



THE RISE OF 'LOW CONTACT' FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

When her mum called her, stress would ring through Marie's body like an alarm going off. So "I stopped answering the phone," she says. This was one of the "boundaries" she discussed carefully with her therapist three years ago when she reached a point of crisis in managing her maternal relationship. So, as well as stopping answering the phone, she decided that she, her husband, and her children would no longer visit her mother, who lives a few hours away.

In the world of family estrangement, the approach Marie is describing is known as "low contact" or LC. TikTok is awash with users proclaiming the benefits of no contact. Katherine Cavallo, a family and couples psychotherapist with more than 25 years of clinical experience, often works with clients experiencing family estrangement. She says low or no contact has become more prevalent in recent years, which some figures back up. She says that younger generations often do not share the same sense of duty towards their family as older ones do – which is not always a negative thing. But culturally, she describes "a growing trend towards emotional growth associated with individualism and a lack of tolerance of relationships that might interfere with that".

It is useful to remember that, not so long ago, lower contact between families was considered normal. Dr Lucy Blake, senior lecturer in psychology at the University of the West of England, explains that the mainstream view within family therapy from the 1960s onwards was that "a typical family relationship is one where people have infrequent contact". It is largely due to technological advances that people so often get in touch. Before mobile phones, the idea of calling a parent once a fortnight was seen as perfectly normal, and in some ways was healthier, she says.

While for some, low contact relationships can work, others experience pushback from relatives. Like families themselves, low contact is complicated. For Marie, in a difficult patch of her own low contact, her overriding advice is clear: build up your support. "I would definitely advise having therapy while you're doing it," she says. "And try to find people around you who matter, relationships you can pour your all into." As you attempt to reduce one bond, others become paramount.

Adapted from an article by Emily Retter, The Guardian, 5-02-2026

Part I. Reading Comprehension

1. Are the following statements true (T) or false (F)? Identify the part of the text that supports your answer by copying the exact passage on the answer sheet. (2 points: 0.5 point each)

a. Marie decided to stop answering her mother's phone calls without any professional guidance. **F**, *"This was one of the 'boundaries' she discussed carefully with her therapist three years ago when she reached a point of crisis in managing her maternal relationship."*

b. TikTok users encourage families to have contact when needed. **F**, *"TikTok is awash with users proclaiming the benefits of no contact."*

c. According to Katherine Cavallo, younger generations tend to feel less obligation towards their families than older generations. **T**, *"She says that younger generations often do not share the same sense of duty towards their family as older ones do – which is not always a negative thing."*

d. Dr Lucy Blake believes that before mobile phones, calling a parent every week was normal. **F**, *"Before mobile phones, the idea of calling a parent once a fortnight was seen as perfectly normal, and in some ways was healthier, she says."*

2. Taking into account the information in the text, answer the following questions using your own words. Copying directly from the text is not allowed. (2.5 points: 1.25 point each)

a. Why does Katherine Cavallo think that low or no contact with family members has become more common in recent years?

Possible answer: According to Katherine Cavallo, this situation is becoming more frequent because younger people see family relationships in a different way. They do not always feel the same responsibility towards relatives as older generations. She also links this change to emotional growth and to rejecting relationships that may damage their well-being.

Information from the text: "She says low or no contact has become more prevalent in recent years, which some figures back up. She says that younger generations often do not share the same sense of duty towards their family as older ones do – which is not always a negative thing. But culturally, she describes 'a growing trend towards emotional growth associated with individualism and a lack of tolerance of relationships that might interfere with that.'" (Paragraph 2)

b. According to the text, how has modern technology changed the way families stay in contact?

Possible answer: Modern technology has made family contact much more frequent. Because of phones and other technological advances, people can communicate very easily and often. In the past,

less contact was considered normal, but now families may expect more regular communication .

Information from the text: "It is largely due to technological advances that people so often get in touch. Before mobile phones, the idea of calling a parent once a fortnight was seen as perfectly normal." (Paragraph 3)

3. Taking into account the information in the text, answer the following questions using your own words. Copying directly from the text is not allowed. (2.5 points: 1.25 point each)

boundaries prevalent duty lack advice paramount

- a. obligation → **duty**
- b. essential → **paramount**
- c. limits → **boundaries**
- d. absence → **lack**

4. Choose a, b, c or d, in each question below. Only one choice is correct. (1.5 points: 0.5 point each)

1. Marie decided to reduce contact with her mother mainly because...

a. she wanted to follow a social trend. **✗** This option is wrong because the text does not say Marie wanted to follow a social trend. TikTok and social trends are mentioned later, but Marie's decision is presented as personal and connected to her mental well-being.

b. her relationship with her mother caused her anxiety and stress. Evidence from the text: "When her mum called her, stress would ring through Marie's body like an alarm going off." and "a point of crisis in managing her maternal relationship." This shows that the relationship caused serious stress and anxiety. (Paragraph 1)

c. her mother refused to visit her family. **✗** This option is wrong because the text does not say her mother refused to visit the family. In fact, it says Marie decided that she, her husband and her children "would no longer visit her mother."

d. her therapist asked her to move away. **✗** This option is wrong because the therapist did not ask her to move away. The text only says she discussed boundaries with her therapist.

2. According to the text, technology has influenced family relationships by...

a. making families emotionally closer in all cases. **✗** This option is wrong because the text does not say technology makes families emotionally closer in all cases. In fact, the article discusses complicated family relationships and low contact.

b. reducing the importance of face-to-face contact. **✗** This option is wrong because the text does

not focus on face-to-face contact becoming less important. It talks about how often people get in touch, not specifically about replacing in-person visits.

c. increasing the frequency of communication. Evidence from the text: "It is largely due to technological advances that people so often get in touch." (Paragraph 3) This means technology has made communication more frequent.

d. eliminating the need for personal visits completely. ✗ This option is wrong because the text does not say personal visits are no longer necessary.

3. What advice does Marie give to people who choose low contact with their families?

a. To completely cut ties with all relatives. ✗ This option is wrong because Marie does not advise people to cut ties with all relatives. The text is about low contact, and her advice is about support, not total isolation.

b. To focus only on their personal independence. ✗ This option is wrong because she does not say people should focus only on personal independence. She actually says other relationships become very important.

c. To seek support through therapy and meaningful relationships. Evidence from the text: "I would definitely advise having therapy while you're doing it, she says. And try to find people around you who matter, relationships you can pour your all into." So Marie recommends therapy and building strong supportive relationships. (Paragraph 4)

d. To avoid talking about their decision with anyone. ✗ This option is wrong because she does not say people should avoid talking about their decision. She recommends therapy, which involves talking about the situation with professional support.

Part II. Composition (130 to 150 words approximately) (3 points)

5. Choose one of these two topics and write a composition about it.

MODEL ESSAY OPTION A

A. Do you think reducing contact with family members can be a healthy decision?

Note: We have **bolded** the connectors, linkers, and useful phrases in the essay.

Short introduction, 2- 3 lines	Nowadays, family relationships can be very complicated. In my opinion, reducing contact with a family member can sometimes be a healthy decision, especially if that relationship causes stress, sadness or anxiety.
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Main body
divided into 2
or máx. 3
paragraphs

Firstly, family is important, **but** this does not mean that people have to accept every situation. If a relative is always critical, controlling or disrespectful, spending less time with them can help a person protect their mental health. **For example**, some young people may feel calmer when they set limits **and** have more personal space.

However, I **do not think** reducing contact should be the first solution. It is usually better to talk, explain the problem **and** ask for help if necessary. Sometimes relationships can improve with communication.

Short
conclusion, 2-3
lines

In conclusion, reducing contact can be healthy in some cases, **but** it should be done carefully and with respect.

(138 words)

💡 Let's have a look in more detail why this model essay is a good example of writing.

🔗 Prompt breakdown:

1. Clear introduction to the topic of family relationships.
2. Clear opinion about reducing contact with family members.
3. Explanation of when reducing contact can be healthy.
4. Reference to mental health and emotional well-being.
5. Specific examples of negative family behaviour.
6. Mention of setting limits and personal space.
7. Balanced idea: reducing contact should not always be the first solution.
8. Clear conclusion connected to the topic.

PROMPT POINT	COVERED?	EVIDENCE FROM COMPOSITION
Clear introduction to the topic of family relationships.	✓	"Nowadays, family relationships can be very complicated."

Clear opinion about reducing contact with family members.	✓	"reducing contact with a family member can sometimes be a healthy decision"
Explanation of when reducing contact can be healthy.	✓	"especially if that relationship causes stress, sadness or anxiety"
Reference to mental health and emotional well-being.	✓	"protect their mental health"
Specific examples of negative family behaviour.	✓	"If a relative is always critical, controlling or disrespectful"
Mention of setting limits and personal space.	✓	"set limits and have more personal space"
Balanced idea: it should not always be the first solution.	✓	"I do not think reducing contact should be the first solution"
Clear conclusion connected to the topic.	✓	"reducing contact can be healthy in some cases, but it should be done carefully and with respect"

MODEL ESSAY OPTION B

B. How have new technologies changed the way families communicate?

Note: We have **bolded** the connectors, linkers, and useful phrases in the essay.

Short introduction, 2- 3 lines	Nowadays, new technologies have completely changed family communication. In my opinion, this change has been mostly positive because it helps families stay closer, even when they cannot meet in person.
Main body divided into 2 or máx. 3 paragraphs	Firstly, technology makes communication much faster and easier. Families can send messages, make video calls and share photos at any moment. For example, if a young person studies in another city, they can still talk to their parents every day and feel supported. Secondly, new technologies can help families be more present in each other's lives. Even small messages can show interest and affection. This is especially important when relatives live far away or have busy routines.
Short conclusion, 2-3 lines	In conclusion, although face-to-face conversations are still necessary, I believe technology has improved family communication. It allows families to stay connected in a simple and immediate way. (134 words)

💡 Let's have a look in more detail why this model essay is a good example of writing.

🔗 **Prompt breakdown:**

1. Clear introduction to the topic of technology and family communication.
2. Clear opinion about the impact of new technologies.
3. Main idea: technology has mostly improved family communication.
4. Mention of faster and easier communication.
5. Specific examples of digital communication.
6. Reference to families who live far away or have busy routines.
7. Mention of emotional connection and affection.
8. Clear opinion-style conclusion connected to the topic.



PROMPT POINT	COVERED?	EVIDENCE FROM COMPOSITION
Clear introduction to the topic of technology and family communication.	✓	"Nowadays, new technologies have completely changed family communication."
Clear opinion about the impact of new technologies.	✓	"this change has been mostly positive"
Main idea: technology has improved family communication.	✓	"it helps families stay closer"
Mention of faster and easier communication.	✓	"technology makes communication much faster and easier"
Specific examples of digital communication.	✓	"send messages, make video calls and share photos"
Reference to distance or busy routines.	✓	"when relatives live far away or have busy routines"
Mention of emotional connection and affection.	✓	"Even small messages can show interest and affection"
Clear opinion-style conclusion connected to the topic.	✓	"I believe technology has improved family communication"

