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Taming Your In-Laws

print email



Good in-laws have been described as people whose adult children still want to be around them. Indeed, in-laws are a mainstay on the "woe is me" list of many couples. If they aren't offering unwanted advice, they may still bear a grudge that you moved closer to your parents.

Some in-laws feel abandoned, threatened or replaced by their child's spouse. If the spouse is very different from them - another religion, for instance - it can feel like a rejection of their values.

In addressing in-law issues, consider these tips:

- **Your spouse is number one.** Always put your marriage first; your primary loyalty is to your partner. Approach any conflicts as a team. If a parent shows disrespect to your spouse, you need to stand up for your husband or wife.
- **Did I ask you?** Thank in-laws for their advice and concern without getting defensive. Whether you take the advice is up to you. You might hint that you'll ask for input in the future if you are at a loss. Tell your in-laws that you want them involved in your family's life but that they must let you do things your way.
- **Maintain your independence.** Couples under age 35 may have more in-law problems if they haven't worked through their own "separation issues" with parents yet. If you accept a house down-payment, for instance, don't be surprised by visits and interference. Before you accept money or other favors from in-laws, decide if their involvement is worth it.
- **Hot-button subjects.** What you say in the heat of the moment may never be forgotten. Sensitive issues are best broached by your spouse with his or her parents. Your in-laws are less likely to get angry or annoyed with their own child.
- **Criticism and complaints.** Complaining to a spouse about your in-laws may make him or her defensive. Instead, explain what is bothering you and ask your mate to suggest a possible solution. Also, don't have a fight with or criticize your spouse in front of in-laws. It will be perceived as an indirect criticism of them.

When conflict erupts

- **Have a talk.** Find a neutral setting, such as a park or restaurant. Try to settle differences while you are both doing something you enjoy. If this fails, ask someone your in-law respects to discuss the problem with him or her.
- **Set up boundaries and let your in-laws know what they are.** Is financial meddling off limits? Are calls at certain hours not welcome? Be clear about holiday visits, time with grandkids or what matters are private.
- **Enough is enough.** Create a password to use with your spouse for when it is time to end a visit or close a topic of conversation.
- **Be realistic.** Your relationship with in-laws will probably not measure up to the one you have with your parents. If you are a newlywed, remember that acceptance of a new family member rarely happens quickly.
- **Minimize contact** with your in-laws if all else fails. Simply be patient, cordial and kind. Marriage is a package deal after all, and you are loving your spouse by honoring his or her parents.

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Finally, remember that you and your in-laws love the same person. A regular phone call to your in-laws will win points. And your spouse will be thrilled if you can learn to get along.

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