouse, with everyone on their best behavior, you can share your opinions, traditions, and memories.

Faigie Horowitz, MS is a columnist, content writer, political advocate, and community activist who serves as the rebbetzin of Agudas Achim in Lawrence, NY

Miriam Hendeles:

Thank you for your important question, which reminds me of a neologism I recently came across: "Grandologist (n): a person who studies their grandchild's interests so they can nurture strong bonds — no matter the distance between."

When our kids and grandkids have discussions that don't involve us, we get a twinge of the "over-the-hill" sentiment, one of being left out of the rink. The feeling will niggle at us: "I'm old, I'm irrelevant..." We can use this discomfort to inspire introspection. Is it that you used to be involved in things they are now busy with, and that makes you feel old? Are you wondering if something is missing in your life?

You wisely ask how to reframe, to turn this into a positive. Relevance changes for each stage. I have moved into a new life stage which I consider a blessing. If we are fortunate to be at our stage, *b"H*, in good health, we are blessed. As grandmothers, we have *nachas* from the younger generation. In general, if adult

children and teenagers are chatting at the table, we can view it as a chance to listen and learn as they *shmooze* among themselves about the minutiae of their lives. Rather than speak about our own experiences (which certainly has a place at times), we can benefit from listening and learning the newest trends in psychology, parenting, recipes, baby clothing, and more.

May our advanced years be accompanied by wisdom. The next time you feel "irrelevant" remember to enjoy the moment! As a grandologist, we get to ask questions and contribute to those topics at the table! Keep your head up high and smile, and know your worth... because every day is a gift and opportunity to learn new things. And that's very relevant!

Miriam Hendeles, M.A., MT-BC is a music therapist for hospice patients. She's the author of "Mazel Tov! It's a Bubby!" and "Best Foot Forward." Miriam advocates for frum women in midlife through the recently launched website of JWOW! where frum midlife women connect, communicate and grow.