

Ask an Expert: Holidays with the Family - Tips for Survival

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12/25/2019



It's that time of year when family members travel from far and wide to gather, exchange gifts, eat and enjoy each other's company. The holidays can be a wonderful time filled with traditions, famous family recipes and catching up with each other's lives. However, there can also be concerns about how everyone will get along.

Here are some do's and don'ts to help your family have a better chance for peaceful, enjoyable holidays together.

First, a few "Don'ts"

- Don't talk politics or bring up other "hot topics." Often the urge is to help family members "really understand" your position or understand why their position is irrational and wrong. Too often, this ends with slamming doors and someone crying in the bathroom or car.
- Don't be sarcastic, critical or give subtle jabs. These can cause emotions to escalate quickly, and can cause hurt feelings or resentment.
- Don't try to fix each other's problems. Also, don't discuss the problems of other family members who aren't there. The holidays are not the time to suggest someone get out of a relationship, sell a house, be a better parent or start exercising.
- Don't take things personally. Some family members are more "prickly" than others, so choose not to get defensive. If someone does start fishing for a reaction, don't take the bait.

Here are some "Do's"

- When having meals together, take charge of seating. Set the table for success by separating conflicting personalities. Put the conspirators near you so you can put out fires and guide the conversation.
- Remind yourself why you are doing it. You love your family (right?), and ultimately, people are more important than problems or being right.
- Ask others about their lives. Show interest in what they are doing, and don't talk about yourself excessively.
- Get kids involved, but then turn them loose. Give kids age-appropriate tasks so they are involved. But they probably won't enjoy being trapped for long periods of time and will likely get restless and whiny. It's okay if they run off after helping or trying most of the foods at dinner. Don't turn it into a battle.
- Slow down a bit and take time to be kind. This can prevent hurt and promote more hope and happiness. Express appreciation often. And remember – the holidays won't last forever, so throw kindness around like confetti!

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