

Ancestry DNA – No Tree – No Response

[VIDEO LINK](#)

Overview

What do you do when you find a DNA Match that looks promising? In other words, this DNA cousin might help you solve a mystery in your family tree. But... They do not have a tree, or they do not respond to your messages. Instead of trying to understand a dizzying amount of DNA cousins in your Ancestry account, let us get smart about how we do this.

I recommend you read this entire handout and watch the video before starting this process, so you understand the journey.

These are not steps but options below.

No Response

First of all, let us set aside the lack of response to your messages. While it would be great if they would respond, it is not the end of the world. There are things we can do. One is to understand why they might not be responding. In my opinion, 90% of the time, they never got your message because they turned off notifications. So, if they happened to sign on and notice the little flag in their message icon, then they would never know you wrote to them. The other possibility is they may have died, or they just do not want to communication (which is rare). Most of the time, they did not get your message.

No Tree

Even without a tree there are so many things we can do. Hang in there... let us work through this process.

Here are 7 options or ideas to figure out the relationship of a DNA cousin when there is no tree and no response to your messages.

Note About Ancestry & Pro Tools

All steps here can be done without the add-on Pro Tools. Only the last step suggests the added benefit of Pro Tools and how it can help you.

Idea One - Importance

Why do you need to know how this cousin relates? Is it really important? The strategy behind using DNA Cousin Matches is because you are **researching a specific branch**. Let us call this the **Focus Area** of the tree. There is no need to blindly contact or spend time researching cousin matches without a goal.



The Goal

The goal should be some part of your family tree that you are actively researching. Remember that DNA is just another tool. Like record hints, DNA might be the only clue you have, but you might have traditional genealogy that can assist in your research.

The Power of DNA Matches

The power of using DNA comes from the combination of good DNA research skills as well as good record research skills.

Identifying the Problem

Now that you have decided this is important to you, create a research question. What is it you want to know? Briefly write it down. Writing it down makes it real... a goal to chase.

Identify the surnames in that part of your tree.

Idea Two – Filtering DNA Matches

There are lots of ways to filter your DNA matches and we will use some as we go through this process. The easiest way to start is to filter your DNA matches by the surnames you identified in step one. However, this will only show you DNA Cousin Matches that have trees with those surnames in them. But what if they do not have a tree? We will get to that in Idea Five.

Evaluating Centimorgans (cM)

Before we dig into filtering and finding relevant matches, you need to understand how to evaluate the centimorgans so that you can determine all logical relationships. You can do this in many ways.

A centimorgan (cM) is a unit of measurement that determines the genetic distance between two DNA tests. The larger the number the closer the match.

Ancestry

When viewing the DNA Match List, Ancestry will show you an estimated relationship. On Ancestry you can simply click on the estimated relationship, and it will give you a list of all possible relationships with the percentage of likelihood for each relationship. Scroll down in the pop out screen (as shown) to see all possibilities.

Predicted relationships

We predict that these relationships are most likely. To predict relationships, we factor in self-reported ages and genders of both people.

Half 2nd cousin 1x removed
3rd cousin
2nd cousin 1x removed
Half 3rd cousin

Frequency of relationships

Here's how frequently people who share 100 cM have each relationship.

Frequency	Relationship
34.94%	3rd cousin Half 2nd cousin 1x removed 2nd cousin 2x removed Half 1st cousin 3x removed

Confirm relationship Close

Half 2nd cousin 1x removed or 3rd cousin
Maternal side
100 cM | 1% shared DNA

DNA Painter

While the Ancestry information is good, I think DNAPainter.com and specifically the Shared cM Tool (<https://dnapainter.com/tools/sharedcmv4>) is the better way to view and analyze the possible relationship between two DNA test takers. First it is more visual and secondly it shows all possible relationships. Following the link above will take you to this page shown below.

The Shared cM Project 4.0 tool v4

March 2020
Blaine T. Sedinger
www.thednagEEK.com
CC 4.0 Attribution License
Interactive version v4 by Jenny Peil at DNA Painter
Click here to contribute data to the shared cM project
Last updated: 20th March 2020

Other versions
New: with support to add a second amount
New: with updated probabilities
With update notes
Shared cM 3.0 (2017) version

Enter the total number of cM for your match:

Relationship Range (90th percentile)

How to read this chart

Then any relationships that fit will stand out below

Most distant common ancestors
Assuming no pedigree collapse or endogamy, and that you're related in just one way, the furthest back you might need to go to find common ancestors for a match of 100cM is 4th-Great-Grandparent level or generation 7 on your pedigree chart.
The connection may be closer.

Relationship probabilities (based on stats from The DNA Geek)
Click on any relationship to view a histogram
New: View these relationships in a tree

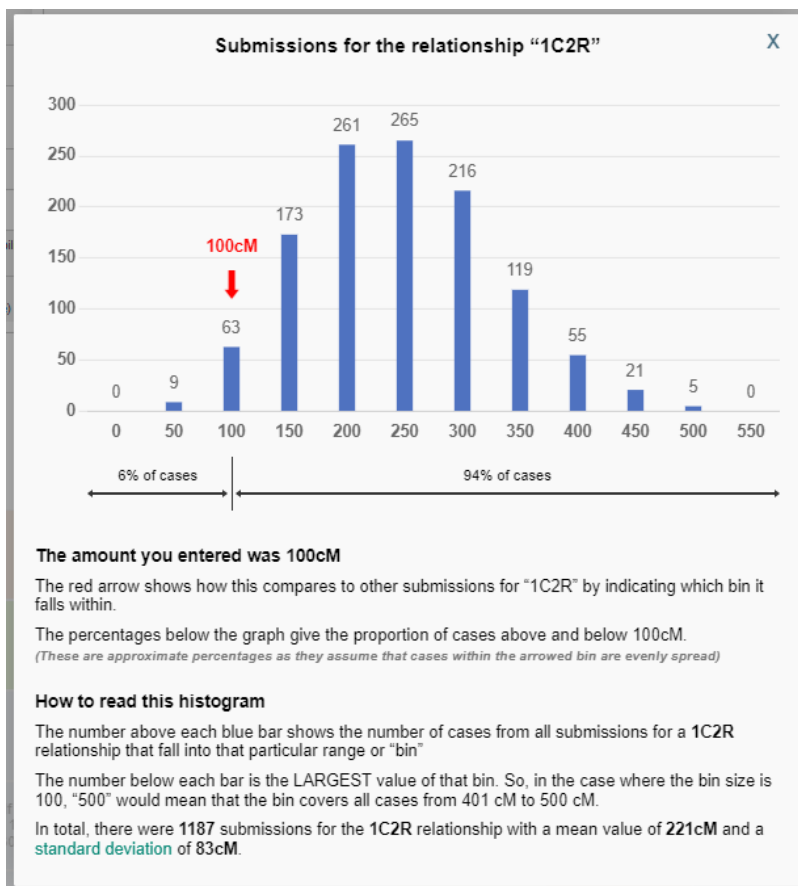
Half GG-Aunt / Uncle 208 103 - 284	Great-Grandparent 887 485 - 1486						Great-Great-Aunt / Uncle 426 186 - 713	1C3R 117 25 - 238	2C3R 51 0 - 154	Other Relationships
Half 1C2R 125 16 - 269	Half Great-Aunt / Uncle 431 184 - 688	Grandparent 1754 984 - 2462				Great-Aunt / Uncle 850 330 - 1467	1C2R 221 33 - 471	2C2R 36 0 - 166	3C2R 18 0 - 65	
Half 2C1R 66 0 - 190	Half 1C1R 224 62 - 469	Half Aunt / Uncle 871 492 - 1315	Parent 3485 2376 - 3720			Aunt / Uncle 1741 1201 - 2282	1C1R 433 102 - 980	2C1R 122 14 - 353	3C1R 48 0 - 126	4C1R 28 0 - 86
Half 3C 48 0 - 168	Half 2C 120 10 - 325	Half 1C 449 156 - 979	Half Sibling 1759 1160 - 2436	Sibling 2613 1613 - 3488	SELF 396 - 1397	1C 866 396 - 1397	2C 229 41 - 592	3C 73 0 - 234	4C 35 0 - 139	5C 25 0 - 117
Half 3C1R 37 0 - 139	Half 2C1R 66 0 - 190	Half 1C1R 224 62 - 469	Half Niece / Nephew 871 492 - 1315	Niece / Nephew 1740 1201 - 2282	Child 3487 2376 - 3720	1C1R 433 102 - 980	2C1R 122 14 - 353	3C1R 48 0 - 126	4C1R 28 0 - 86	5C1R 21 0 - 60
Half 3C2R 27 0 - 78	Half 2C2R 48 0 - 144	Half 1C2R 125 16 - 269	Half Great-Niece / Nephew 431 184 - 688	Great-Niece / Nephew 850 330 - 1467	Grandchild 1754 984 - 2462	1C2R 221 33 - 471	2C2R 36 0 - 166	3C2R 18 0 - 65	4C2R 12 0 - 42	5C2R 13 0 - 42
Half 3C3R 60 0 - 120	Half 2C3R 208 103 - 284	Half 1C3R 66 0 - 190	Half GG-Niece / Nephew 208 103 - 284	Great-Great-Niece / Nephew 420 186 - 713	Great-Grandchild 887 485 - 1486	1C3R 117 25 - 238	2C3R 51 0 - 154	3C3R 27 0 - 98	4C3R 19 0 - 60	5C3R 13 0 - 30

Once there you can type in the cM's in the box at the top and the graph will highlight all possible relationships. Note that on the right side of the graph is full cousins and on the left side are half relationships. We do not want to forget that the cousin match you find might be a half relationship to you or your DNA kit (if you manage other kits).

Not only will DNA Painter show you the percentages but will also (if you scroll down) show you graphically those same possible relationships (shown below).

Half GG-Aunt / Uncle 208 103 - 284	Great-Grandparent 887 485 - 1486						Great-Great-Aunt / Uncle 420 186 - 713	1C3R 117 25 - 238	2C3R 51 0 - 154
Half 1C2R 125 16 - 269	Half Great-Aunt / Uncle 431 184 - 688	Grandparent 1754 984 - 2462				Great-Aunt / Uncle 850 330 - 1467	1C2R 221 33 - 471	2C2R 36 0 - 166	3C2R 18 0 - 65
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Half 3C 48 0 - 168	Half 2C 120 10 - 325	Half 1C 449 156 - 979	Half Sibling 1759 1160 - 2436	Sibling 2613 1613 - 3488	SELF 396 - 1397	1C 866 396 - 1397	2C 229 41 - 592	3C 73 0 - 234	4C 35 0 - 139
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Half 3C3R 60 0 - 120	Half 2C3R 208 103 - 284	Half 1C3R 66 0 - 190	Half GG-Niece / Nephew 208 103 - 284	Great-Great-Niece / Nephew 420 186 - 713	Great-Grandchild 887 485 - 1486	1C3R 117 25 - 238	2C3R 51 0 - 154	3C3R 27 0 - 98	4C3R 19 0 - 60

To take this one step further, you can click on any one of the boxes, from the graph previously shown, (say **1C2R**, means **first cousin, twice removed**) to get a histogram (odds shown in a bell shaped curve), to help you see the odds of where your cM match falls. This might help us as we work through a process of eliminating outliers or less likely relationships. In this case, at 100 cM's I would still consider the relationship of a 1C2R, but not as likely as others.



Idea Three - Communicate

If you have not attempted to reach out to the DNA match, do so. However, do not riddle them with messages or send longwinded life stories. They may block you.

Keep messages simple... like three sentences max! Do not send them your whole family history. Concise will likely get an answer more often than not. People are busy. Make it quick and easy for them to respond.

If you can make an offer of information to help in their pursuit of family history, do so. More than likely you have something you share, but do not share it in the first communication. Just say you are researching this line of the family; you would like to connect and share information.

You can contact them through the Ancestry messaging system. This is much improved from previous years. You can now attach an image to your message if it is tied to an ancestor.

If that does not work, try finding them on social media platforms. I would start with Facebook.

Also, you might try good old fashioned phone directories or other family members for contact information.

Idea Four – Family Trees Online

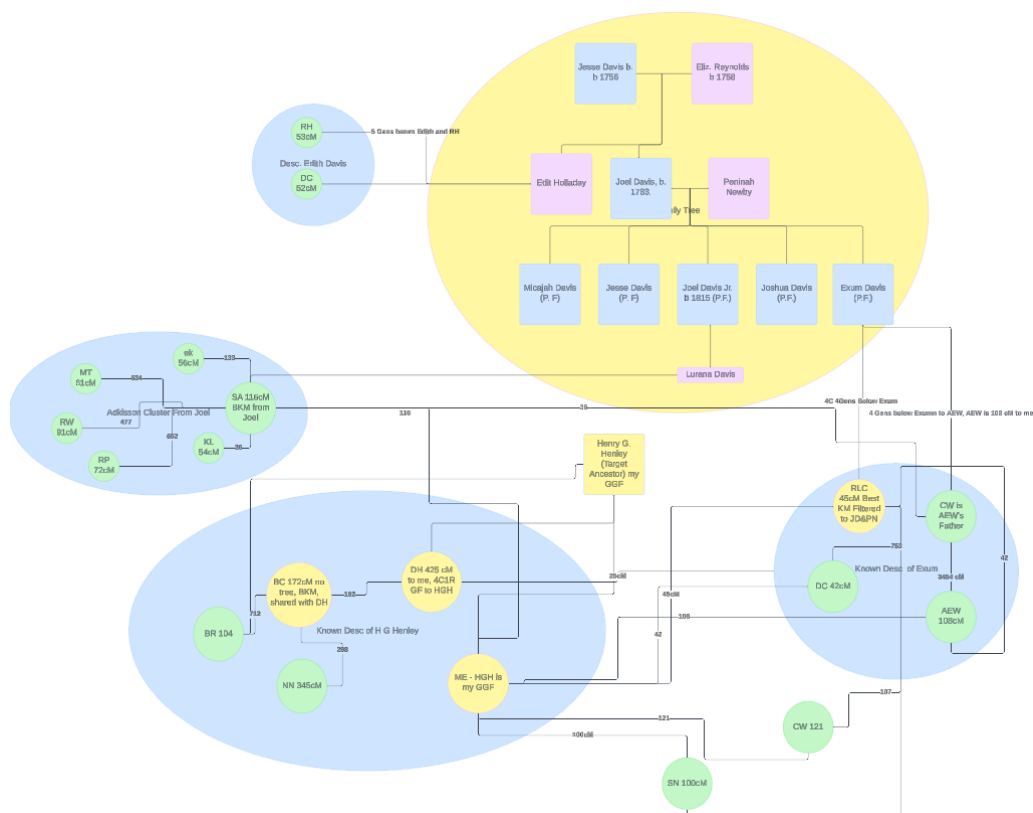
If the DNA cousin has a tree, go for it. Take a look. Sometimes there are only a few people in a tree but that is okay. It is something.

If they do not have a tree... try looking for them on FamilySearch and WikiTree. FamilySearch will be your best chance of finding them. Keep in mind that there are many people with the same name. You will need other family ties or records to help identify the right person.

Start Mapping Out a Temporary Tree for DNA Cousins

Consider drawing out a tree with your DNA cousins as you discover where they might fit. I used to do this in Excel, but now I use Lucid Chart because it is easier and dynamic to move clusters of the tree around if needed.

[Lucid Chart](#) is an online application that is free to get started. It is easy to drag and drop a box, type a name, and connect it to another box. I do not recommend using this for building your entire family tree, but is useful for special projects, like trying to build the tree of a DNA cousin when you are struggling to fit them into your tree. In this example below, is where I was using DNA cousins and mapping them to different clusters of family to figure out how they were related. You can add shapes (yellow circle) and layer them (select shape, then right-click and...) “Send to Back” larger circles to help visualize cluster or family units. They do not need to be as complicated as this one.



Idea Five – Discovery & Research

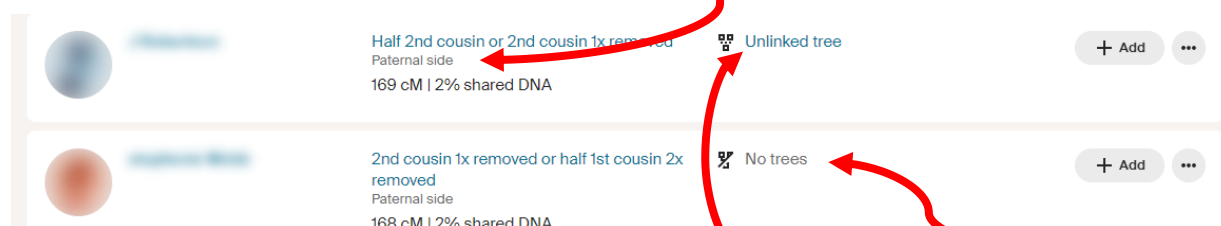
Filtering and Researching

The trick is to research all known cousins around the **Focus Area** of your family tree. You may need to map the DNA Cousins out (as noted in Step Four), and research how they are connected to each other and ultimately to you.

Filter to Parental Sides

Let us start with one match for this exercise. You can then repeat these steps for additional DNA Matches.

Start easy by filtering to the parent level. Ancestry already tells you in the match list which side your DNA Match is on (in most cases).



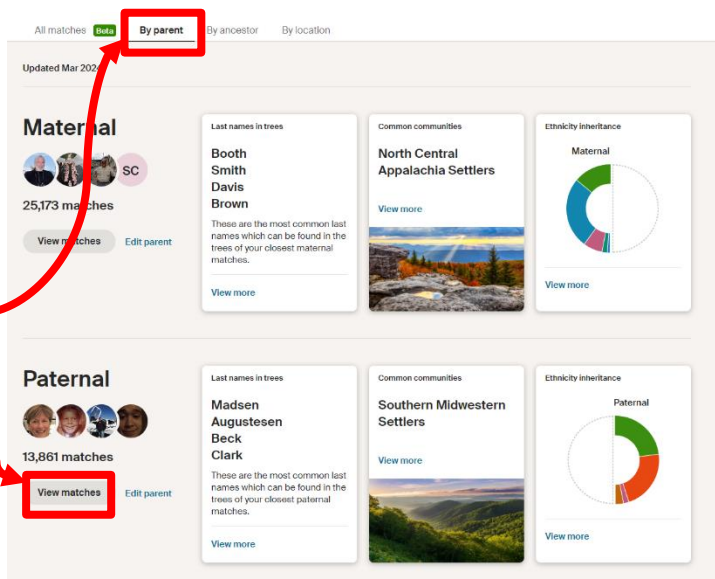
In the screenshot above, we see one of these matches has an **unlinked tree** and the other has **no tree**.

Always, drill into the unlinked tree just in case there is something there. Sometimes people forget to link their DNA kit to their tree.

Let us pretend that it is the DNA match for the person without a tree in which we are interested.

At the **top of the screen**, click on **By Parent** to narrow the list to just the parental side that matches the DNA match. In this case I want to filter to the Paternal side. Click **View Matches**.

For me, clicking on View Matches on the paternal side, narrowed my list to 13,861. Still a lot to manage. We will filter more.



Filter to the Surname

We do not really need the DNA match that did not have a tree because we are going to take a different approach. Instead of worrying about the DNA match without a tree, we can filter this complete list by surname to find DNA matches that **do have trees** with the same **surname**. You would then research the trees of those DNA cousins who do have a surname in the area you are researching.

Idea Six – Use Floating Trees

Use Floating Trees if necessary to add DNA Cousins **that you suspect are close to your target ancestor**, but you do not know how they fit just yet. This strategy lets you research your DNA match within your main tree until you figure out how they are connected.

What is a Floating Tree? It is where you **connect (temporarily) an unknown person** to your family tree and then **disconnect them immediately so that they float by themselves** in your family tree.

The reason you want to do this in your main tree (where your DNA test is linked) is to let the search engine work for you. This allows you to research the DNA Match using the search engine to find records and related member trees.

There are [several episodes on how to create floating trees](#) on [Genealogy TV](#). I recommend this recent episode called [Connecting Floating Trees to Your Main Tree on Ancestry.com](#).



Tip: **Use the MyTreeTags®** feature and create a custom tree tag that says **“Floating.”** This will allow you to search from your tree for all people with the tag **“Floating”** so you can find them again.

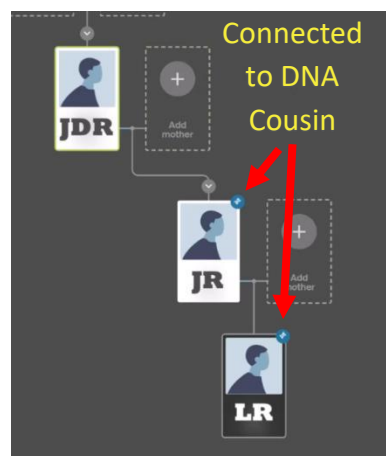
Idea Seven - Thrulines

You can try to use Thrulines, but that is only good if there are member trees who happen to have the same people in them. It will then use those member trees in combination with DNA genetic estimates and cobble together an estimated path from you to your DNA match. Use caution though. If member trees are incorrect, Thrulines has the possibility of being incorrect. Think of it as a hint feature and nothing else.

HUGE BONUS TIP – Researching and Connecting the Mystery Match

This strategy uses several strategies in one. When trying to **identify a Mystery Match**, use a combination of creating a **“Floater”** in your tree (for the DNA Mystery Match)... then **go back to the DNA Match and connect them to the Floater** profile you created in your tree.

Then using the **ProTools Shared Matches** feature [add-on expense], **research the trees of the closest matches to the Mystery Match building a mini-floating-tree for the Floater (within your tree)** and **keep researching records and trees until you find the connection to your main tree (the one that has you in it)**. You are basically **connecting the dots between you and your DNA cousin using member trees and verifying with records along the way**.





I was able to connect the mystery match to my tree.

Wrapping It Up!

There are a lot of strategies we can use to help find our mystery matches. You can even try looking for the same person and image on social media (especially on Facebook).

Ultimately, understanding how to use these strategies in combination with each other can be a huge gamechanger for many.

Keep watching [Genealogy TV](#) for more updates and evolving strategies. Consider [joining](#) the [Genealogy TV Academy](#) for deeper research.

