

Talking about your family and loved ones

French A1 (beginner) · Lesson

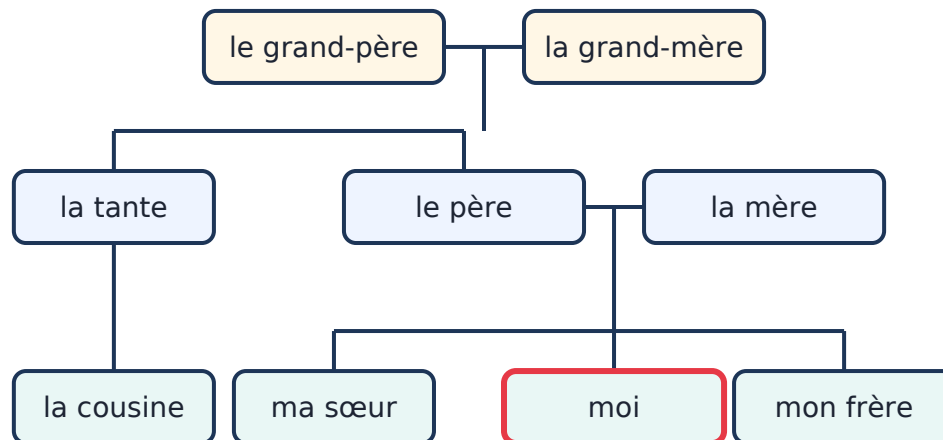
Quick answer: To talk about family in French, learn the relatives (la mère, le frère), the status words (marié, célibataire) and the possessives mon, ma, mes, son, sa, ses. A possessive agrees with the noun owned, never with the owner, so ma sœur works for a man or a woman.

Level: French A1 (CEFR beginner) · **Standards:** CEFR A1, Spoken production

Which words name the people in a French family?

Picture a first coffee break at a new job in Nantes: a colleague asks about your weekend, and family words come up right away. Learn each noun with its article, because the gender never changes.

French	English
le père / la mère	father / mother
le frère / la sœur	brother / sister
le grand-père / la grand-mère	grandfather / grandmother
l'oncle (m.) / la tante	uncle / aunt
le cousin / la cousine	cousin (male / female)
le mari / la femme	husband / wife
le fils / la fille	son / daughter
les parents, les enfants	parents, children



A family tree seen from the center box: moi.

Note that la fille means both daughter and girl, and la femme means both wife and woman. Les parents are the mother and father together. For the wider circle of relatives, say la famille.

How do you say that you are married, single or divorced?

Put the status word after Je suis. A woman adds an -e to marié and pacsé, and veuf becomes veuve.

French	English
Je suis célibataire.	I am single.
Je suis marié / mariée.	I am married (man / woman).
Je suis pacsé / pacsée.	I am in a civil partnership.
Je suis divorcé / divorcée.	I am divorced.
Je suis veuf / veuve.	I am widowed.

To mention children, use avoir: J'ai deux enfants. — I have two children. In a negative sentence, un, une and des all become de: Je n'ai pas d'enfants. — I have no children.

SITUATION FAMILIALE

☐ célibataire
☒ marié(e)
☐ pacsé(e)
 Nom du conjoint : Diop

☐ divorcé(e)
☐ veuf / veuve
Nombre d'enfants : 2

A French form: ticking one box tells the administration your status.

How do possessive adjectives work?

Rule

A possessive adjective agrees in gender and number with the noun that follows it, not with the owner.

English	Masc. sing.	Fem. sing.	Plural
my	mon	ma	mes
your (tu)	ton	ta	tes

English	Masc. sing.	Fem. sing.	Plural
his / her	son	sa	ses
our	notre	notre	nos
your (vous)	votre	votre	vos
their	leur	leur	leurs

Examples

- mon frère, ma sœur, mes cousins — my brother, my sister, my cousins
- Voici notre fille Awa. — This is our daughter Awa.
- Leurs enfants habitent à Liège. — Their children live in Liège.
- mon amie, ton école — a feminine noun starting with a vowel sound takes the masculine form

Watch out

English *his* or *her* depends on the owner. French *son*, *sa* and *ses* depend on the noun: Karim présente sa sœur. and Inès présente son frère. Alone, *sa mère* can mean his mother or her mother, and the context decides.

How do you describe a relative?

Use *s'appeler* for the name, *avoir* for the age and *être* for looks and character: Mon oncle s'appelle Moussa. Il a 52 ans. Il est grand et très drôle. — My uncle's name is Moussa. He is 52. He is tall and very funny. Adjectives agree with the person described.

Masculine	Feminine	English
grand	grande	tall
petit	petite	short
brun	brune	dark-haired
blond	blonde	fair-haired
sympa	sympa	nice (plural sympas)
drôle, timide	drôle, timide	funny, shy

Zoé's tip

Before choosing *mon*, *ma* or *mes*, ask which noun comes next. Then say the pair as one block, *ma sœur*, *mon frère*, until it sounds like a single word.

Culture note

In 1999 France created the PACS, a civil partnership open to couples of any gender, so forms list pacsé(e) beside marié(e). Also, belle-mère means both mother-in-law and stepmother.

Key points to remember

- Family nouns have a fixed gender: le frère, la sœur, l'oncle, la tante.
- Status words take -e for a woman: mariée, pacsée, divorcée; veuf becomes veuve.
- Possessives agree with the noun: mon père, ma mère, mes parents.
- Before a vowel sound, a feminine noun takes mon, ton, son: mon amie.
- After a negative, des enfants becomes pas d'enfants.

Talking About Your Family and Loved Ones: frequently asked questions

Why can sa mère mean both his mother and her mother?

French possessives agree with the noun that follows, not with the owner. Sa is feminine because mère is feminine. Only the context tells you whether the owner is a man or a woman.

When do you use mon with a feminine noun?

Use mon, ton or son before a feminine singular noun that begins with a vowel sound, such as mon amie or ton école. This avoids the clash of two vowels in ma amie.

How do you say that you are an only child?

A man says Je suis fils unique and a woman says Je suis fille unique. To give the number of siblings, say J'ai deux frères et une sœur.

Does femme mean wife or woman?

Both. Ma femme means my wife, while une femme is a woman. The possessive tells you which meaning is intended.

How do you answer a family question on a French form?

Look for Situation familiale and tick one box: célibataire, marié(e), pacsé(e), divorcé(e) or veuf / veuve. Then write the number of children.