

Reducing the Stress of Family Holiday Gatherings

By Kathy Jo Pollack
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Are you stressed just thinking about family gatherings over the holidays? Are you still angry over comments made last year? As tough as it may seem, it is important to make an appearance and be a part of the family. Apply these simple suggestions to make the season less stressful and more enjoyable.

First, put things in perspective and realize that there is no such thing as a perfect holiday or family or person. Forget the mental pictures of families from those old Hollywood movies. Lower your expectations and relax. In fact, expect the imperfections of your family! That is what makes your family unique. It is only for a few hours and certainly, you can find the strength to deal with anything for a short time.

An important and often forgotten tip is to make sure you are well-rested before the event. Everything seems more stressful when you are tired. Pay attention to your attitude, body language and tone of voice, too. Help to get your family gathering started on a positive note.

Next, be prepared and plan. If you are a guest and find that these events make you anxious, seek out someone with whom you feel comfortable. Know your limits and have an exit strategy.

If you are hosting the gathering, have a variety of activities planned for all ages. Do not solely rely on the television, and downtime can be an opportunity for trouble to start. Consider cookie decorating, board and card games, plus an outside activity if the weather permits. Have a favorite movie playing and an area prepared with photos or recipes for guests to look at and discuss. Invite guests to share their favorite recipe and bring photos, too.

Know what to expect from certain family members. Be prepared with responses to potentially annoying or embarrassing questions. Sometimes a simple “yeah” to the comment that you have gained weight or still not gotten a job is fine. If asked an embarrassing or inappropriate question such as when are you getting married or starting a family, you may want to say, “I don’t know”. The point to remember is that you want to diffuse the comment, not escalate it. Never participate in gossip and politely change the subject when rumors or potentially hurtful chatter starts. Be kind, give compliments and remain diplomatic at all times. Keep conversations just that – conversations, not debates. It is not a competition. If need be, politely excuse yourself from the conversation to talk with Grandpa Joe who is sitting by himself or help Aunt Tess in the kitchen.

Lastly, always remember that you cannot control what others say and do. The only behavior you can control is your own. Don’t let your own behavior spoil the holidays, and keep in mind that although annoying at times, most often our family members are the first to jump in and help when we are in need.

This holiday season, make a sincere effort to keep things in perspective, lower your expectations and be prepared. These simple tips will help you to relax and enjoy the holiday season – imperfections and all!

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Author's Bio

Kathy Jo Pollack is a certified life coach, trainer, and speaker with a focus on finance, relationships, and etiquette. She has worked with thousands of people from all walks of life as the training specialist for Consumer Credit Counseling Service and has taken her passion and expertise to a new level as a coach and writer. She also offers various teleclasses and seminars. Please visit her at: www.kathyjopollack.com. You may also contact her directly at 1-724-224-6619 or mycoach@kathyjopollack.com.