



Avoiding Negative Family Patterns, Keeping the Holidays Bright

Many of us will be with extended family for holiday celebrations, but those gatherings aren't always all "hearts and flowers." Do you dread being compared with your more successful cousin? Are you afraid you'll take the bait for a heated argument with your opinionated uncle? Do you find yourself acting like a pouty 14-year-old? Or maybe you're the grandparent still trying to direct your adult children's lives even though you know you shouldn't.

Thinking ahead and practicing healthy responses can help avoid pitfalls and lead to greater peace and good will for the whole family! Here are Marti's practical tips:

I. Background

- Even if we've created healthier patterns in our adult lives, when we return to our childhood homes or to our family of origin, we often fall back into the patterns we knew then.
- Mindfulness and practice can help if we take time to reflect on those patterns and be prepared. We can't make others change their attitudes and behavior, but we can change our own.

II. Four tips for parents

- 1) Anticipate the triggers for your unhealthy responses
Visualize and practice new ways to respond. For example, breathe deeply before you say anything. Simply acknowledge a provocative comment ("ah, that's interesting") rather than taking it on. If you're tempted to criticize someone else, stop and think about how you would feel in that person's shoes and keep your comment to yourself.
- 2) Let people own their own feelings
For example, if someone criticizes you or tries to pick an argument with you, you might just say, "I can see you feel strongly about that" or "I appreciate your concern for me" or "I'll give that some thought and maybe we can talk more about it at another time."
- 3) Focus on the good qualities of others (especially the most difficult people) and see through their eyes
Think in advance about the things you appreciate about each family member, even if you often find them irritating. And try to see things through their eyes; why do they feel a need to put you down or provoke you or try to direct your life? Is it out of genuine concern? Insecurity? Show them the compassion you want others to show you.
- 4) Follow your hosts' "rules of the house"
Even if you have very different rules at your house, it is important to show respect for your hosts by following the rules of their house. Shoes off inside? Eat only at the table? No rough play in the house? Know the rules and make sure you and your kids abide by them.

Marti Erickson, Ph.D.

Owner & Co-host, Mom Enough®

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