

What family means to me is a combination of family I've grown up with and family that I've found over the years. I've been lucky to have been raised by two parents who got divorced early but remained amicable my entire life so I've always had the family structure of a mom and dad. However, in addition to them, I've been lucky enough to have my life filled with multiple sets of grandparents, cousins, as well as step parents and step siblings. I'd also include far too many pets over the years that have taken the place of my siblings due to being an only child; lizards, chinchillas, hamsters and my usual cats and dogs. To me, family is more of a massive grouping of older and younger family members all coming together to make things better. A shoulder to cry on or just lean on or just to visit every weekend for a brunch filled with maybe too much booze and stories of the old days. I'd also argue that found family has become increasingly more important as I've grown older. Since I don't live with family in close proximity, having friends and partners nearby means that they've taken almost center stage when family isn't available. They don't entirely replace the gap of a traditional parent dynamic, but they are teachers, motivators and supportive like a traditional family structure. Overall family to me is a combination of older and younger members, human, furry or scaley, related either by blood or mutual appreciation who look out for you when things get rough. They're protectors if you need it, a good laugh when you're sad, advice when you're lost and sometimes just the people who help you pack up and move all your belongings when you can't afford a moving van.