

## Point

### **Joint Family Is Not to Be Recommended**

By Bala Prasad

According to the latest U.S. Census data, the number of households with three or more generations grew 38% from 1990 to 2000, vs. 8% for two generations. With the current economic crisis, the pressure to “double up” is likely to remain. But unless there are extenuating circumstances or an emergency situation, living with an extended family presents real problems.

“Moving back to the nest” is hard on the ego of adult children. The stereotype is that adults who live with their parents are losers – a difficult stigma for an adult child to shake. It’s easy to lapse into old patterns: parents dictating rules, adult children reverting to childlike roles. An adult child, living with parents for an extended period of time becomes a child again. Owning nothing, following parental rules. Even if parents insist that the child treat the house as their own, it never feels that way. You must conform to the parent’s schedule, eat at their dinner time and watch their TV programs. Ultimately, the adult child no longer feels like or acts like an adult.

It is even more challenging for spouses. They are left to carve out their own role, without benefit of blood ties and family bonds. It’s difficult to see others gel into a familiar pattern, being left to fend for yourself. Without a parent-child bond, inevitably spouses feel like outsiders. Spouses don’t enjoy seeing their partner revert to childlike roles!

Finally, there are the grandchildren, adored by all, it is second nature to spoil grandchildren. Let them stay up late, watch TV, eat whatever they want. A grandparent’s job is to spoil, not discipline. If mommy says no ice cream, grandpa will let them have it. The grandparent means no harm, it is simply an undeniable fact that the grandparents are softer on children than parents. Who should the child listen to? This causes confusion for the child, and frustration for adults.

There are times when we need support of extended family. Though temporary, it feels so good to have mom’s home cooked meals and dad paying the bills, days stretch into months. Tension mounts, the longer the stay, the greater say the parents feel they have: from food choices to where you go. Gradually the longer you stay, the less control you have over your life. Through hurt feelings and resentment your parents mean well, but you are an adult. It’s hard to give up control of your life. They are quick to criticize. It feels like interference, but they feel you have it coming.

In the end, living with your extended family is stressful and there is no getting around it. Everyone means the best, but what is really best is if you make your stay temporary!

## Counterpoint

### **Joint Family Is the Need of the Hour**

By Musafir

Humans do not have as much control over their environment and destiny as they think. We fall on bad times and become weak, old and helpless. We have interdependence with family, community and society at large. Unfortunately, we are living longer and so have longer span of misery and dependence on others towards the end of our lives. Many of us return to live with our children because of sheer need like unwelcome guests or burdens. Why not live together from the very beginning with good will, love and proper understanding or arrangement?

A joint family system is a good and necessary model for the future. With the worsening economic situation and unstable jobs, many young folks are returning home to live with their parents. As the resources of the world dwindles, we will need to share resources such as energy, water, food and space to live.

I have lived in my own nuclear family all my adult life. I can feel the sense of loss as I am far removed from the hearts and minds of my own kith and kin and vice versa. I feel more stressed as I have to cope with my problems all by myself. The sense of being alone has caused greater psychological problems in today’s society resulting in greater cases of depression, divorce, broken families and suicide

Times have changed, so I am not advocating the old model of joint family where awkwardness, discomfort level and hypocrisy made the members’ lives miserable. In the new structure, we must have a common understanding that we need to respect everyone. Parents having the final word and the autocratic styles of repression giving rise to discontentment must be things of the past.

Members of a family must expect open communication without judgmental or condescending attitude. We must learn from the failure of the past and provide each other space without transgressing on their freedom or meddling in their affairs. We must learn to accept each other’s weaknesses and accept the way they are. Realistic expectations will help us to be more tolerant of weaknesses of one another. We are the units of the family. Family is the unit of the society. Society is the unit of a nation and nations are the units of the globe. Once we learn to live jointly and adhere to the above principles, we will learn to be better citizens and rid the world of many conflicts prevalent today.