

MARRIAGE RULES

Who could marry who

In England the list of forbidden marriages was drawn up by the Church of England in 1560 and remained unchanged until the 20th century. Most of the rules apply to close blood relatives but as you will see also apply to step relatives. As the first list is complicated I have given a second chart which is simplified.

	A MAN MAY NOT MARRY HIS	A WOMAN MAY NOT MARRY HER
1	Grandmother	Grandfather
2	Grandfather's Wife	Grandmother's Husband
3	Wife's Grandmother	Husband's Grandfather
4	Father's Sister	Father's Brother
5	Mother's Sister	Mother's Brother
6	Father's Brother's Wife	Father's Sister's Husband
7	Mother's Brother's Wife	Mother's Sister's Husband
8	Wife's Father's Sister	Husband's Father's Brother
9	Wife's Mother's Sister	Husband's Mother's Brother
10	Mother	Father
11	Stepmother	Stepfather
12	Wife's Mother's	Husband's Father
13	Daughter	Son
14	Wife's Daughter	Husband's Son
15	Son's Wife	Daughter's Husband
16	Sister	Brother
17	Wife's Sister	Husband's Brother
18	Brother's Wife	Sister's Husband
19	Son's Daughter (granddaughter)	Son's Son (grandson)
20	Daughter's Daughter (granddaughter)	Daughter's Son (grandson)
21	Son's Son's Wife	Son's Daughter's Husband
22	Daughter's Son's Wife	Daughter's Daughter's Husband
23	Wife's Son's Daughter	Husband's Son's Son
24	Wife's Daughter's Daughter	Husband's Daughter's Son
25	Brother's Daughter	Brother's Son
26	Sister's Daughter	Sister's Son
27	Brother's Son's Wife	Brother's Daughter's Husband
28	Sister's Son's Wife	Sister's Daughter's Husband
29	Wife's Brother's Daughter	Husband's Brother's Son
30	Wife's Sister's Daughter	Husband's Sister's Son

Simplified Version of above List

1	Grandmother	Grandfather
2	Step grandmother	Step grandfather
3	Grandmother-in-law	Grandfather-in-law
4,5	Aunt	Uncle
6,7,8,9	Aunt-in-law	Uncle-in-law
10	Mother	Father
11	Stepmother	Stepfather
12	Mother-in-law	Father-in-law
13	Daughter	Son
14	Stepdaughter	Stepson

15	Daughter-in-law	Son-in-law
16	Sister	Brother
17,18	Sister-in-law	Brother-in-law
19,20	Granddaughter	Grandson
21,22	Granddaughter-in-law	Grandson-in-law
23,24	Stepgranddaughter	Stepgrandson
25,26	Niece	Nephew
27,28,29,30	Neice-in-law	Neice-in-law

These rules were mainly imposed to prevent close blood relatives marrying but you will see that Cousins are not mentioned and half siblings are not mentioned.

However, it is believed that the inclusion of half siblings is implicit in the general terms 'brother' and 'sister'.

The full set of in-laws and step relatives are included to match the equivalent blood relatives of the same name except; stepsister; stepbrother; step-aunt; step-uncle; step-neice and step-nephew.

The first changes to this list were made in the 1907 Marriage Act which removed No. 17 from the forbidden list provided the first spouse in each case was deceased.

The 1921 Marriage Act removed No. 18 again provided brother or sister in each case was deceased.

The 1931 Marriage Act removed 6, 7, 8 and 9, 27, 28, 29 and 30 provided the relevant Uncle, Aunt, Niece and Nephew were dead.

The 1949 Marriage Act confirmed the previous three Acts and specifically included "half blood" relatives.

The prohibitions in this Act were based on

1. Consanguinity – blood relationship including half blood (half blood means having on parent in common, for example, a half-brother)
2. Affinity – relationship by marriage

The prohibited degrees apply to a wide range of family relationships and include marital and non-marital offspring. An adopted child is within the prohibited degrees in relation to its natural family and adoptive parents. However, it would appear an adopted child can marry the child of their adoptive parents.

You can marry your deceased spouse's sister or brother. This also applies if your marriage ends due to divorce. Before it was only after death. There is no legal restriction on the marriage of first cousins.

List of Forbidden Marriages 1949 version
A man may not marry A woman may not marry her

1	Mother	Father
2	Daughter	Son
3	Father's Mother	Father's Father
4	Mother's mother	Mother's Father
5	Son's Daughter	Son's Son
6	Daughter's Daughter	Daughter's son
7	Sister	Brother
8	Father's Daughter	Father's Son
9	Mother's Daughter	Mother's Son

10	Wife's Mother	Husband's Father
11	Wife's Daughter	Husband's Son
12	Father's Wife	Mother's Husband
13	Son's Wife	Daughter's Husband
14	Father's Father's Wife	Father's Mother's Husband
15	Mother's Father's Wife	Mother's Mother's Husband
16	Wife's Father's Mother	Husband's Father's Father
17	Wife's Mother's Mother	Husband's Mother's father
18	Wife's Sons's Daughter	Husband's Son's Son
19	Wife's Daughter's Daughter	Husband's Daughter's Son
20	Son's Son's Wife	Sons' Daughter's Husband
21	Daughter's Son's Wife	Daughter's Daughter's Husband
22	Father's Sister	Father's Brother
23	Mother's Sister	Mother's Brother
24	Brother's Daughter	Brother's Son
25	Sister's Daughter	Sister's Son

Simplified list 1949 version

A man may not marry his

A woman may not marry her

1	Mother	Father
2	Daughter	Son
3,4	Grandmother	Grandfather
5,6	Granddaughter	Grandson
7	Sister	Brother
8,9	Half Sister	Half Brother
10	Mother-in-law	Father-in-law
11	Stepdaughter	Stepson
12	Stepmother	Stepmother
13	Daughter-in-law	Son-in-law
14,15	Step-grandmother	Step-grandfather
16,17	Grandmother-in-law	Grandfather-in-law
18,19	Step-granddaughter	Step-grandson
20,21	Granddaughter-in-law	Grandson-in-law
22,23	Aunt and half Aunt	Uncle and Half Uncle
24,25	Neice and half Neice	Nephew and half Nephew