

SURVIVING YOUR RELATIVES DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

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You've seen all the cute holiday movies where everyone gets together and treats everyone with love and respect. ***Your family get-togethers might not have that same Norman Rockwell feel.*** Your mom still pesters you about being single. Your uncle still asks you to pull his finger. And your cousin, the surgeon, still makes fun of your sensible shoes.

The holidays aren't all good times and cheer.

Try these strategies:

1. Realize that the holidays have unreasonable expectations. We've been bombarded with messages that the holidays should be wonderful, and everything should be just right. Few families actually have this experience. The holidays are stressful for most families. Realize that your situation might be much more typical than you think.

- The issues your family has the other 11 months of the year won't just evaporate for the holidays. Relationships have inertia. They don't change easily.

2. Have a game plan. Know which people and situations are likely to upset you. ***Attempt to avoid those situations and people whenever possible.*** Think about how you'll deal with any negative emotions that you experience.

- Call a friend.
- Go for a walk.
- Go out for coffee.

- Listen to music.

3. **Pamper yourself afterwards.** A makeover, massage, short vacation, or a nice purchase is a way of being good to yourself after a tiring holiday season with the family.
4. **Play it cool.** *Imagine you're a forest monk sitting on a platform in the trees.* Your job is to stay as serene as possible. No matter what your family throws at you, you resolve to maintain your composure.
5. **Let go of the past.** If you don't have any long-standing negative feelings toward anyone in your family, you're in the minority. A few parents are great. A few stink. Most of us had mediocre parents. There's nothing you can do about the past. You can either continue to be tormented by it or let it go. ***The choice is yours.***
6. **Invite a friend along.** Visiting your parents in your hometown? Invite an old friend over for dinner. You have the benefit of moral support, and your family will be less likely to misbehave around company.
7. **Set and achieve a couple of easy goals.** You might take your car to the carwash and balance your checkbook. Getting a few constructive things accomplished will enhance your mood and keep your emotions on track.
8. **Stay physically active.** The local health club has a daily membership plan. Use it. Or go for a jog. ***Even a walk can provide and emotional break and sooth your nerves.*** Go out and do a few pushups under a tree in the back yard.
9. **Beware of self-medicating.** A single drink might not be a bad idea, but four could prove to be your undoing. Keep those old pain-killer prescriptions in the

medicine cabinet. You don't need them!

10. **Take the high road.** If someone is trying to get your goat, don't let them have it. Avoid feeling the need to stick up for yourself. Just move on to another conversation partner or another topic. Once someone responds emotionally, the entire interaction is bound to take an ugly turn. ***Value your sanity more than your pride.***

Hopefully, the holidays are an enjoyable time to be spent with the family. Unfortunately, holidays spent with family are often stressful. ***Temper your expectations.*** Your interactions with your family don't improve during the holidays. Plan ahead and have a few temporary escapes planned. Rely on your friends to help you through this time.

Reach out to old friends and stay physically active. Accomplishing a few small goals each day can lift your mood and your resistance to negative family members.