

Protect Your Holiday Spirit from Difficult Family Members

By Jay Ostrowski, LPC/S

The holidays are quickly approaching! Excitement and anticipation fill our hearts as we envision the happy scene: the smell of pine in the air, children bustled in lines to tell Santa their gift ideas; the warm, gentle glow of fireplaces; the sound of Christmas carols bellowing holiday tidings and last but not least, the excitement of sharing the season with family and loved ones. But what if you face the holidays with mixed emotions due to rocky relationships with family or in-laws? The dread you feel at the thought of sharing the holidays with that difficult person can be enough to dampen even the brightest holiday spirits! Would you like to face the upcoming holidays equipped to handle uncomfortable family encounters? Then, by all means, read on!

Set limits.

If you are hosting holiday guests, know in advance when they are coming and...when they are leaving. Having a time frame in mind will make enduring that challenging family member a little more tolerable.

Be mentally prepared.

Talk to your spouse about your feelings and make a decision to support each other. Don't let family members cause division. If you are single, pick a trusted friend in whom you can confide your feelings. Spend time with people you enjoy before your guests arrive. Also, spend time by yourself, involved in an activity that brings you relaxation. You will have an advantage by not entering the situation emotionally bankrupt.

Make time for your marriage.

For couples, schedule some quality time away from the relatives, even if they are staying in your home. Remember the boundaries of marriage and the importance of spending time with each other. Make plans ahead of time for just the two of you to take a long walk, attend a Christmas cantata or go to your favorite restaurant.

Be sensitive to your spouse.

Be aware of issues you or your spouse may have with family. Deep pain can resurface quickly with one touch of an old wound. Talking this out with your spouse may help you have a more clear perspective on present circumstances in light of past events. Also, be sure not to prefer family members over your spouse or take sides. After all, your significant other remains long after your guests have departed.

Be gracious.

As difficult as it may be, strive to forgive your family member for the way he or she behaves. Try to be empathetic and maintain a sense of humor. Decide ahead of time that you will be patient instead of reacting in anger to annoying habits or comments. Keep the conversation as light as possible, avoiding topics known to be sore spots. And, if you are feeling especially adventurous, make this the year of reconciliation. You might even consider involving a mediator.

Although you may have major differences, determine to enjoy each other anyway. You might not be able to change long standing problems in the relationship, but you can do your part in making peace-as much as it is up to you (Romans 12:18).

If you need further consultation on relational issues, call Crossroads at 803 808-1800