

B2-C1 English Worksheet

Personal Questions and Social Etiquette: Age, Money and Privacy

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Article

An etiquette column published on 6 October revived a familiar dilemma: is it rude to ask an adult's age? Its answer pointed towards the social stigma attached to growing older. But age is only one example of how an apparently harmless question can cross the line. Social conventions differ, and a request for personal details may come across as curiosity in one setting and an intrusive demand in another. The same enquiry can put someone on the spot when it carries an unspoken assumption about success, appearance or life choices.

Questions about salary illustrate the tension. Greater transparency might expose unfair pay, yet an employee may be reluctant to disclose confidential figures to a colleague. Family conversations create different pressures: relatives may bring up marriage or children with genuine affection, unaware that the subject is painful. A candid response can clear the air, but not everyone wants to open up. Some people prefer to brush off the enquiry with a joke; others draw the line more explicitly. Neither reaction necessarily means the person is being dishonest.

Online life complicates matters further. The right to decide what to share and what to keep to yourself matters even when information is easy to find. At work, a friendly conversation can become awkward if a manager starts to pry into health, relationships or family plans. Equally, avoiding every sensitive subject could leave relationships superficial. The challenge is not to ban personal questions but to judge whether they are appropriate, pay attention to context and think twice before asking. Respectful curiosity leaves room for a refusal, without treating someone's boundaries as a personal insult.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

No.	Statement	T / F
1	The etiquette column links discomfort about age to social attitudes towards ageing.	
2	The writer claims personal questions are interpreted identically in all cultures.	
3	A question can carry assumptions even when the speaker considers it harmless.	
4	The article recognises that openness about pay may expose unfair treatment.	
5	Relatives always realise when their questions about children may cause distress.	
6	The writer treats a refusal to discuss something as evidence of dishonesty.	
7	Easy access to personal information does not remove someone's right to privacy.	
8	The conclusion recommends banning questions about private matters.	

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to their definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. cross the line	A. avoid addressing something seriously
2. put someone on the spot	B. set a firm limit on behaviour
3. bring up	C. make someone feel pressured to answer
4. brush off	D. not tell others something personal
5. open up	E. consider carefully before acting
6. keep to yourself	F. give a particular impression
7. pry into	G. go beyond acceptable behaviour
8. draw the line	H. share private feelings honestly
9. come across as	I. introduce a conversation topic
10. think twice	J. intrude into another person's private life

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. intrusive	A. reveal
2. conventions	B. shallow
3. reluctant	C. uncomfortable
4. disclose	D. invasive
5. candid	E. sincere
6. superficial	F. unwilling
7. appropriate	G. limits
8. awkward	H. customs
9. genuine	I. suitable
10. boundaries	J. frank

Use the New Language

Choose 5 words or phrases from the worksheet and write your own sentences.

No.	Your sentence
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Discussion Questions

Student A	Student B
1. Are there personal questions you dislike, even from people you know well?	1. Who determines whether an enquiry is intrusive: culture, context or the individual?
2. Would you feel comfortable disclosing your salary to a colleague?	2. Would greater salary transparency reduce inequality or cause more conflict?
3. Have you ever decided not to ask a question because it might put someone on the spot?	3. Can excessive politeness prevent necessary but uncomfortable conversations?
4. Which topics are easier to discuss with friends than with relatives?	4. Why might questions about marriage or children come across as social pressure?
5. How do you respond when someone crosses a personal boundary?	5. Is it acceptable to give an evasive answer when someone pries into your life?
6. What information do you share online but prefer to keep to yourself in person?	6. Has social media changed what people consider private, or simply what they disclose?
7. Which personal topics do you avoid bringing up at work?	7. Where should employers draw the line between friendliness and intrusion?
8. How have ideas about what is rude changed during your lifetime?	8. Which social conventions around privacy might disappear over the next generation?

Answer Key

Exercise	Answers
True/False	1=T, 2=F, 3=T, 4=T, 5=F, 6=F, 7=T, 8=F
Phrase Match	1=G, 2=C, 3=I, 4=A, 5=H, 6=D, 7=J, 8=B, 9=F, 10=E
Synonym Match	1=D, 2=H, 3=F, 4=A, 5=J, 6=B, 7=I, 8=C, 9=E, 10=G

Example Sentences With the Phrases

No.	Example sentence
1	A personal question can cross the line if it ignores someone's boundaries.
2	Unexpected questions about income can put someone on the spot.
3	My relatives sometimes bring up relationships at family gatherings.
4	It can be tempting to brush off an awkward question with a joke.
5	Some people open up more readily when they feel respected.
6	You are entitled to choose what you keep to yourself.
7	Managers should not pry into employees' private lives.
8	I draw the line at discussing my salary with strangers.
9	A blunt question can come across as judgemental.
10	I try to think twice before asking about somebody's health.