

# Vampire Relatives

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Question: "With the holidays coming and bringing extra stress (re: 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?

Dr. Bruno's Response: 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 educate Vampire Relatives about PPS, hoping that understanding will lead relatives to meet their own needs. But more polio survivors continue to meet relatives' needs and thereby trigger more 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 the divorce. You just don't answer Vampire Relatives' phone calls. Use caller ID to screen the number and let Vampires' calls go to voicemail. Answer your phone when and if you want to. If relatives show up and ring your doorbell, 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 complaints, 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 another kind of Relative 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 and avoid stress."

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 the separation 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 divorce can work is by staring down the guilt and staying away from your Vampire Relatives, "until they understand ." 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.

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So you should rightly ask, "Does divorcing relatives work?" I have had a number of patients who divorced a Vampire Relative, usually their mothers. At first their guilt was almost overwhelming. But, eventually relief overcame the guilt -- relief of not meeting others' demands, not being interrupted by a dozen phone calls each day, no longer going shopping for them several times a week and no longer 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* Holiday . . . and Everyday.

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