# What is a 'nepo baby', and what do celebrities have to say about being labelled one?

2022 has been dubbed the year of the nepo baby, with the family connections of celebrities laid bare and Gen Z discovering anew how often nepotism paves the path to success. Here's all you need to know about the biggest buzzword of the year.

Nepotism's place in Hollywood is so cemented it should probably have its own gold star on the Walk of Fame.

While celebrities like to claim it's hard work - not family connections - that bought their entry to the A-list, this year's signature fascination with nepo babies has illuminated the threads that make up the web of the entertainment industry's stars and successes.

Here's a rundown of what's behind the nepo baby trend - and what the nepo babies themselves have to say about it.

What does "nepo baby" mean?

Nepo baby is a catchier way to say the successful child of a celebrity - someone who rode to fame on the coattails of their talented parent, often making a name for themselves in the same or an adjacent industry.

"Nepo" is short for nepotism, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as giving unfair advantages to your own family if you are in a position of power, especially by giving them jobs.

And baby, defined as an unborn or newly born human being, can actually refer to somebody at any point of life when it's attached to the word "nepo". Very straightforward.

Where did the term come from?

The explosion of interest in nepo babies started with a tweet in February from a Canadian named Meriem Derradji about the cast of TV series [**Euphoria**](https://news.sky.com/story/zendaya-says-new-season-of-euphoria-could-be-triggering-and-difficult-to-watch-for-some-people-12512918).

She wrote: "Wait I just found out that the actress that plays Lexie is a nepotism baby omg her mom is Leslie Mann and her dad is a movie director lol."

The "movie director" in question is Judd Apatow, the filmmaker behind movies including The 40-Year-Old Virgin, Knocked Up, Funny People and This Is 40 - and the internet was shocked Gen Z was familiar with his daughter Maude Apatow and not him.

So Gen Z discovered lots of Hollywood stars often have famous parents - then what?

A lot of responses to Derradji's tweet - along with the ones mocking her for not knowing Judd Apatow's back catalogue - derided her for being surprised to learn Hollywood is a town built on connections.

The fascination with celebrities' children and the career paths they take is not new, but with the advent of a new term came a new generation's curiosity. TikTok became the platform where nepo babies were exposed - [**Zoë Kravitz**](https://news.sky.com/topic/zoe-kravitz-8879), Maya Hawke, [**Dakota Johnson**](https://news.sky.com/topic/dakota-johnson-8706).

Why the fuss now?

In its last edition before Christmas, New York magazine published a cover story dubbing 2022 the year of the nepo baby, bringing together a forensic deepdive into how the term evolved over 2022 and a detailed flow-chart of Hollywood’s familial connections - reigniting interest in one of the buzzwords of the year.

Who are all the nepo babies?

Who isn't a nepo baby could be a better question in Hollywood's upper echelons.

"Platinum grade" nepo babies include [**Miley Cyrus**](https://news.sky.com/topic/miley-cyrus-7856), child of country singer Billy Ray Cyrus; Kate Hudson, daughter of actors Goldie Hawn and Bill Hudson; and Dakota Johnson, whose parents Melanie Griffith and Don Johnson were also actors.

Then there are the nepo babies whose stars now shine brighter than their parents: George Clooney, Drew Barrymore, Gwyneth Paltrow, Mia Farrow.

There are also extended universes of nepo babies, where every branch is famous - the Chaplin family (Charlie, grandfather to Game of Thrones actress Oona Chaplin, son of playwright Eugene O'Neill), the Kardashian-Jenners, the Coppola family of filmmakers, actors and musicians.

Industry babies occupy another rung of the nepo ladder. These are the children of directors, producers and voice actors, whose parents couldn't offer fame but did open the door via connections, exposure and cultural capital. Billie Eilish (daughter of a voice actor), Maggie and Jake Gyllenhall (children of directors) and Phoebe Bridgers (daughter of a set builder) all fall in this camp.

What do nepo babies have to say about it?

Nepo babies have been less than thrilled at the suggestion anything but hard work got them where they are today.

Lily-Rose Depp - daughter of Johnny Depp and Vanessa Paradis - told Elle it's the internet who cares who your family is, not casting directors.

"Maybe you get your foot in the door, but you still just have your foot in the door," she said. "There’s a lot of work that comes after that."

Her comments didn't go down well with Italian model Vittoria Ceretti, who called out a certain "nepo baby" on Instagram, saying: "I can't stand listening to you compare yourself to me … I know it's not your fault, but please, appreciate and know the place you came from."

Maya Hawke, the daughter of actors Ethan Hawke and Uma Thurman, didn't go as far as denying the privilege that comes with her parentage but said the "chances will not be infinite". "If you do a bad job, the chances will stop. That's my ethos."

In a recent interview with The Independent, Kate Hudson brushed off "the nepotism thing", saying "I don’t really care".

"I look at my kids and we're a storytelling family. It's definitely in our blood. People can call it whatever they want, but it's not going to change it."

She said nepotism was more common in modelling and business than acting.

"Sometimes I've been in business meetings where I'm like, 'wait, whose child is this? Like, this person knows nothing!'

"I don't care where you come from, or what your relationship to the business is - if you work hard and you kill it, it doesn't matter."

**They** became a talking point on social media, [Twitter](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter) especially, after Vulture and New York Magazine articles highlighted a number of entertainers today with influential parents who may have helped their career.

This list included [Lily-Rose Depp](https://www.newsweek.com/jack-nicholson-daughter-tessa-gourin-lily-rose-depp-nepotism-comments-1760289), daughter of [Johnny Depp](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/johnny-depp) and Vanessa Paradis, and [Jack Quaid](https://www.newsweek.com/why-fans-defending-jack-quaid-nepo-baby-talk-1768428), son of Dennis Quaid and Meg Ryan.

The debate has heightened social media users' interest in who in entertainment has benefitted from having famous relatives. Newsweek has looked at some of them.

### George Clooney

There's no denying that George Clooney is very much a star in his own right, but the Oscar winner boasts a celebrity connection in the form of his late aunt Rosemary Clooney, who starred alongside Bing Crosby in White Christmas.

However, George Clooney did not grow up in the bright lights of Hollywood. He was raised in Kentucky by his parents, city councilor Nina and news anchor Nick.

Once it was established that he wanted to pursue a career in entertainment, he moved to Los Angeles, where he learned some lessons from his aunt.

In a 2021 interview with [*The Guardian*](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/dec/03/i-was-offered-35m-for-one-days-work-george-clooney-on-paydays-politics-and-parenting), the actor explained how he avoided bringing scandals and embarrassment to his family after rising to fame.

"I was 33, 34 when ER took off, so I was older, right?" he said. "Also, Rosemary was a huge singer—huge! And then rock 'n' roll came and she lost her career. And she didn't get it, because at 21 she thought she was the real deal and by 26 it was gone. So, I'm lucky enough to understand how little the fame side has to do with me."

### Gwyneth Paltrow

After enjoying success on the big screen, which included an Oscar-winning turn in Shakespeare in Love, Gwyneth Paltrow launched her lifestyle and wellness brand Goop.

But if she had never embarked on a career as an actress, fame would still have been a part of the family story, as her mother, Blythe Danner, also enjoyed success in film and on Broadway.

After taking time out to raise her children with late TV and film director Bruce Paltrow, Danner has returned to acting, notably scooping Emmy nominations for her efforts in the classic sitcom Will & Grace.

In July, Gwyneth Paltrow drew criticism for saying [children of celebrities "have to work twice as hard](https://www.newsweek.com/gwyneth-paltrow-backlash-celebrity-kids-work-twice-hard-1728685) and be twice as good" during an appearance on [Hailey Bieber](https://www.newsweek.com/hailey-bieber-selena-gomez-photo-picture-academy-museum-gala-justin-1752270)'s vlog Who's in My Bathroom?

### Robert Downey Jr.

Long before Robert Downey Jr. won global recognition for his role as Iron Man, he made a bid for fame as part of the new, younger cast hired to appear on long-running show Saturday Night Live back in 1985.

This hiring is of particular note because the actor's uncle is none other than legendary SNL writer Jim Downey.

However, this connection didn't exactly make things plain sailing for Downey Jr.—he was dropped from the show the following year amid poor ratings and criticism of the new cast's comedic talents.

Rolling Stone named Downey Jr. the worst cast member in the show's entire run, per Vulture. As we all now know, the actor would eventually get the last laugh with hugely successful career that at one point saw him become Hollywood's highest-paid actor.

### Angelina Jolie

Angelina Jolie's Hollywood connections were made use of at the start of her acting career when she made her screen debut opposite her father, Jon Voight, in the 1982 movie Lookin' to Get Out.

Since then, she has gone on to become one of Hollywood's highest-paid screen stars, thanks to roles in such blockbusters as Maleficent and Mr. & Mrs. Smith, where she met her now ex-husband Brad Pitt.

### Drew Barrymore

The granddaughter of John Barrymore and daughter of John Drew Barrymore, Drew Barrymore comes from one of Hollywood's biggest dynasties.

Her connections could go far toward explaining why she started her acting career at just 11 months old.

As a toddler, she auditioned for a dog food commercial. She also gained early recognition for her role in the classic 1982 movie E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial.

She later found success in an array of films, including Charlie's Angels, and is currently hosting her own talk show.

### Kate Hudson

Kate Hudson is the [daughter of Goldie Hawn](https://www.newsweek.com/25-celebrities-famous-parents-1568960) and her first husband, Bill Hudson.

Speaking to The Edit in 2017, Kate Hudson said that her parents told her she could not rely on them when she chose to go into acting.

"[My parents] said, OK, but we're not going to [financially] support you," the Almost Famous actress said. "They made it clear that we grew up privileged, and that it was theirs, not ours."

### Dakota Johnson

The 50 Shades of Grey star is the daughter of two Hollywood heavyweights, Don Johnson and Melanie Griffith. She is also the granddaughter of Tippi Hedren, star of Alfred Hitchcock's The Birds.

On growing up in a famous family, Dakota told The Edit in 2016: "I understood that my family was famous. I saw the way it felt from the inside, and that put me off ever feeling like I was capable of gawking at someone because they were famous."