

Introducing

## DAWN FRENCH

Our new agony aunt brings her warm wit and wisdom to bear on problems that are troubling you

**Q** I live very close to my mother, who is in her nineties and somewhat frail. My brother lives hundreds of miles away and sees Mum rarely, but he's always phoning me to suggest I should do this, that or the other with Mum. His interfering from afar is unbelievably annoying. I also have my own life to live, which he seems to forget. How can I get him to either come and help more or to butt out?

**A** First of all, it's a bit good that he is at least calling, however irritating; it shows he is connected. I'm also thinking that the frequency of the calls might be a reflection of how helpless and guilty he might be feeling? I know you would have to be feeling extra kind to allow either of the above, but I've decided to regard you as extremely benevolent – saintly, even.

I think you could call him, and say something like, 'Hi, it's me, your gorgeous sis, just wanted to say thanks for all your ideas about Mum. They are really good suggestions for the most part, but you are so far away, and I don't really know how to implement them,

● Try to massively include him. Of course, if that doesn't work, simply wheel your nonagenarian mother to his door and leave her there ●

so I'm wondering if you might come up (down?) and show me what you mean, in person? I'd find that really helpful, and I'm sure Mum would too.

'We can try out your ideas together and Mum will see us working jointly to give her the most excellent care we can. She'd love that. I know we have tough times ahead, and quite honestly, I need my brother right now. We are siblings, in it together, right?'

Emphasise how important he is to both you and your darlin' ma. Try to massively include him. You need him to butt in, not out. Perhaps then he might consider how difficult it all is for you?

Of course, if that doesn't work, simply wheel your nonagenarian mother to his door and leave her there for him to find. I don't mean that you should be cruel, you would of course leave a cover over her in case the weather should become inclement. I'm not a heartless savage.



### HAVE A QUESTION?

You can email [experts@saga.co.uk](mailto:experts@saga.co.uk), putting Dawn in the subject line, or write to Dawn French at the address given on p8.

She can answer questions only on this page.

**Q** I'm nearly ten years younger than my retired husband and I still work full-time. The deal is that he is supposed to be the house husband, but I find myself every weekend cleaning, shopping, doing the laundry etc. He thinks he's cleaned the house if he's run the Hoover round. He just doesn't seem to see what needs doing. What can I do?

**A** If this were me, I would devise a list of ten demands, and invite him to reject five, and promise five. That way, he will believe the five agreed promises were his choice. Win, win. My list would be something along these lines:

- 1 Daily Hoover (upstairs one day, downstairs next)
- 2 Worming the cat
- 3 Light dusting
- 4 Whittling an entire nativity scene for Christmas
- 5 Putting a wash on
- 6 Making chronologically accurate photo albums from every family photo
- 7 Clean windows
- 8 Build a new state-of-the-art outhouse in the garden
- 9 Clean the oven
- 10 Embroider cushion covers for the craft stall at local fête, then nit-comb the grandchildren's hair, then organise all the pencils in order of length, then rod the drains.

His choice. Entirely.

Of course, if that doesn't work, I would dump him and marry a kind-hearted, hard-working woman, who would be less likely to take you for granted, and would probably value the parity in a relationship full of mutual respect. You would likely also benefit in the hair-product department, hugely.

Your choice.



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