



## Vampire Relatives

By Dr. Richard L. Bruno, HD, PhD  
Director, International Centre for Polio Education

Question: You have written, "With the holidays coming and bringing extra stress (that is, relatives) it's a good time to talk about controlling high blood pressure." You always say, "Treat the cause, not the symptom." How do I treat the high blood pressure *caused* by my relatives?

Answer: Dealing with your relatives is lot harder than finding a drug to treat high blood pressure! When PPS rears its ugly head, some relatives stop being nice to you when you stop doing what you've always done for them. I call those folk "Vampire Relatives," people who have become used to your meeting their needs regardless of how you feel, physically or emotionally. Some polio survivors try to make Vampire Relatives understand PPS hoping that understanding will lead to relatives meeting their own needs. But more polio survivors continue to meet relatives' needs and thereby trigger PPS symptoms.

What do you do when Vampire Relatives deny PPS symptoms are real, refuse to listen to your needs and call you lazy, crazy or selfish because you're not meeting *their* needs? There's only one solution for "deaf" Vampire Relatives: Divorce.

There are three types of Relative Divorce:

- **"Silent Divorce."** "Silent" means you don't announce it. You just don't answer Vampire Relatives' phone calls, or you use the answering machine to screen calls and return them when and if you want to. If relatives show up at your door, don't answer it. When relatives ask why you're no longer responding to the bell like Pavlov's dog, you just say, "My doctor told me to rest. I was resting."

There is tremendous power and savings in emotional energy in repeating a brief statement like, "My doctor told me to rest," without having to come up with different answers to Vampires' inevitable questions, like "Why have you become so selfish?" and the ever popular "Why don't you love me anymore?" Sometimes, Vampire Relatives respond to silent divorce and stop making demands of you. More likely, relatives will complain more loudly that you're not meeting their needs. If that happens, there's a second kind of Divorce.

- **"Conditional Divorce."** If relatives refuse to even acknowledge your needs, you can simply say, "Until you understand that I have PPS, I can't talk to or be with you." When they ask "why?" you just repeat that simple statement, "My doctor told me to rest."

Where's the "conditional" part of the divorce? Conditional is the "Until you understand..." You don't allow Vampires back into your life until they understand, acknowledge and meet your needs. For Conditional Divorce to work, you have to be patient. Really patient. Vampire Relatives are used to decades of having their needs met and ignoring yours. A few weeks (or months) of separation may not change your relatives' behavior. During those weeks or months you will likely feel whopping guilt that will push you to end the divorce. After all, guilt is what made you take care of Vampires in the first place.

The only way a divorce can work is by *staring down the guilt* and staying away from your Vampire Relatives, "until." But, if "until" never comes, there's only one other option.

- **"Permanent Divorce."** When Vampire Relatives show that they are never going to acknowledge your needs, you need to cut them off. Whether you tell them or not, Permanent Divorce means you never again answer phone calls, the doorbell, letters or queries sent by other relatives. For your own good you "finalize" the divorce.

I know this sounds really difficult, and it is. But the question is does divorcing relatives work?



I have had a number of patients who divorced a relative, usually their mothers. Their guilt was huge at first. But, eventually, so was the relief of not or meeting others' demands, having to take a dozen phone calls a day, going shopping for others several times a week and cooking every holiday dinner. I have never seen patients so relieved and so proud of themselves as when the guilt burned away and they were free of the Vampire Relatives.

And here's an amazing fact. All but one Vampire Relative eventually acknowledged my patients' needs, although it sometimes took years for relatives to come around. Yes, relatives did backslide and tried to resume their Vampire ways. But a simple, "I divorced you once, I'll divorce you again" reminded them that my patients meant business, and relatives Vampire behavior stopped again.

I can't guarantee that Vampire Relatives will respond to any type of divorce. And I know it's hard to divorce relatives, even if they are Vampires. You may think you can't live without them. But, ultimately, there is only one person you can't live without: **You!**

**Happy Vampire-Free Holidays!**

[The Encyclopedia of Polio and Post-Polio Sequelae](https://www.papolionetwork.org/encyclopedia.html) contains *all* of Dr. Richard Bruno's articles, monographs, commentaries, videos and "Bruno Bytes"

<https://www.papolionetwork.org/encyclopedia.html>

Are you looking for a specific topic? The Encyclopedia Index (By Subject) is available. [HERE](#)