

POINTS OF Possibility

November 2015

Ten Tips to Avoid Another Family Holiday Meltdown

RICHARD DEL MONTE, PRESIDENT

“With a little forethought and a shift in thinking, this holiday season with your family can be the best ever.”

The holidays are upon us, and with them come promises of joyful opportunities for families to reconnect, break bread, and celebrate the season together.

Yet, these wonderful occasions for family togetherness can sometimes backfire and turn into a nightmare of epic proportions. For many families, meltdowns during the holidays are so common that feelings of foreboding and dread begin showing up as soon as the Halloween decorations are put away.

So much effort goes into planning even the most minute details of family holidays together, yet we often forget to consider how to avoid stepping on land mines that can destroy the family's holiday harmony. To help you keep peace in the family this holiday season, here are some tips:

- 1 First, relax!** Family holidays are supposed to be fun, not perfectly choreographed performances. Things will go wrong. People will show up late, forget to bring the pie they promised, and might even make a snide remark or two. If you are prepared and expect stuff like this to happen, you can be much more relaxed and accepting, come what may.
- 2** Try to avoid looking for something to be upset or complain about. Instead **look for things you appreciate.** Focus on what's great about others in the family, the party, the food, or the ambiance.
- 3 Understand that none of us has a monopoly on the truth.** It's really in the eye of each beholder. Everyone has a different perspective on a subject, yet too often we behave as if what we believe is “the

truth,” and everyone else is mistaken (at best) or moronic (at worst). This is perhaps the most dangerous attitude to bring to a family holiday celebration.

4 Practice attentive listening. Most people, when listening to others talk, have voices in their heads saying things like, “That’s not what happened. They’re wrong! When is she going to stop talking so I can get a word in edgewise? I wonder what my sister is doing in the other room.” Instead, try listening to really understand what the speaker is saying and how they see things from their perspective. It will make a world of difference!

5 Wait to be asked for your opinion before giving advice. Nobody likes being told what to do, or being made to feel inferior to others.

6 Don’t take things personally. When others say things that seem critical, in most cases they are not trying to upset you. Even if the comment is directed toward you, it usually has nothing to do with you – it’s their issue, not yours.

7 Understand that emotions are just more intense within our family relationships. Oftentimes, a certain look, a raised eyebrow, or a word uttered with a certain inflection can set off a chain reaction of emotions within us, almost as if we are stuck on autopilot. These are often caused by unresolved conflicts from our past, even as far back as our childhood. When that happens, try to gain control of your emotions and avoid reacting. What is happening in the moment is not the same as what happened to you back then.

8 Maintain your own emotional boundaries and avoid letting yourself get caught up in the middle of someone else’s conflict. Their drama doesn’t have to affect you at all.

9 Traditions are an important part of family holiday celebrations. While some enjoy experimenting and creating new family traditions, others prefer to maintain things as they were in the past. **Be flexible, generous, and open to new ideas**, especially when the party is at another family member’s home. When the party is at your home, you can have it exactly as you like.

10 Release your expectations about how the event is going to unfold. Ever notice that when you expect something to fall apart, it usually does? Try to envision a different (positive) outcome, or better yet, don’t expect any outcome at all. Enter the event with an open heart and mind, and take what comes moment by moment. Staying present is one of the best ways to remain calm and enjoy yourself!

And a bonus tip: ***Share these tips with your family!***

With a little forethought and a shift in thinking, this holiday season with your family can be the best ever. Enjoy! 🍷

