

OPERATION GRANNY FILES

The Hard Conversation Kit

A verification checklist, three outreach templates, and a privacy worksheet for unexpected DNA results

Field Guide & Quick-Reference

Mission 35: The Surprise in the Spit Kit — When DNA Tells You Something the Family Didn't

Clearance Level: Biscuit-Tin Operative

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QUICK-GRAB SUMMARY

An unexpected DNA result deserves three things before anything else happens: verification, not assumption; a gentle approach, not a confrontation; and a private decision about who else needs to know, made on purpose rather than by momentum. This kit gives you the checklist, the message templates, and the worksheet to do all three carefully. Nothing here needs to be finished today.

Section 1 — Verification Checklist

Before you conclude anything — before you tell anyone anything — work through this list in order. A single match is a question, not an answer. These six steps turn a strong feeling into an actual finding.

- **Confirm the shared centimorgan total.** Pull the exact number from your testing company's match page and run it through a relationship-probability tool (such as DNA Painter's Shared cM Tool) rather than estimating from memory. The same total can map to more than one plausible relationship — see the full spread, not just the likeliest guess.
- **Find a second, corroborating match.** One match pointing somewhere is a lead. Two independent matches on the same line, agreeing with each other, is much closer to evidence. Don't skip this step even when the first match feels conclusive.
- **Rule out endogamy or pedigree collapse.** If the family's ancestral community was small, isolated, or historically intermarried, shared DNA can run well past what a standard relationship chart predicts. This alone can explain a surprising number.
- **Check the documentary record.** Birth records, marriage records, and census enumeration either stay silent where you'd expect a record, or they actively contradict what the DNA suggests. Those are two different findings, and they point toward two different next steps — note which one you're looking at.
- **Sit with a tentative conclusion for a few days.** Verification isn't only about data; it's about giving your own reasoning time to settle before it becomes a decision. A conclusion spoken aloud to a family cannot be fully taken back.
- **Name one trusted person to sanity-check your reasoning.** This doesn't need to be a family member — a genealogy friend, a professional researcher, or a support-group contact works well. Choose someone who will ask you good questions, not someone who will just agree with you.

GRANNY PRO TIP

Endogamy is the most commonly overlooked explanation in this whole process. Before you assume a match means what it seems to mean, ask: is this an ancestral community where cousins have been marrying cousins for generations? If yes, run the number through an endogamy-adjusted calculator before you trust it at face value.

Section 2 — Three Outreach Message Templates

If your verification points toward reaching out to a match, the wording matters. Each template below is built for a different disclosure level. Read the "why this wording" note under each one — the reasoning matters more than the script itself, because your actual situation may call for adjusting the words while keeping the principle.

Level 1 — Curious, Low-Stakes

Use when: a new cousin-level match with no reason to think the news is unwelcome.

Hi [Name], I noticed we're a DNA match on [testing site] — it looks like we share [X] cM, which usually means we're [estimated relationship]. I'm working on my family tree and would love to compare notes if you're open to it. No pressure at all if now isn't a good time — just wanted to say hello to a new cousin!

Why this wording: Ordinary, warm, and low-urgency. It reads exactly like the thousands of routine match messages sent every day, because for this disclosure level, that's exactly what it is.

Level 2 — Meaningful But Not Destabilizing

Use when: a closer-than-expected relationship the recipient may or may not already suspect — for example, a previously unknown half-sibling.

Hi [Name], I hope this message finds you well. I recently took a DNA test and our results show we share a significant amount of DNA — enough that we appear to be [relationship, e.g., half-siblings]. I want to be upfront that I'm still working out what this means on my end too. I'd welcome the chance to talk if and when you're comfortable, but there's absolutely no obligation to respond, and no hard feelings if this isn't something you want to pursue right now.

Why this wording: States the connection plainly without dramatizing it, names the sender's own uncertainty so the recipient isn't asked to carry more clarity than the sender has, and puts the timeline entirely in the recipient's hands.

Level 3 — High-Stakes, Likely Unknown to Recipient

Use when: reaching out to someone who may be an unaware biological parent, donor, or sibling with no prior knowledge of your existence.

Hi [Name], I want to start by saying that this message concerns a DNA match that may be unexpected or sensitive, so please only continue reading when you're in a good place to do so. Our DNA results suggest a close biological relationship that I understand may come as a surprise. I'm reaching out with no expectations — I'd be glad to talk, to go through a third party or search angel if that would feel easier, or to simply leave this message here for you to consider on your own time. If you'd rather not respond, or would prefer I not reach out again, I will respect that completely and won't follow up

further.

Why this wording: Leads with a content note so the recipient can choose the moment they read it, offers an intermediary option to lower the pressure of direct contact, and closes with an explicit, honored off-ramp — the sentence that does the most work in the whole message.

BONUS INSIGHT

Genetic genealogist Diahan Southard's widely cited guidance frames a good first message as one that "opens a door, not kicks one down." Every template above is built around that single image — identification and invitation, never the full reveal delivered all at once.

Section 3 — Privacy Decision Worksheet

Answer these questions before you share a discovery any further than the person you already told (if you told anyone). Write your answers in the space provided, or simply think them through slowly.

Question	Your Notes
Who else, if anyone, needs to know this right now — and why?	
Whose consent would be needed before this goes into a shared or public family tree?	
Is there a living person whose story this discovery touches who has not agreed to being included?	
What is the smallest circle this information could stay in for now?	
If I'm not sure, who is a neutral, trustworthy person I can ask before I decide?	

A discovery is yours to process. It is not automatically yours to share.

GRANNY SAYS

"An unexpected result is a fact waiting to be understood, not a verdict waiting to be delivered. Verify slowly, reach out gently, and give yourself exactly as much time as you need."

Notes

Use this space for personal notes and discoveries.
