

Of aunts and uncles

Sibling bonds are ones that last a lifetime. While your childhood is spent fighting over the remote and having the guarantee that you will always have someone to tutor you right before exams, soon enough the older sibling moves into more adult roles such as higher education abroad, dating, getting a job and so on.



You watch your older brother take care of finances and dance at your sister's wedding. But if you thought their growing up only involves them, you could not be more wrong!

"It didn't fully hit me that my sister now has her own family until the baby came. As an uncle, I was expected to be responsible and look after my niece. As the previous baby of the house, the transition was indeed eye-opening. Soon enough, I was changing diapers! That was three years ago; she'll soon start going to school and my sister has a full time job, so guess who'll be dropping her off and picking her up?" Waseq, now 18, quizzed rhetorically.

This is the oft-ignored bond, the one that we share with our uncles and aunts. While they do not exactly have any legal obligations like parents, they often love, adore, and sacrifice for their nieces and nephews just the same. Your earliest childhood memory revolves around them, whether it is playing football with the fun uncle or spending the summer vacation at your aunt's place. In fact, plenty of them are involved in their nieces and nephews lives on a regular basis.

"When I was a kid, I couldn't really say auntie or khalamoni, so I started calling my aunts 'Anna', and the nickname stuck! They're always calling to check up on me on every single thing about my life — when I get home, whether I've eaten and what not. It's like having two extra parent



figures in your life," Aisha, a university student, explained.

As soon as one steps into the role, the change is evident. Their camera roll gets filled with cute baby pictures of the little gems and they are happy to show you and 'aww' for the 100th time on how adorably their niece or nephew holds their pinky. Why? Because they are just as excited as the new parents!

Whether it is finding the perfect tiffin box for their beloved's first day at school or keeping them company at a party full of only adults, their roles get only bigger as the child grows.

"The thing about being an aunt is that you need to balance fun and responsibilities. You can't be as strict as their mother with things, but that doesn't mean you'll give your 5-year old nephew ice-cream when he already has a cold!" Janita, a working woman, said, while talking about her older brother's son.

"I'm still working on perfecting the balance though. Kids of different age need different kinds of things. My brother also has a teenage daughter, and with her, it's more about giving advice on friends, boys, school and teaching her basic makeup tricks," she continues.

The bridge, however, goes both ways.

Even for the nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles are special. Whether it is the occasional pampering with games that you really wanted and your parents said no to, or just someone to teach you the family recipes, almost everyone has a favourite aunt or uncle that they are particularly close to. Love, however, is shown differently in all families. Often times, factors such as geographical limitations or busy schedules can get in the way. While heart-to-heart conversations aren't always possible, frequent phone calls and casual Skype conversations are enough to keep the relationship going.

Resilience is key to this relationship, and a great aunt or uncle needs to be quite adaptive to be able to step up to the challenge. There are those who respect and look up to their aunts and uncles, but are rather inexpressive about it, while others are more frank and finds a confidant in them. Whatever your role is as one, don't hold back. If you see your niece or nephew struggling with things, be a good influence and offer advice. And in case of serious matters, do tell their parents. Being a responsible and fun aunt or uncle is hard work, but it sure is worth the effort!

By Adiba Mahbub Proma
Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed



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