

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

HOW TO INTRODUCE NEW, GROWN FAMILY MEMBERS

August 2016

The Situation:

Two months ago my oldest brother announced to my mom, dad and I that he is a dad. His son is 25 with two kids of his own, and his daughter is 16. He has taken a DNA test and they are his children. We've met them, welcomed them with open arms, shared photos and stories, and invited them to our next reunion so they can meet the rest of the family. They want to attend, however my brother doesn't want them to. He says he's embarrassed to introduce two grown children at the reunion. We don't want to create friction, but want the newfound family members to meet and become part of our entire family. They've been a secret too long. How can we pull this off without offending my brother?

The Fix:



Doug and Myrna Harris

First, decide who your brother is most likely to listen to. Is it his mom? Dad? Sister? Brother? Cousin? Old friend? Whoever it is, get them to talk to him one on one. The person should try to convince him of the positives of inclusion for his children--especially since they want to attend and other family would like to meet their blood relatives. No need for Ancestry.com or Henry Louis Gates; you've already found what others pay good money for. Long lost relatives have been identified and a connection can be established. It must also be pointed out that the children might interpret their father not wanting them to attend as his being ashamed of them. If there is any shame, it belongs to him, not his children.

The Fix:



**Sylvia
Ford-George**

I met my grandfather the day my father passed; my sisters and I visited and spoke with him constantly thereafter. Neither my Dad or Grandfather ever spoke of their family. There were very few of their family members at my Dad's funeral, but many more at my Grandfather's. My sisters and I were curious to see so many *"family members"* paying respects, but it was awkward not knowing who they were or how we were related. They were curious about us too, and our being awkward soon turned into feeling uncomfortable as folks were pointing and whispering and asking *"who are they"*, *"where did they come from"*, *"who's their momma"*, *"I didn't know he had grandchildren"*, etc. Of all the folks there, only one person made an effort to greet us without asking inappropriate questions.

Based on my experience, I suggest you let your brother know that he has been given an opportunity to *"right a wrong"*, to get ahead of all the talk and the gossip that might make him uncomfortable. The situation may be embarrassing, but his grown children are not, and he should do everything he can to make sure they are comfortable; and to make meeting the family-at-large a bit easier. If your family has a newsletter or website, put together an article titled, *"Meet the Newest Family Members"* to introduce them, tell a little about what they do, their hobbies, milestones they've had, etc.; and don't forget their pictures. (And if you don't have a newsletter or website, now would be a great time to start one.) That way when the reunion rolls around the shock factor will have worn off and family members can talk *with them* rather than *about them*. Your brother can be as brief as he feels comfortable with regarding how he found out he was a father, and he should prepare a response for folks who want to be too nose-y (like *"that's for another day"*, *"we can talk about that later"*, *"not in front of the kids"*). In the end, meeting the family at the reunion will be far better than at a funeral.
