

Dos and don'ts for surviving holiday family dynamics

The late comedian George Burns often said that "Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city." Ha! Keeping a good sense of humor can be an asset as we approach the holidays, a time that brings many families together, with all the good and bad which that can entail.

For many, family celebrations are a joyous time, but there are few perfect Norman Rockwell families. Usually, there are at least a few sharp edges and obstacles that need to be navigated.

There are many reasons why spending time with family over the holidays can be challenging: if there are unresolved resentments or rivalries; if you've had a difficult year that has had some reverses; if you've experienced the loss of a family member; if there is ongoing tension or conflict; if a family member is abusive or troubled. The list is endless.

In a split second, we can revert back to childhood dynamics and childhood roles. Couple that with too much stress, irregular schedules, overeating, overdrinking and overspending and you have a recipe for trouble.

While traditions can be nice, they aren't cast in stone. If there have been problems in prior years, plan in advance to change things up. Talk things out, negotiate and set the plan that will work best for you. Don't overload your schedule or compromise your physical, emotional or psychological well-being for tradition.



It's vital to remember that we have no control over other people and their behavior. We only have the power to control our own reactions and our own behavior. Whether you are religious or not, the common sense advice from the serenity prayer can help. "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

Here are a few other survival tips:

DO

- Have realistic expectations.
- Set your own boundaries and limits in advance.
- Give the benefit of the doubt.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Keep a sense of humor.

DON'T

- Expect to change people.
- Try to solve other people's problems.
- Let your buttons be pushed.
- Push other people's buttons.
- Drink too much, which lowers inhibitions.

Remember, if the holidays get tough, your EAP is here for you. Log in to your Member site for tips and tools or call to talk to a counselor day or night!