

What Are Family Dynamics, Coping And The Quality Of Life?

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ABSTRACT: Family dynamics, coping and the quality of life is a multidimensional phenomenon which represents all aspects of a family and an individual well-being and various areas of the patient's life. Specific coping strategies may be connected with the quality of life and also with the severity of the disorders when the family dynamics becomes a negative part to trail. The objective of this article is to explore the relationship between the coping strategies, quality of life and family dynamics in our society most especially now when life and living is difficult to define. In Nigeria, family sizes vary. A family living in a more urban area may have between three to five children, while a more rural family may have as many as seven to ten. ... Nigerians have tremendous respect for their elders. Grown children are expected to care for their parents as they age. Family forms an integral part of our lives. Despite the hectic lifestyle, the dynamics shared in the family continues to be the soul of any individual. When it comes to family dynamics meaning – it is a set of interactions that happen within families. Though some share a hate-love relationship, yet every person confides in the family. And these interactions, style of communication forms the backdrop of family dynamics. Nigeria families are patriarchal with extended family members having more to say than usual in comparison to family setups in the westernized world. Although children are very important to Nigeria families because parents believe that their children will provide support for them in their old age, family relationships are mostly guided by strict system of 'seniority' and male tended egoistic values. Emphasis has always been placed on male members of the family more because of their rights to both family inheritance and extension of family lineage and name. Embedded in the family system are social norms passed down from one generation to another. Most of these societal norms cut across the nation irrespective of age, educational

achievement, religion, marital status and so on. With the gradual introduction of western lifestyle and religious virtues, one is interested in knowing if the Nigeria lifestyle trend is still the same. Family dynamics refers to the patterns of interactions among relatives, their roles and relationships, and the various factors that shape their interactions. Because family members rely on each other for emotional, physical, and economic support, they are one of the primary sources of relationship security or stress. Family dynamics are often complex and may feel difficult to understand. This article tends to help us clear this complexity. Family dynamics can have a significant impact on the conscious and unconscious choices one is drawn to throughout childhood and as an adult. Family dynamics are pervasive patterns of interaction--both healthy and unhealthy--that trickle down from generation to generation. These interactional patterns may or may not be something that some or all family members are consciously aware of. "TV movies love to show us what a perfect family should look like, but what if our family does not resemble what is on TV? What if our family dynamic is toxic? This article will helps us to cope with a toxic family if ours is one and to learn boundaries and how to use them. If you do not know much about boundaries or are not the best at enforcing them, talking with a counselor can help you. Boundaries can be hard to put in place when you are not used to them, so do not feel bad if you have not been successful with creating and keeping them. After talking with a counselor, you will be more confident and prepared to use and enforce them with toxic family members. However, Coping strategies are significantly associated with quality of life. Higher using of positive coping has a positive association with quality of life (QoL). The main factors related to QoL are the subjective severity of the disorder, employment and positive coping strategies according to regression analysis. In terms of

family relationships and interactions, the needs of family members, particularly siblings, often get compromised due to the high financial demand for these families (Ajuwon & Brown, 2012; Moyson & Roeyers, 2012). This affects family relationships between couples and other family members.

KEYWORDS: Family dynamics, Nigeria, Women.

I. INTRODUCTION:

In Nigeria, the family is extremely important. The Nigerian families are not the epitome of indestructible knit, but there is still that strong family bond which is mostly described by the saying that blood is thicker than water; and fuelled by strong societal traditional norms. Marriage which is a means by which a family is formed is viewed as a necessary but not sufficient condition to create a family. Most individuals aspire to marry especially before the age of thirty five (for women) and forty two (for men). Although there are exceptions to this, mainly the Christians striving to live a life of celibacy and some others who have either refused to marry for certain reasons or have been labeled in the society as “no-go-area” for marriage. Despite the westernized lifestyle slowly sipping into the community especially amongst the Yoruba tribe, the issue of marriage or even the family system at large is not a private one, these two institutions are rarely established without the interference of the extended family members (Boomie, Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell, 1991; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Aluko and Alfa, 1985; Bascom, 1969). Although Nigeria families are patrilineal, hardly can one observe remarkable difference between Nigeria families and some Africa countries whose families are matrilineal. Ogundipe – Leslie had the following stated as the general norm in most Africa communities. African women are weighed down by super structural forms deriving from the pre-colonial past. In most African societies, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, gender hierarchy, male supremacy or sex asymmetry (or whatever term we choose to use) was known and taken for granted. Even in matrilineal societies, women were still subordinate to men, considered as second place to men; the only difference being that inheritance and authority pass through the women to the male of the line (rather than it passing through the male to the male line as in the case of patrilineal families). Men are still dominant in private and public life. The ideology that men are naturally superior to women in essence and in all areas, affects the modern day organization of societal structures. This ideology prolongs the attitudes of negative

discrimination against women. With the fast spread of education in Nigeria especially amongst the Yoruba tribes, one would think that the Nigeria families and even the society as a whole are being fastly westernized. This is far from the truth or what would be expected. Authors such as Boomie, Caldwell, Orubuloye, Ogundipe-Leslie to mention a few had in the past described the typical African societies of which Yoruba is not excluded. Ogundipe-Leslie painted the picture so well in her description quoted below. ... From the traditional past also came notions of the physical control of woman’s body and its product. Under this issue came purdah, genital mutilation, the lack of control over her body’s biology or its products such as children who are viewed to belong to the man’s family (i.e. the couple’s extended family on the husband’s side). She is but a beast that produces the man’s children on his behalf. These aspects of the oppression of women in Africa are very important to African women though they tend not to wish to emphasize the quest for sexual freedom and promiscuity which preoccupy the western feminist.

Nonetheless, the African male fears the attainment of equal sexual freedom for women. Emphasis has always been placed on the male especially in the family system; mainly because the families in Nigeria are patrilineal, the males are seen as continuity of both family name and lineage and the men are suppose to be dominant with women being subject to them. The males are described with strong adjectives such as perfect, strong, fit, authoritative, self sufficient etc (just think of adjectives in that line that can be used). Unlike the men, the women are described by their biological sex and family responsibilities and their beauty is only seen through these myopic lenses (Franklin, 1977). Franklin amongst many writers described the African (west) woman in non – compromising words: ... Beauty where life is marginal, as it is in much of Africa has a special meaning. The most beautiful thing of all is to survive. That which helps to survive is beautiful. Thus a woman may be beautiful because she has a strong back for farm, or the sturdy neck and shoulders which enable her to carry a larger and more profitable load to the market ... or the endurance to fetch water as needed. She is also beautiful if she is skilled in haggling, has relatives who can be hit for a loan if the need arises, or is blessed with the sort of hips that glorify a husband through frequent and easy childbirth. Norms are strongly adhere to in Nigeria families. The woman either as a daughter or sister has more value, authority and even in many cases right to

inheritance (Ogundipe-Leslie, Aluko). Immediately she marries, she is treated as one of the possessions, voiceless, without rights, with constrained freedom and without her own identity (since she has to take up her husband's family name and drop her father's family name). She is treated as a nobody in her matrimonial home especially by her in-laws, with constraints which are not imposed on either their (in-laws) daughters or sisters imposed on her. She becomes the wife who is left to do all the house chores (which in her father's house is either shared or left for the youngest) and still go to a paid job and fulfill her sexual role at home. When it comes to social obligations such as marriages, meetings, naming ceremonies, chieftaincies, funerals, birthdays etc, she is usually the first to get to the venues where these occasions are done, and most times the last to leave. The bulk of the preparation, cooking and cleaning is done by her with little time to enjoy the occasion (Aluko, Boomie). She is treated as a slave without consideration or feelings (after all that is how slaves are treated). In many cases, the mother-in-law and even the sister(s)-in-law mistreat the wives, forbidding their sons (or brothers) to do any house chores. These same in-laws in so many cases either rule and run the woman's home from theirs or even move in to live in their son's (or brother's) home. The Nigeria men once married has nothing to loose but all to gain (a wife, children, respect in the society and even a wife-personified-housekeeper). Demand is not placed on the man in anyway. The men argue that they are forcefully burdened with the financial responsibilities of their wives' family (especially in cases such as marriage, funeral, schooling etc). If they feel constrained and overburdened, what about the women (their wives) who have been demoralized emotionally and physically, forced into a purdah like life by the so called societal norms and customs, and made voiceless without any identity of theirs? Nigeria families are also guided by the strict system of seniority (Fadipe, 1970). The issue of seniority cuts across the nation and it is so clear that it is mostly guided by male egoistic ideology. Older members of the family are never addressed by their first name. Instead they are addressed as mummy, daddy, uncle, aunty, brother, sister etc according to their sex, age and relationship with addressee. The married woman unlike her male counterpart is forced to continue with the family norm of seniority. She is forbidden to call anyone from her husband's side (extended family) by first name. She has to use the afore mentioned prefix or coined names for any family member such as iyale (senior woman), baba oko (father/brother-in-law), idi leke

(one embodied in beads) etc; even if she's older than them in age or better than them in monetary and social status. On the other hand, as afore mentioned, the men have nothing to loose. He addresses only those older than him (form either his or her family) by the prefix (no coined names needed). He is not expected or demanded to use these prefix to address those younger than him or of same age as him. With the wide fanatic spread of religion in Nigeria, one would presume that the family norms would have changed. Religion still has not been able to have an upper arm in the Nigeria family norms, hereby liberating the women. Islam is rather suppressive of women and some Christian leaders hide under the cloak of Ephesians 5: 22 – 24, using it as a suppressive weapon for the women in their denomination. Bearing all these in mind, one would not be wrong to assume or have the idea that the family lifestyle in Nigeria portrays women having stereotyped roles, limited/constraining freedom and they can only exist in relation to men. Thus in this paper, the Nigeria family lifestyle is examined from a feminist side with the norms examined as either favourable to individuals especially the women or they have to be abolished. The consequences of the patrilineal family setup are discussed and data obtained from a small trial survey are analyzed. The author wishes to reiterate that the Nigeria family lifestyle and norms examined and discussed in this paper are neither exhaustive nor theories in their own. Thus the research is still open to further study (this is because this is a trial test to a big intended research) and opinion, ideas and contributions from readers are welcome.

Most Nigerian households consist of a mother, father, and children, and many include grandparents, uncles, and aunts as well. In Nigeria, family sizes vary. A family living in a more urban area may have between three to five children, while a more rural family may have as many as seven to ten. The highest tier of Nigerian society is made up of wealthy politicians, businessmen, and the educated elite. These people, however, make up only a tiny portion of the Nigerian population. Many Nigerians today suffer under great poverty. The lower classes tend have little chance of breaking from the vicious cycle of poverty. Poor education, lack of opportunities, ill health, corrupt politicians, and lack of even small amounts of wealth for investment all work to keep the lower classes in their place.

In some Nigerian ethnic groups there is also a form of caste system that treats certain members of society as pariahs. The criteria for determining who belongs to this lowest caste vary

from area to area but can include being a member of a minority group, an inhabitant of a specific village, or a member of a specific family or clan. The Igbo call this lower-caste group Osu. Members of the community will often discourage personal, romantic, and business contact with any member of the Osu group, regardless of an individual's personal merits or characteristics. Because the Osu are designated as untouchable, they often lack political representation, access to basic educational or business opportunities, and general social interaction. This kind of caste system is also found among the Yoruba and the Ibibios.

In most Nigerian families, the father is considered the head of the house. He makes most decisions and is the primary breadwinner for the family. Women are usually responsible for childrearing and household duties. In most families in Nigeria, children eat separately from adults. Nigerians have tremendous respect for their elders. Grown children are expected to care for their parents as they age. Staples of the Nigerian diet are yams, cassava (a starchy root), plantains, and rice. Common dishes include pounded yam (like mashed potatoes), jollof rice (rice cooked with tomatoes, peppers, and meat), and okra. Nigerian meals traditionally are paired by a sauce made with fish, meat, or chicken. Nigeria's warm climate allows for a large array of fruits and vegetables to enhance their cuisine.

A family, which is usually made up of people who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption, is very important to most Nigerians. There are two major family types; the nuclear family, which is made up of one man, his wife, and their unmarried children, and the extended family, which is usually made up of a series of nuclear families. Culturally, most Nigerian cultural groups practice patrilineal descent, have patriarchal authority, have patrilocal rule of residence, and are generally patricentric in outlook. The children are socialized with this arrangement in mind, and female children are consciously socialized to serve and be subordinate to males. This hierarchical structure has sometimes led to dissolution of marriages on the grounds of the birth of only or mostly female children (Omokhodion 1996).

In Nigeria, having many children is fashionable and is a status symbol. For example, although a large family brings a greater economic burden, many families in the eastern part of Nigeria have ten or more children. Thus, the national fertility rate was estimated at 6.31 children per woman in 1995. The birth rate was 43.26 births per 1,000 people, while the death rate was 12 deaths per 1,000 population. However, the infant mortality

rate was 72.6 deaths per 1,000 live births due to the poor medical facilities and the poverty of most Nigerians. This rate is one of the highest in the world and had a negative influence on the birth rate. The maternal mortality rate is also high.

A unique feature of the Nigerian family is the existence of a loose matrilineage and use of various terms to describe households and unions. For example, some households are headed by women. This may be the result of the women being widowed or divorced. The women might also be out-side wives. This term describes women who function as wives to married men who live with their original wives and have extra wives outside their homes. These men are mobile husbands who move among their various partners, spending nights, having sex with their partners, and supporting them financially. These outside wives use the surname of their "husbands," and in many cases, are known to the man's original wife. Those who are not part of the culture may find this confusing, but the practitioners seem to manage well. The Nigerian legal system has improvised ways of accommodating such women and their children. In many cultures in Nigeria, there is no such status as illegitimate child.

Nigerian families are also distinctive in their loose use of the word uncle when referring to all older male relatives and sometimes nonrelatives as well. Also, all older female relatives and nonrelatives may be referred to as "aunty." Similarly, women above the age of forty-five are loosely called "mommy," while men who are about fifty or older are loosely called "daddy." People of greater social status, regardless of age, are addressed as sir or madam. This may be based on the traditional cultural deference to elders or superiors, which is very important to most Nigerian cultures.

The Yorubas of southwestern Nigeria practice bilateral descent. Thus, many of the current traditional rulers (Obas) have ascended the throne from their mother's lineage. In most parts of Nigeria, family linkage and consanguinity are very important. Thus, people have fourth, fifth, sixth, or even seventh cousins. They may refer to people from their village or town as brothers or sisters and create associations to perpetuate the linkage.

As a result of urbanization and migration and associated economic factors, however, the nuclear family is gradually becoming the dominant family type. It functions slightly differently from the typical nuclear family in Western countries. This may be the result of traces of the extended family system of being "our brothers' keepers."

Family dynamics impact nearly all areas of life, making understanding them incredibly important to individuals who are working towards living an emotional healthy life. Without a solid understanding of your own unique family dynamics, you may not feel fully in tune with why certain experiences are triggering, or why you are drawn to certain careers, relationships, and friendships. Understanding your family dynamics means:

- Being connected to yourself
- Developing insight
- Understanding your conscious and unconscious choices, as an awareness of this can help you seek out healthy relationships and experiences as well as have a healthy awareness of your needs.

Factors That Affect Family Dynamics

Family dynamics may be impacted by:

- The parents' relationship
- If the parents or caregivers are not together and/or are dating/committed to other partners
- If there are children within the family and if so, how many
- If one or multiple parents or caregivers are abusive, neglectful, or have abandoned a child or children
- If someone in the family has a chronic condition, an addiction, and/or one or more mental health disorders
- If the family or an individual within the family has experienced trauma, homelessness, a loss, or a divorce or breakup
- What the family values are
- The family's culture and belief system (religious or non-religious)
- The power structure in the family
- If parent-child attachments are secure
- What the pervasive family dynamic patterns are
- What the environmental climate/experience is like that the family is living through
- What the parenting style is like
- If multiple generations live within the same household
- The family members' temperaments

How Do You Explain Family Dynamics?

Family dynamics are the interactional patterns experienced between family members. Family dynamics include what roles you take on (healthy and unhealthy), typical family interactional patterns, as well as multi-generational

interactional patterns that have impacted the entire family system.

Healthy Family Dynamics

In a healthy family dynamic:

- Everyone has a voice and is treated with respect
- The parent-child attachments are secure (if there is a child or children)
- If there are children, the parenting style provides structure and rules, but is flexible, understanding, and loving (vs. overly rigid or totally non-structured)
- Everyone feels loved, safe, and connected

Types of Family Dynamics

Family dynamics can range from unhealthy to healthy, and everything else in between. Family dynamics can also shift from healthy to unhealthy, and vice versa. Family dynamics can be impacted by those involved in the family system. A family dynamic example: a family with one-parent and one child will have a different family dynamic than a family household that includes two grandparents, two parents, and several children.

Family Dynamics Roles

Within a healthy family, the roles may look like:

- Two adults in an equal and loving relationship
- A one parent or caregiver household, a multi-parent household, or a multi-generational household with the parent(s) or caregiver(s) using healthy parenting methods to nurture their child or children (healthy attachment established, appropriate rules and boundaries set, and unconditional love)

When families experience unhealthy dynamics, they often unconsciously slip into the dysfunctional family roles of caregiver (enabler), the scapegoat, the hero, the lost child, the mascot, and the addict or identified patient.

How Family Dynamics Affect Child Development

Family dynamics become the basis for how the child views themselves, their relationships, and the world around them. What is unconsciously and consciously absorbed and experienced during childhood greatly impacts their choices as adults, including who they are attracted to, what type of goals they have, and how they handle conflict. Children who grow up in households with unhealthy family dynamics (abuse, neglect, overly strict parenting, overly loose parenting, poor communication, insecure attachment style, etc.) are more likely to develop mental health disorders and

may experience more difficulty within relationships.

Family Systems Theory

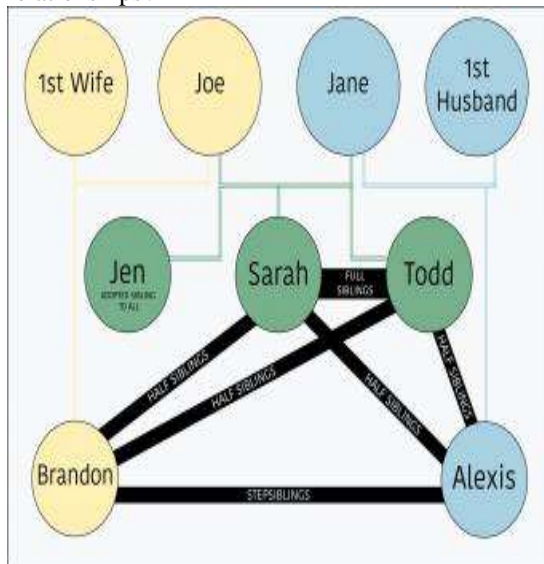
The family systems theory posits that individuals do not have individual problems that exist in a vacuum, but rather are impacted by the complexity of family dynamics on a multi-generational level. This approach is able to identify and address an individual's difficulties and/or uncomfortable symptoms by examining their relational experiences.

Understanding Family Dynamics

A family's unique dynamics can have an immense impact on every individual's overall health and well-being, as well as the conscious and unconscious choices they make. Roughly 16% of children in the U.S. are living in blended families that may include a stepsibling or half sibling. The majority of families no longer consist of the traditional, nuclear family, so understanding what stepsiblings and half siblings are helps you understand modern family dynamics.

Types of Sibling Relationships

Twelve percent of American children live in blended families with a stepsibling or half sibling. While these are two types of siblings, you may be wondering "What are the different kinds of sibling relationships?"



SOURCE

What Are Stepsisters and Stepbrothers?

Stepsiblings have no blood relation but are related through the marriage of one of their parents. For example, Jane is the divorced mother of Alexis and Joe is the divorced father of Brandon. If Jane

and Joe get married, Alexis and Brandon would be stepbrother and stepsister.

- Stepsiblings do not share a biological relationship, so they're not blood related.
- Because they don't share parents biologically, stepsiblings would not be considered "real siblings" by most people.
- Stepsibling relationships may be formed by gay marriages or heterosexual marriages.

What Are Half Sisters and Half Brothers?

Half siblings are related by blood through one parent, either the mother or father. For example, in the family above, Jane and Joe are now married and Alexis and Brandon are stepsiblings. Jane and Joe have a baby together, who they name Sarah. Sarah is the half sister to both Alexis and Brandon. Sarah is a half sister to Alexis, since they share the same mother but not the same father. Sarah is also the half sister to Brandon since they share the same father but not the same mother.

- Half siblings are considered "real siblings" by most because the siblings share some biological relationship through their shared parent.
- Half siblings can have the same mother and different fathers or the same father and different mothers.
- Half siblings may share one biological parent, but marital status of any parent does not affect their relation as half siblings.

What Are Full Siblings?

Full siblings have both the same biological mother and biological father. Jane and Joe have a second child together, who they name Todd. Like Sarah, Todd is the half sibling to both Alexis and Brandon. However, Sarah and Todd are full siblings to each other, since they share both the same mother and father.

- Full siblings are typically who people refer to as "real siblings" because they share both parents.
- Marital status of any parent does not change the fact that two people are full siblings.
- Full siblings typically refer to each other as simply "sister" or "brother."

What Are Adopted Siblings?

Adopted siblings don't share any biological parents, but are legally the children of a shared parent. Continuing the same family example, if Jane and Joe adopt a child named Jen together, Jen would be the adopted sibling of Alexis, Brandon, Sarah, and Todd. While they all share at least one parent legally, Jen does not share any biological parents with her siblings.

Sibling Relationships in Blended Families

Living in a blended family with a stepparent, stepsibling, or half sibling involves some differences from living in a traditional family. There are some potential challenges to gaining new siblings, but don't fret; there are definite benefits too.

Challenges of Step Sibling and Half Sibling Relationships

Potential challenges for kids who are stepsiblings or half siblings living in a blended family can include social, emotional, and physical challenges.

Age Difference Challenges

A large age difference is one potential challenge. Ten or more years between half siblings is not uncommon. This age difference can make it difficult for half siblings to develop the same type of relationship they have with full siblings. Some older half siblings say they feel more like an aunt or uncle than a sibling.

Sibling to Parent Bonding Concerns

It can be difficult on sibling bonding when half siblings live with different parents. This situation most often happens when the half sibling relationship is through the father. Children may have a hard time developing the same closeness that they have with the people they live with.

Sibling to Sibling Bonding Concerns

There is a forced relationship before emotional bonds have been formed. Often, stepsiblings are forced into a relationship with one another before emotional bonds have been fully formed. An older child may have a new, baby half sibling, but may not be emotionally ready for the new addition.

Feelings of Loss

Many half siblings experience feelings of new loss. When parents separate or divorce, children may feel a great loss. When a new half sibling is born, children may re-experience loss as they deal with sharing a parent with another child.

Feelings of Sibling Jealousy

Jealousy can happen if the stepsibling moves in with the child, taking away some of the attention of the parent the child lives with. Feelings of jealousy can be even more profound if the stepsibling lives with the parent that the child is no longer able to live with.

Feelings of Home

Many half and stepchildren feel like no place is home. While many children of separated parents feel like they don't truly have one home, children who have siblings at both parents' homes may feel this more profoundly.

Sibling Order Changes

Loss of "place" in the family can be a challenge for all siblings in the family. The oldest child can suddenly find she's not the oldest anymore and the baby can become a middle child. This loss of "place" in the family can be confusing and cause resentment toward the incoming child.

Benefits of Stepsibling and Half Sibling Relationships

Potential benefits for half siblings and stepsiblings sharing a household can extend far beyond immediate family. Although there seem to be more negatives than positives to a blended family, don't underestimate the weight of the benefits.

Focus Is on Fun

Many half and stepsiblings note being able to have more of a fun relationship with a sibling is a great benefit to a blended family. This is true especially if there is a large age gap between two children. In that case, the relationship can be based more on fun activities and less on day-to-day tasks.

Less Sibling Competition

Half siblings and stepsiblings tend not to show as much competition for individuality with each other since there is not a need to differentiate between themselves.

New Role Models

Some blended families are able to develop relationships that benefit everyone. Children have a new female or male role model and people that truly become their siblings. Just like any other family relationships, these relationships are lifelong and a great source of comfort and support.

Improvements in Behavior

Many blended families see improvement in children's behavior. Contrary to popular belief, moving into a blended family does not automatically mean children have more behavior problems than children whose parents never divorced. How a child responds to changes in the family has more to do with the quality of parenting than the transition itself.

More People to Love and to Love You

A blended family means new grandparents! Once children get new stepsiblings, they also get new grandparents who will love them, spoil them, and let them do all of the things their parents won't let them do.

Helping Siblings Adjust and Bond

There are several things you, as a parent, can do to help all the siblings in your family adjust to their new family and bond with one another. Understand, however, you can't do everything and you can't force anything. However, there are things you can do to help.

Encourage Open and Honest Conversations

Talk about everything and don't ignore anything. Let all of your kids talk to you and your spouse about anything that is bothering them. From what they want to call their new stepparent to what they're worried about, these issues are important to your kids even if they seem silly to you.

Ignore Sibling Relationship Titles

Don't force them, but encourage them to not use terms like "step" and "half." The closest, most successful blended families don't differentiate between these relationships. This helps all members to not think of one another differently. If they don't want to call a stepbrother their brother, they can refer to him by name.

Create an Environment of Equality

Treat all of the kids equally. Since your history with your kids is going to be longer than your history with your spouse's kids, treating kids equally might seem challenging. However, love is love, house rules are house rules, and everyone needs to be treated equally.

Discipline Your Own Children

Ease your way into a disciplinarian role. Disciplining stepchildren too soon will cause resentment and interfere with bonding. Let the parent of the child discipline, at first, and then begin to discipline slowly. Start by verbally correcting inappropriate behavior, for example, long before attempting to remove privileges.

Make One-on-One Time a Priority

Make sure you and your spouse spend time with each child in the family individually as well as together. It is important you build a relationship with your stepchildren, but you don't want to neglect your children in the process. Take stepsiblings out together who have common interests or are close in age. Let each child build a relationship with the other children in the family.

Respect Old Traditions and Create New Ones

Make new traditions together, but don't abandon old traditions. Introduce the new side of the family to existing traditions and encourage them to introduce you and your kids to theirs. Try to build new traditions that are unique to your blended family.

Keep Adult Relationships Positive

Do everything possible to develop a relationship with your stepchildren's other parent.

By forming a positive relationship with your stepchildren's mom, for example, your stepchildren won't feel the need to have to pick a "favorite mom." Having a good relationship with your stepchildren's other parent will make the family environment more positive overall.

Consider Your Terminology

People are generally familiar with the terms "stepfamilies," "half siblings," "broken families," "blended families," "intact families," "traditional families," and "nontraditional families." However, you should think about what these terms imply, and whether they are really the terms you want to use. If two children love each other, support each other, and grow up with a relationship unlike what most people have, are they merely "stepsiblings?" If two children share the blood of only one parent are they merely "half siblings?" If you remarry, is your family automatically "blended?" When you consider the message you want to send to your children, you may want to get rid of these terms altogether and choose something new for your family.

Getting Along With Siblings' Spouses

When a family member gets married, they form a new alliance with their spouse. This shift in family dynamic can cause tension between you and your sibling's spouse. Attempting to create a peaceful relationship with your in-law can help you maintain and even improve your relationship with your sibling.

Daily Interactions

If you see your sibling often, chances are, you will spend time with her spouse. Begin by asking general questions and you will find some common ground. Some good conversation starters include:

- How was your day today?
- Any plans for this weekend?
- Tell me about your work. My sibling was telling me you are a/an (insert job)
- What do you like to do for fun?
- (Sibling's name) tells me you like to (insert activity or hobby). How did you first get interested in that?

How to Handle Special Events

Holidays and other special events can be stressful, especially if you aren't sure how to deal with your in-law. If you haven't yet connected, set an obtainable goal by starting off small.

- Attempt to give her a genuine compliment.
- Spend a few minutes chatting with him. If you are not comfortable with him yet, approach him when he is standing in a group.

- Be courteous. If you are at a party, ask if you can get her anything to eat or a drink.
- If you are at a loss for what to say, remember you both have your sibling in common. Share a funny anecdote about growing up to get the conversation going.
- When the night is over, be sure to say goodbye before you leave and note it was nice seeing them.

How to Deal With Awkward Situations

You may have some social anxiety and feel uncomfortable around new people, or your sibling's spouse may be shy and guarded. Either way, try a few tips to help you interact with him.

- If you are nervous, keep conversations brief. Excuse yourself if you are overwhelmed. You can say, "It was great speaking with you, I need to head out, but I look forward to seeing you again."
- If there is an awkward silence, ask general questions about how she met your sibling, what they do for fun together and where they are living.
- If you don't understand what he said, or a joke he made, ask about it. You can say, "I'm sorry, I must have missed something. What did you mean by (insert what was confusing)."
- If she has an opinion you don't agree with, be kind and open to her. Ask questions out of curiosity, instead of being defensive about your stance. You can also share you respect her opinion, but have a different perspective.

Drawing Boundaries

Depending on who your sibling has married, you may face inappropriate situations. Unfortunately, there are people out there that do not respect boundaries. Your sibling's spouse may be a boundary violator if:

- He makes rude and lewd comments about you or your sibling regularly.
- She physically or emotionally violates you. Examples of this include physical harm, inappropriate sexual comments or touching, and verbal abuse.
- He attempts to split you and your sibling. Splitting occurs when one person pits two other people against each other. He may do so by starting arguments between you and your sibling which over time creates a rift in your relationship.
- She uses you for emotional support and talks poorly about your sibling to you.

Maintaining a healthy relationship with anybody starts with setting appropriate boundaries:

- If the situation is safe, meaning you are not in physical or emotional danger, attempt to speak with your sibling's spouse about how you are feeling. You can say, "I felt uncomfortable when you made this comment. Going forward, please do not speak to me in that way again." Be sure to inform your sibling that you had a conversation with her spouse so everything is transparent. Hopefully, it was just a misunderstanding and you can work on your relationship in the future.
- If your sibling's spouse puts you in physical or emotional danger, inform your sibling that you are no longer comfortable being around her partner and briefly explain why. Make plans with just your sibling and do not enter into situations where you will be alone with her partner.
- If she attempts to split you and your sibling, do not engage in arguments. Let your sibling and his spouse know that you will speak with them individually if they are having a problem with your behavior or something that you said.
- If he uses you for emotional support, let him know that it is not appropriate for him to talk badly about your sibling with you. Redirect him to speak with his partner to resolve the issue.

What to Do If It's Been Years

If you've known your sibling's partner for some time and still don't get along, there are a few things you can try:

- Do not engage with her if she is making comments that make you feel uncomfortable. Politely excuse yourself or set some boundaries.
- If you've tried to set boundaries in the past but he still violates them, make sure you only engage with him in a group setting, or very minimally one on one.
- If she tends to be abrasive or rude, try to be kind in return. It is really hard for most people to continue to behave poorly when they are not getting a reaction out of their target.
- If you just don't enjoy his company, spend some time making small talk with him at the beginning of your visit when you have the most energy. Once you've hit your max, remove yourself from the situation and hang out with someone else.
- If you know that she will be at an event, or they have invited you over for dinner, make

sure you bring a friend or a partner to accompany you. Sometimes this can make the visit a little more bearable.

- If you don't enjoy speaking with your sibling's partner, try to make sure that when you do spend time together you are engaging in an activity instead of a sit-down meal. This can limit conversations while still allowing you to spend time with your sibling.

IMPROVING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

If your sibling's spouse is safe to be around, make an effort to get to know her. After all, your sibling married her for a reason. You can work on your relationship by:

Making an effort to do activities or hobbies with her that she likes

- Treating her to lunch and asking questions to get to know her better
- Inviting your sibling and his spouse over for dinner, making sure to cook something they both enjoy
- Having a movie night with both of them
- Giving her a 'welcome-to-the-family' gift

Being Patient

If you and your sibling's spouse got off to a rocky start, or you do not know him well yet, take your time and know that you will find some ways to connect eventually. In anything that you do, remember to be kind and genuine. As long as the partner is safe to be around, give this person a fair chance because he or she may be in your life for a while.

Making In-Law Relationships Work With Less Stress

In-laws relationships can be a challenge, even for those who enjoy the families which they married into. The familial road traveled will not always be an easy one, but oftentimes if it's a challenge, it's worth doing. These tried-and-true tips can ease those times of stress with in-laws.

In-Laws Relationships Need Boundaries

Just like all relationships in life, those with in-laws need healthy boundaries.

Establish Equality among Grandparents

If you find yourself preferring your own parents to your partner's, that is fine and probably pretty natural, but it doesn't mean that you should push your in-laws out of the picture. If they desire lots of face time with your kids, make sure that they feel like they are getting as much quality time as your parents get. A good way to work them in is to give them specific tasks, like picking your child up from school two days a week or taking over soccer practice duties.

Know When to Say "No Thank You"

It is possible to have too much of a good thing, and grandparents can overdo it even when their intentions are pure. If you are noticing that they are asking to constantly come over or help out, get comfortable with politely declining their offers. Being able to say no when it doesn't work for your family is a key part of setting boundaries.

Remember Who Is the Parent

You are the parents, and you call the shots. If they raised their kids in a different manner than you are choosing to, you'll find that you clash over plenty of child-rearing methods. Neither is right nor wrong, but what you choose for your kid is the right choice for your family. They did the parenting thing. Now it is your turn. Don't second guess your choices, especially when you feel strongly about them.

Adjust Expectations

Your in-laws are not your own parents. They are going to do things in their own manner; that is normal and to be expected. Try to remove predispositions about how they should be grandparenting, according to you. Adjust your expectations, and you may discover that while they perform their grandparenting duties uniquely, different can be a good thing.

Do not Take Things Too Hard

If you are of a sensitive nature and your in-laws are blunt, your feelings are in great jeopardy of getting hurt. When you find yourself becoming increasingly upset by something they have said, consider the source. Is this just the way they speak? Are you reading too much into what they have said? Do you truly believe they spoke their words to hurt you?

Find Common Ground, Literally

When they come to your house, you stress over cleaning and cooking. At their home, you feel out of place and don't know how to infuse yourself into the space. Try spending time together in a neutral setting. Perhaps a restaurant lunch date, a day in the park, or an afternoon at the movies would fix this particular stress.

You Aren't Married to Them

You married their son or daughter, not them. Always remember who your loyalty lies with.

Your Spouse Isn't Your Mother-in-Law

If she is grating on you, remind yourself that she is not your spouse. It can be difficult not to transfer negative feelings about your in-laws to your partner because they are so closely related, but they are different people, and your relationship with each of them should be individualized, not generalized.

Vent to Someone Other Than Your Partner

Everyone needs someone to vent to, but in the case of in-laws, your spouse might not be the perfect person for this job. Try taking your emotions to a trusted friend, sister, or brother. Gripping to a partner about their parents can create anger and resentment, further straining relationships.

Be a Team Player

Even when your mind wants to create a "self against them" mentality, it's important to remember that you and your spouse are the "team." Of course, your partner is a part of their family, but they are part of yours too. The two of you have to work hard to communicate and create a united front.

Do not Gang Up on Your Partner

Maybe you adore your in-laws, so much so that it often becomes you and them against your partner. Being too in sync with your in-laws can create just as much stress as not being close to them. Make sure your allegiances always revert to your spouse and let them all work out issues without you.

Create Consistency

Creating consistency might make everyone a bit more comfortable.

Schedule Time Together

Set schedules can solve a bevy of in-law woes. If your partner's parents have made it a thing to just drop by whenever, and that's a source of stress for you, give them set times to come visit. Make it work for them, but also for you. Choose times where you have an exercise class or use the visit to run needed errands or take a nap.

Refuse to Engage in Awkward Conversations

Warning: Uncomfortable conversations will come up from time to time. If there are certain hot topics that your in-laws tend to bring up often, such as why you continue to formula feed, try your best to not engage. Starting a war of words is never going to end well, and hurt feelings can last for a long time. Make it a point to not engage in any awkward conversation and further damage your in-law relationship. If you don't react, the conversation may just fall dead in the water.

Always Take the High Road

You will want to go to battle with them from time to time, but don't. The kids are always watching and listening and learning from the actions of the adults who love them. Don't let them

witness your frustrations with their grandparents. No good will come of that.

Rules are not Meant to Be Broken

At least not when it comes to your rules and your in-laws. If you and your partner have decided that the baby can't have sweets, but any time your mother-in-law comes around your little one becomes covered in chocolate, put your foot down. While some confrontations can be avoided to better keep the peace, breaking your rules needs to be addressed. It can be done both gently and assertively.

Merge Your Worlds

You have merged your lives, so start acting like it!

Avoid Culture Clash

If your partner's parents are from another culture, you may have to work harder to embrace their attitudes and beliefs, should they be vastly different from your own. Learn about their culture and embrace all that you can. Remind yourself that your child is fortunate to have several enriching cultures as part of this fabric.

Try Their Hobbies

You are a stay-indoors and read a book kind of person, but your in-laws are outdoors lovers. Even if you don't love their choice of hobbies, put yourself out there and be a part of what they like. They will be appreciative to see your effort, and you may discover something new that you had never previously opened yourself up to before.

Respecting Their Values Doesn't Mean Following Them

Respect doesn't necessarily mean obey. You can respect your in-law's ideals and values but still follow your own path. So long as you aren't displaying a poor attitude or verbally offending them, it's okay to acknowledge that they feel one way and continue on with your own beliefs.

Focus on What They Bring, Not Lack

It is easy to fall into a pattern of focusing on what in-laws lack, as opposed to what they bring to the mix. Maybe they are constantly crafting and engaging in creative play. You can look at this as messy or you can put a positive spin on it and be grateful for the creative teaching that they bring to your kids. Are they lovers of music? Do they let your kids bang on piano keys and pots and pans? You can be annoyed at the noise or

thankful that they are focused on something that you don't particularly care for.

In the End, You All Have a Common Goal

While you might think that you and your in-laws come from different planets, you likely have more in common than you realize. Chances are, you can bond and come together over your shared love, the kids. You love your kids and so do they. In times of stress, focus on the fact that when all is said and done, they adore your little humans and would do anything for them. In-law relationships can be trying, but having them in your children's life is likely also enriching and beneficial.

How to Deal with Difficult Family Members

Dealing with difficult family members is a reality for most people. From family members who disrespect you to ungrateful family members, learning strategies to deal with family drama can help you enjoy family time again.

How to Approach a Difficult Family Member

You cannot change how someone else acts, so don't waste your time trying. What you do have control over, is how you act. Debbie Mandel, MA, a stress reduction specialist and coach, agrees that if you don't like what you see in a difficult family member, change what you see and how you react. You can't always avoid interactions with difficult family members, so use these tips to make the best of get-togethers.

Meet on Neutral Ground

Interacting somewhere you both feel comfortable can instantly help create a calm atmosphere. If you or your family member has major issues tied to a particular location, suggest the event or activity take place somewhere else. Meeting in public places often makes people act on their best behavior so having Christmas at a rented event space might be more comfortable than gathering at Mom's house, for example.

Focus on the Positives

Before meeting with your family member, think of all the qualities you like about them. Focusing on the good rather than the bad will prepare you for dealing with the actions that do annoy you. This is because your stress level won't already be heightened before you even see the person, which will make you more able to tolerate them and see them in a better light.

Prepare Yourself for Interactions

Imagine what this interaction will look like specifically based on your previous experiences with this person. Typically, difficult family members have a certain behavioral pattern that is easy to track once you become aware of it.

Based on their past behavior, mentally prepare yourself to deal with any possible scenarios you think may unfold. By doing so, you may find that you have an easier time reacting appropriately.

Use Empathy to Alter Your Perspective

Difficult people are not born that way, they become that way based on the interaction of nature and nurture. Even though it can be really hard, try to understand their perspective. You do not have to agree with their viewpoint, but understanding why may help you interact with them in a calmer way. Interactions with difficult people create incredible opportunities for growth, self reflection, and heightened emotional intelligence.

How to Talk to a Difficult Family Member

Sometimes, there isn't much you can do to avoid the annoyances of your family member. This is when you should employ some good conflict resolution techniques. The way you talk can influence the mood of any conversation, so be conscious of how you speak.

Use "I" Statements

When you use "I" statements, it takes blame off the person you are speaking to, which then helps him become less defensive. Phrases like, "I feel threatened by comments like that" or "I become easily offended about topics like these." Start with the word "I" and make the feelings about you.

Set Limits in Conversations

Sometimes it's better to leave a bad conversation with a difficult family member because the more you talk, the worse things get. Say something like, "I understand that you need (want) to do this, but I have this that I would like to accomplish. So let's figure out what to cut out and what we can do to get it all done," or "I will not discuss this topic. If you'd like to continue, I will have to leave," to let them know you won't participate in a nasty conversation.

Suggest a Break

If you are sensing that the discussion is heading down a negative or unhealthy path, excuse yourself for a quick breather. You can say, "This conversation is a bit intense. I'm going to get some fresh air for a few minutes." If you feel too overwhelmed by the conversation and would like to discontinue speaking with him say, "I've enjoyed speaking with you. Let's put a pin in this discussion for now." You can also say, "I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed. Let's discuss this another time."

Ask What They Think You Said

Often times, difficult family members will misinterpret a statement and use it to spark an

argument with you. When you sense that coming, ask them something like, "What is your understanding of what I just said?" That way, you will be able to clear up the misunderstanding by giving them additional information so they can better see your intention.

How to Act Around a Difficult Family Member

Depending on the type of person you're dealing with and their specific issues, there are different ways you can act around them to keep things peaceful. Think about what you know about this person and their typical behaviors so you'll be prepared to act in a way that's least likely to set them off.

Be Honest

There's a small chance your family member doesn't recognize that their behavior bothers you, especially if no one has ever told them it does. While honesty can backfire in certain situations, it's worth a try to let them know what is bothering you and why. If honesty doesn't work the first time, there's no need to keep repeating yourself.

Avoid Hot Topics

If you know that discussing politics usually ends up in a heated debate, avoid the topic. If your family member insists on discussing it, try to change the subject. If you can't change the subject, step away from him by going to another room or ending the meeting. By avoiding topics that trigger them, you lessen the chances of major drama.

Avoid Stressful Situations

When you must interact with a difficult family member, try to avoid activities or locations you know trigger their bad behavior. For example, if they don't like to sit in traffic and typically complain about it the whole time, schedule a meet up when you know traffic is light or drive separately.

Do not Ignore Them Completely

It might seem logical to simply ignore the family member who's bothering you, but this can actually cause more issues. Make a point to say "Hi." when you see them and engage in small talk if you can. You can then strategically avoid them during events, engaging only if they approach you.

Keep Tabs on Your Own Emotions

When you are spending a lot of time with a difficult family member, remember to continue checking in with yourself. Note any tension in your body and try some calming techniques to get yourself through the stressful moments. Look for simple ways of taking a break like going to the

restroom. If you reach your emotional breaking point, find a discreet way to excuse yourself.

Be Intentional With Your Response

Although it is difficult not to react to annoying or outrageous behavior, pause and think about what you are going to say or do. This can help prevent arguments and make the interaction with a difficult family member go a bit more smoothly.

Strategies for Dealing with Specific Family Drama

While it may not seem fair that you have to find ways of dealing with this difficult family member, keep in mind that you only have control over your own behavior. Learning how to deal with family problems or family members who are inconsiderate or hate you can help make these interactions less stressful for you.

Strategies to Deal with Domineering Family Members

You might have a family member who always takes over conversations, butts in on other people's conversations, or wants to control exactly how, where, and when an event or activity takes place. To deal with a domineering or controlling family member, try these strategies:

- Give them control over specific aspects, like who's bringing what dish to pass, so they feel some power that doesn't hurt anyone else.
- Don't get caught up in their lies or justifications, remember what you know to be true.
- Use logic and facts in your conversations.

Strategies to Deal with Over-Dramatic Family Members

If your family member loves to gossip about everyone, spill secrets, make up lies for attention, and create drama everywhere they go, there are a few ways you can try dealing with them.

- Refuse to participate in dramatic conversations by saying "I am not going to participate in this conversation, if you want to talk about something else I'd love to chat with you."
- Do not react. Over-dramatic people are seeking big reactions, so if they're not getting one from you they'll likely move on.
- Do not try to reason with them or change their mind. You can't rationalize with an irrational person, so don't even try or you'll get sucked into the drama.

Strategies to Deal with Negative Family Members

Call her Negative Nancy or him Negative Ned, these family members are always somber and particularly like to point out all your flaws. Dealing

with a negative person involves understanding that it's their problem, not yours.

- Be yourself. If you aren't a negative person, don't be negative even when they are.
- Avoid problem-solving. Someone who is depressed or always negative will not respond well at your attempts to seemingly "fix" them.
- Don't take it personally. Their negativity is not a representation of you and your life, it's a representation of theirs.

Strategies to Deal with Annoying Family Members

People who are obnoxious are generally seeking attention and they think being loud and annoying is the way to be the center of attention. Dealing with an annoying family member can be really irritating, but there are some strategies you can try.

- Plan a moment for them to be the star from the start. If they get everyone's undivided attention off the bat, they may be satisfied enough to calm down a little.
- Let them know in a nice way when they're too loud or they've gone too far. Annoying people typically don't realize they're even doing these things.
- Plan quieter, independent activities to lessen your interactions while still spending time together.

Strategies to Deal with Family Members Who Have Mental Health Concerns

From Personality Disorders to depression and anxiety, dealing with family members exhibiting mental health concerns is difficult because you have to consider their mental state.

- Recognize their strengths and focus on those.
- Understand their behavior is probably not personal toward only you.
- Avoid conversations about their mental health unless they're asking you for help.

How to Deal With Toxic Family Members

The definition of "toxic" is something that is "very harmful or bad." To deal with toxic family members, you need to be able to recognize that they are toxic and learn when it's best to disconnect.

How to Tell if a Family Member or Family Dynamic Is Toxic

If your family member causes you emotional or physical distress, especially long-term distress, they are toxic to your life. Some of the warning signs a person is toxic include that they:

- Intentionally hurt you often
- Never apologize for their behavior

- Consistently require your help even if it causes you to lose sleep, miss work, or other important things
- Criticize you often
- Attempt to control all major aspects of your life
- Abuse you physically, emotionally, or sexually

How to Handle Toxic Family Members

If you're not ready to cut your toxic family member out of your life, there are some strategies you can try to keep interactions peaceful.

- Decide your own relationship boundaries and stick to them. You don't need to share what these are.
- Be conscious of what you make public knowledge and what you keep secret.
- Say "No" to invites if you need to.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs during interactions. If possible remove them as options for anyone.
- Work with a personal counselor to help you deal with family issues.

How to Disconnect From Toxic Family Members

If your family member is clearly toxic and shows no signs of self-awareness, empathy, or attempts to be a better person, it might be best for you to disconnect from them. If you've decided to disconnect from a toxic family member, there are two basic approaches.

- You can "ghost" them and just cut all ties, change your phone number, and eliminate ways for them to get your contact information. This approach is best for abusive relationships.
- You can tell them you need a break and avoid responding to their attempts to communicate.
- When you disconnect from a toxic family member, inform other family members of your decision so it's not a surprise to them.
- Make sure you have supports in place for yourself and take safety precautions if you think it's necessary.

Focus on You

As much as you would like tips and advice make your relationship better automatically, it doesn't happen overnight. Focus on who you are and what you can do to deal with difficult family members as your ultimate strategy. If you feel hopeless or helpless about your family problems, seek help from a professional counselor or therapist. If you think your family members would be open to it, you can explore family therapy.

Traits of a Jealous Mother-in-Law to Recognize

When families combine, tensions can arise between you and your mother-in-law. Recognizing

traits of a jealous mother in law can help you find appropriate ways to manage the situation while minimizing your level of stress.

Traits of a Jealous Mother-in-Law

Beneath the jealousy your mother-in-law exhibits are often more complex emotions that she may not be conscious of. When families combine, relationship roles shift, and that may create a lot of anxiety for your mother-in-law. Instead of appropriately explaining what she is experiencing, she may lash out at you, try to create stress within your romantic partnership with her child, and attempt other tactics to belittle you or cause a rift between you and your partner. Her motives, both conscious and unconscious, may include:

- Feeling scared about losing her relationship with her child
- Feeling scared about her relationship with her child changing in any way
- Feeling threatened that you will alter her relationship with her child
- Not knowing how to process that her child will likely align with you going forward instead of her
- Grappling with the idea that her child is growing up and not feeling ready to let go

Her behavior towards you may have nothing to do with you whatsoever, but more so may be in reaction to what you represent to her and her family unit. That means that you may not ever understand why she behaves a certain way towards you, but you can begin to observe her behavior and better decipher her motivations. In doing so, you will have a better chance of responding to her in healthy and appropriate ways.

She Sabotages Your Plans

In an attempt to create tension between you and your partner, she may interfere with your plans as a way to test your partner's loyalty to her. This can be really challenging for couples to deal with, especially if it is happening often. Examples of this include changing your dinner plans without telling you and requesting your partner's presence when you are supposed to spend alone time together. If this occurs:

- The most appropriate response is for your partner to have a serious conversation with their mother regarding appropriate boundaries.
- If she attempts to confuse you and your partner separately to purposefully interfere with your plans, be sure you always connect with your partner and discuss exactly what she said.
- Discuss with your partner the importance of communicating with each other when their

mother gets involved so you both can stay on the same page.

She Speaks to Your Partner about You behind Your Back

Your partner may disclose if their mother speaks badly about you when you aren't present. Their mother may do this to create a rift between you two and pull your partner back into their old role within their family of origin. If your partner tells you this is happening:

- Discuss with your partner what you feel comfortable with in terms of resolving this.
- You may want to have your partner speak with her alone and set some boundaries, so she knows this is inappropriate.
- Refrain from saying anything to her on your own, even if you are tempted to.

She Triangulates You

Triangulation is when someone uses another person to communicate, instead of speaking directly to them. While this may not sound like a big deal, triangulation is an unhealthy way of reducing anxiety, instead of dealing directly with conflict or tiffs. Your mother-in-law may speak through your partner instead of directly to you or may insert herself in conflicts between you two that have nothing to do with her.

- Speak with your mother-in-law about discussing issues directly with you and have your partner present.
- You can also have your partner let their mother know that it's not appropriate for her to insert herself in conflicts or tiffs that don't directly involve her, and that they will not be a messenger for her when it comes to conflicts involving you.

She Pits You Against Your Partner

Your mother-in-law may attempt to spark arguments between you and your partner. If she has done this in the past:

- Be sure you and your partner are very careful regarding the information you choose to share with her about your life together as she may use this information against you at some point.
- Do not take the bait if she tries to incite an argument.
- Make sure you and your partner know not to resolve conflicts in front of her and refrain from sharing conflict related information with her, even if you've already worked through it.

She Drives a Wedge Between You and Your Partner

If you get the feeling that your mother-in-law is attempting to create distance between you and her child in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, keep

in mind that this probably doesn't have anything to do with you, but may be more about her feeling anxious about her relationship with her child shifting. This behavior, known as splitting, can be difficult to verbalize, but it's critical that you and your partner discuss her behavior and how it makes each of you feel.

- Avoid letting her see that she's gotten to you and remain calm and neutral as best as you can.
- Discuss her attempts to split you and your partner in private and be sure you both are on the same page regarding solutions.

She Doesn't Respect Your Boundaries

Your mother-in-law may speak over you, announce something personal and private about you in front of others, invade your space, show up unannounced, and behave in ways that you've already verbalized being uncomfortable with. Continuously violating someone's boundaries is an unhealthy way to test them and see how far they can be pushed or manipulated.

- Hold firm with your boundaries and continue verbalizing clearly what you are and are not comfortable with.
- Be sure your partner backs you up to reaffirm to her that what she's doing is not appropriate.
- Adjust the consequences for her not respecting you (for example: if she continues to discuss something you asked her not to, calmly leave the situation).

She Subtly Ignores You

Your mother-in-law may ignore you as an attempt to get you to react. If this happens:

- Don't let her see she's getting a rise out of you - it's best to remain neutral and not feed into her behavior.
- Remain calm and be respectful of her.
- Behave in a way that communicates to her that her behavior towards you does not affect you whatsoever.

She Criticizes You

If she criticizes you or gives you insincere compliments privately or in front of your partner and/or others, it can feel absolutely exhausting to endure. If this occurs:

- Speak with her in private about her behavior towards you and how it makes you feel.
- If you feel unsafe speaking to her, you can have your partner speak with her about what they have observed in terms of her behavior towards you- just make sure your partner isn't

speaking on your behalf and is stating what they have witnessed.

- Do your best to ignore her behavior, limit your time with her, and remind yourself that you don't need her approval.

She Speaks Badly About You to Your Children

If you have a child or children and your mother-in-law is speaking poorly about you to them, it's critical to intervene. This type of behavior is completely inappropriate and puts your child or children in a terrible position.

- Discuss the situation with your partner and come up with appropriate boundaries to set (for example, maybe she doesn't get alone time with your child or children).
- Speak with her, along with your partner, about why it is inappropriate and be sure to set boundaries right away.
- Be sure to discuss with your child or children why this behavior was wrong and let them know that they did the right thing telling you what happened.

Even if she doesn't apologize, or understand why it was wrong, it's up to you as parents to shield your children from this type of behavior, even if it means limiting their time with her, and/or always being present when she is around your children.

She Incites Chaos

If you have yet to have a peaceful encounter with her, keep in mind that the chaos she reflects outwardly mirrors her internal state as well. While this doesn't change her behavior or actions towards you, it may help you understand why she behaves a certain way. It is also likely that her behavior towards you isn't unique and she may treat others in a similar fashion.

Being Around Her Is Stressful

If you feel overwhelmed by your mother-in-law, and visits are becoming stressful:

- Be sure to speak with your partner about your feelings in a respectful way.
- Limit the time you spend with her.
- Keep visits short and be sure to decompress afterwards.

How Do You Know if Your Mother-in-Law Is Jealous of You?

It's important to remember that jealousy is likely the surface emotion that you may be observing in your interactions with your mother-in-law. Often times, there are complex emotions and thoughts that may have more to do with what your

relationship with her child represents than her actually being jealous of you.

How Do I Know if My Mother-in-Law Is Manipulative?

Signs of manipulation include:

- Playing the victim
- Drawing you in only to reject you
- Using resources to influence your partner's thought process
- Attaching strings to every favor
- Using distractions to minimize circumstances they are confronted with
- Exaggerating faults to get what they want
- Threatening to do something if you don't agree with their decision

What Is a Toxic Mother-in-Law?

A toxic mother-in-law has an unhealthy relationship with her own child and therefore views any romantic partnership with them to be threatening to the homeostasis. She will use inappropriate and unhealthy tactics to ensure that her relationship with her child won't change, even if it means hurting people in the process. This can put your partner in an especially challenging position, where they may be forced to align with you or their family of origin.

Working Through Mother-in-Law Related Problems

When working through a difficult situation with your mother-in-law it's critical to realize that:

- You will never be able to control her behavior or reactions.
- You may never have a healthy relationship with her, because it takes two people to make a healthy relationship work.
- You may need to let go of the idea of what you wanted your relationship with your partner's mother to look like.
- You may need to have some difficult conversations with your partner about what you are experiencing with their mother.
- You may need to shift your expectations of what you want the relationship with her to look like.

When it comes to in law related relationships, it's a good idea to see a couple's counselor to help support you and your partner as you navigate this difficult situation.

Jealous Mother-in-Law Signs

Working through mother-in-law issues can feel very debilitating. Be sure to take care of yourself

and seek appropriate support to help you process this complex situation.

TOXIC FAMILY DYNAMICS: THE SIGNS AND HOW TO COPE WITH THEM

There are many people you can choose in your life and get rid of if needed. You can pick your friends, and if there's a problem, you can always choose to part ways. However, you can't pick your family, and you can't leave them if you're a minor, or if they're your only source of living. Sometimes, your family can have qualities that you don't like, and it can be hard to deal with them. Other times, you're unsure whether you live in a toxic family situation or not.

After all, every family is going to have their problems. People have bad days, or there may be bumps in the road, such as financial difficulties. If you're a teenager, it can be hard to tell the difference between parenting and control. So here are some signs of a toxic family.

They Are Controlling: Many teenagers call their parents controlling. There is, however, a difference in normal parenting and controlling parenting. When behavior becomes forceful or leaves someone in fear, this is controlling. Adults who are being controlled may not realize it in the beginning. In fact, at first, many adults dismiss the concerning thoughts and say the other person is just trying to "do what's best for me." For adults, when your personal decision-making is prohibited by another person, that is controlling behavior. Some ways that people who are toxic try to control others include:

- Trying to persuade you to make decisions about your life that you aren't comfortable with
- Using money or food as a means to have you do what they want
- Installing tracking apps on your personal devices without your knowledge
- A controlling adult may try to tell another what he/she can or cannot wear with regard to clothes, jewelry or make-up.

They Always Blame You: Individuals who engage in toxic behavior rarely see the wrong that they do. They do, nevertheless, find it easy to find fault in others. When toxic relationships occur within a family, one family member may blame the other for their problems, rather than taking responsibility for his/her own actions that may have contributed to the problem. While there are times that some people don't realize they've made a mistake, if this is something that happens often, the problem needs to be discussed.

Don't Confuse Punishment For Discipline. Discipline is a means of teaching someone to live

by a code of behavior or correction that is used to teach a child right from wrong. When toxic family dynamics occur, one person may be the victim of "toxic punishment". This is a type of discipline or punishment that occurs when no lesson is being taught. Rather, if a parent or spouse is having a bad day, he/she may take frustrations out on another family member. At times, the punishment may be excessive for the type of behavior that needed to be corrected. Adults in toxic relationships often use the silent treatment as a form of punishment.

They Make Threats. Family members don't have to engage in physical altercations or follow through with a form of punishment for it to be considered toxic behavior. At times, simply threatening another family member can be a form of toxic punishment. The fear that the innocent party feels after being threatened by another family member is very real.

It's important to note that everyone feels angry from time to time and may make idle threats. When toxic family dynamics are present, however, the family member who is engaging in the toxic behavior will make threats often and use those threats as a means of control. Even when threats are not carried out, they can have a lasting effect on the person who is threatened.

They Are Always Critical Towards You. A toxic family member seems as if he can never be satisfied. No matter what accomplishments other members of the family achieve or how well adjusted the other areas of life are, the toxic person will always find a way to criticize and undermine the other person's character. This can be very frustrating and often requires the help of someone outside of the family to address these behaviors and help create a pattern for recovery from the toxic family dynamics. Many times, it's all projection. Some parents feel like they can no longer accomplish their goals after they have children, and will still try to live through their children, trying to shape their lives to be like the lives they envisioned having.

They are dismissive of your feelings. A close family will encourage one another. Family members will listen as you express your feelings and will offer support in difficult times. The toxic family member, on the other hand, will show little, if any, concern for your feelings. They often disagree with what you say, even if they know you are right. If the toxic person is the reason you are feeling anxious or depressed, she will likely try to convince you that you are the problem, rather than addressing the situation and trying to resolve it.

Taking sibling rivalry to extremes: Any family that has more than one child is likely to see sibling

rivalry in action from time to time. In fact, sibling rivalry can help foster healthy competition and drive to succeed. However, when the behavior becomes extreme or dangerous, the behavior is considered toxic. Some examples of toxic sibling rivalry include:

- Blaming the other sibling every time they get into trouble
- Trying to humiliate the other sibling
- Making competition among siblings personal and vindictive

How to Deal With A Toxic Family Member

Identifying toxic family dynamics is the first step to gaining control and establishing healthy family practices. The next step is to learn how to implement new ways of communicating and acting toward one another. Some ways to begin overcoming toxic family dynamics include:

- Each family member should have an opportunity to express how he or she feels about the family dynamics and what they feel could make things better. This should be done without the interruption or criticisms of other family members.
- **Set boundaries.** After talking with one another about concerns, it's time to set healthy boundaries for what behavior is acceptable within the family and what is not. For example, if one spouse is always criticizing the way the other one performs a task, he should be given the option to do the task himself or accept the fact that it is being done by someone else and show appreciation. All family members should have clear instructions about what is expected of them and why. The other family members should express gratitude, not criticism of one another. Be assertive when setting and enforcing boundaries.
- **Try to determine the source of toxic behavior.** For some, toxic behavior has become a way of life because no one has ever set standards of acceptable behavior within the family. At other times, there may be underlying conditions, such as mental illness, that may cause behavioral disturbances. If you suspect that you or anyone in your family is suffering from any illness that may alter personality, it's important to consult with a primary physician and/or mental health professional to determine if there is any need for medical intervention.

It's important to note if a medical or mental health disorder is the underlying cause, there are treatment options available. Help and support during times of recovery can help strengthen the family bond and resolve the toxic family dynamic. .

- **Don't be afraid to be independent.** One of the most toxic behaviors an adult child can do is to expect adults parents to support her. If you are the parent, allowing this to happen is a form of toxic behavior, as you are enabling your adult child to manipulate your time and finances while you care for her. Set expectations of what your adult child's rights and responsibilities are while living in your home and stick with those rules. If you are an adult child living at home, get a stable job and learn to support yourself.
- **Know when severing ties are necessary.** While no one wants to think about cutting communication with a loved one, when emotional and/or physical well-being is at risk, it may be a necessary step. If attempts to resolve the toxic behavior have been to no avail, taking some time away from the toxic person will give you the chance to think clearly and decide what course of action is best for you. Sometimes a break from communication and negative interaction is all a family needs to realize that changes need to be made.
- **Seek Help.** Dealing with toxic family dynamics can be difficult. For some, it's hard to set boundaries or cut ties with someone that we love. If you aren't sure how to begin a journey of family healing, seeking the help of a family therapist could be a great way to get support.

It's not uncommon for the person in the family who is exhibiting toxic behavior to refuse counseling or other intervention. While you cannot force a loved one to see a therapist with you, you can talk to someone for yourself. Having someone who is experienced in handling tough family situations can help you learn effective ways to communicate and how to set boundaries and expectations within the family.

There are several sources for getting counseling help. Some people prefer to see a therapist in person or choose to engage in support groups. When neither of these options feels like a good fit for you, a great alternative is online counseling, such as that offered at ReGain. Online counseling provides clients with the opportunity to talk to licensed, experienced counselors, doctors, and social workers in the convenience of their own

home. Read below for some reviews of ReGain counselors, from people experiencing similar toxic family issues.

What's the definition of a toxic family?

Toxic families can be painful to handle. If you're a member of that kind of unit, you may struggle to express your voice. You might feel like your family doesn't care about you. Before getting into the emotions in a toxic family, it's essential to define what it is. The word "toxic" means poisonous or deadly. A toxic family is one where the members of the unit are treating one another in a destructive or harmful way. If you have a toxic family member, you are not alone. Family members are notorious for pushing your buttons, but a toxic family member is slightly different. A toxic family member can refer her to various things, but the constant tends to be that toxic family members put you in a negative mindset of some kind. Toxic families or toxic family members may make you feel bad about yourself, your accomplishments, or your life overall. They may do this covertly or overtly, but after you spend time with a toxic family member, you are most likely to feel more down on yourself than you did before seeing them. You're more likely to feel as though a black cloud is following you based on their specific comments or actions toward you or relating to you. You could have toxic parents, toxic siblings, or toxic family members of some other relation. If you have toxic parents, it can be particularly difficult, because it's harder to distance from them than it may be to distance from other family members. So, what can you do about your relationship with a toxic family member? How do you know if you have a toxic family member in the first place?

What are some signs that my family has an unhealthy family dynamic?

- Some signs of a toxic family dynamic are:
- Name-calling and other forms of bullying
- Stonewalling
- Belittling you or your accomplishments
- Gaslighting
- Invalidating your experiences and feelings
- Angry outbursts, or anger management issues
- Destruction of household or personal items
- Blackmailing
- Controlling behavior
- The crossing of personal boundaries

Criticism

These are a few of the red flags that your family is toxic. However, they aren't the only ones.

There are many signs your family is toxic. Note that every situation is unique and that every relationship with a toxic family member will look different. For some, you may experience bullying. For others, you may have undergone emotional neglect as a child or encountered things that you shouldn't have seen, such as physical violence. The bottom line is that if you feel awful about yourself around a particular family member based on their behaviors or speech, it is worth looking into the possibility that they may be toxic.

How do I heal from a toxic family dynamic as an adult?

You may be concerned that the wounds of your toxic family will be permanent. Therapy is a place where you can work through that pain and evolve from it. Your trauma is valid, but you don't have to let it fester. You can confront it in a safe space with a counselor, therapist, or family therapist, such as an LMFT (Licensed Marriage and Family Counselor). Growing up in a toxic environment or with a toxic family member can have long-lasting effects on you, your self-perception, and your self-esteem. The best thing to do as an adult is to be mindful of your needs and work to honor them. Family get-togethers may be difficult and triggering if you grew up with a toxic family member or toxic parents, so one example of honoring your own needs might be limiting the amount of get-togethers you go to or setting boundaries when you go to those get-togethers. Going to therapy is one way to heal from a childhood toxic family dynamic as an adult.

It's crucial to understand that you're in control of your own life now that you are an adult and that you can make your own decisions outside of your family. Surround yourself with supportive individuals and build a support system of friends and other chosen individuals that you feel good around. Make an effort to do the things in life that make you happy, and that makes you feel successful. Don't feel obligated to spend time around people that make you feel bad about yourself, and know that you can step away from a conversation whenever you need to, or whenever your boundaries are not being respected. You may limit the amount of time that you spend with people, or you might cut ties with family members entirely if necessary. It may sound harsh if you have a toxic family or toxic family member; after all, so many of us grew up believing that blood relation means an obligation. However, it would be best if you protect yourself. You can use your discretion and value system to determine how you

handle this situation. The most important thing is that you feel safe, physically, and emotionally.

Can having a toxic family life harm my romantic relationships?

The lasting psychological effects of this upbringing might impact your romantic relationships if you grew up around a toxic family member or any toxic environment. Toxic family members can affect your self-esteem and the way that you function in the world. You may have insecurities or wounds surrounding attachment that impact your mental health and interpersonal relationships, or you may find yourself repeating behaviors from toxic family members yourself. However, it is possible to heal and break the cycle. Working through the wounds from your toxic family member or toxic family environment will benefit your relationships for the rest of your life.

Counselor Reviews

"I had left my family when I contacted Regain with the hope of salvaging a completely broken down relationship. Bradley was allocated to us. Bradley made one step at a time, said the right things at the right time and just seemed to get in tune with us to understand what was required in order to help resolve our relationship. He worked with us about once a week at the start then going more to once every ten days in the latter part of the counseling for about six months. We have managed to resolve our differences and are looking forward to a prosperous future in a healthy relationship. Bradley has given us the tools required to make sure we can quickly identify and know how to resolve any problems arising in the future. We couldn't recommend him more. Thank you so much, Bradly and Regain!"

"She never makes one side feel like she is teamed up with the other, so her tips and advice is willingly accepted by both parties. Not only has she helped us regain perspective as a unit, but individually as well."

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Who is Sherrie Campbell?

Sherrie Campbell is a clinical psychologist and the author of various books designed to help people. One book fits well with this article, and that book is *But It's Your Family...: Cutting Ties with Toxic Family Members and Loving Yourself in the Aftermath*. The book is an account on learning to separate yourself from abusive family members and thriving afterward. This book helped many learn to cut from their toxic family, and move forward with their lives.

How Do I Set Boundaries With a Toxic Family Member?

Setting boundaries with a toxic family member, or another person, can help you keep your sanity, but how can you do it?

Be firm. Don't try to beat around the bush. Tell your family member you need to talk to them, then set the boundaries. Emphasize that these boundaries are not meant to be crossed, and then make sure your toxic family member doesn't try crossing them.

Keep repeating the boundaries, should your toxic family member try to cross them. If they bring their own boundaries, follow them as well, as long as they don't contradict your own. Some family members may make it so you can't set any boundaries.

Is the Silent Treatment Toxic?

A toxic family member may punish you by giving you the silent treatment, where they ignore you as a punishment. To them, they want you to beg for their forgiveness. This is an immature way of handling a relationship, and is something you don't want to do under any circumstances. If a family member is giving you this, don't entertain it.

When Should I Cut Ties With a Toxic Family Member?

Many of us have family members who have their problems, but we love them regardless. However, there's a limit. At some point, it may be worth it to cut ties with that family member if you want to preserve your mental health.

Here are some signs that it may be time for you to cut the ties.

- Your family member only talks to you when they have something negative to say. They never praise you or want to talk about anything else besides the negative.
- The family member is abusive, be it verbally, physically, or emotionally.
- This family member only uses you for money or another service, and doesn't put in any effort for you.
- You've tried everything, including seeking the help of a professional, and no progress has been made.
- They always cross your boundaries and invade your privacy. Having some sort of boundaries and privacy policy when you talk to your family members is important, but many of them will try to cross it. You deserve your privacy, and by sticking to your own privacy policy, it may involve cutting ties with your family. Just like a copyright, think of all rights

reserved in regards to your privacy. If someone tries taking it, take action.

What Is a Toxic Family?

A toxic family is one where your family members don't respect your boundaries. Toxic family members create an unhealthy family situation. Toxic family members also build stressful interpersonal relationships and cause mental and emotional distress.

How Do You Know If Your Family Is Toxic?

You may have been raised in a toxic family environment, but not have known it at the time. It's normal to think that your familial relationships are like everyone else's, but when you get older, you might see that you had to deal with a toxic family. The emotional abuse you suffered by growing up with toxic family members may have included:

- Physical and emotional trauma
- Sexual abuse
- Mental and emotional abuse
- Physical violence
- Toxic patterns of love then hurtful interactions
- Family toxicity
- Family members that don't respect your boundaries
- Long term interactions with a dysfunctional family
- Get a phone call or phone calls that are emotionally charged
- Dreadful holiday gatherings

If toxic family members raised you, don't feel that you are alone. There are ways that you can deal with toxic family, including measures that cut off contact with them.

How Do You Handle a Toxic Family?

It can be hard to deal with toxic family members. However, you need to feel safe in life, and it's normal to feel insecure when you are around your dysfunctional family.

There are several ways that you can deal with a toxic family. They include:

- Limited the number of long term interactions you have with your toxic family members
- Don't feel that you have to go to holiday gatherings if the family environment won't feel safe
- Look for ways to change the subject if a topic comes up that will upset toxic family members
- Put a long distance between where you live and where your toxic family members live

- Limit interpersonal relationships with toxic family
- Look for ways to change the energy when you are with toxic family members

Is it Okay to Cut Toxic Family?

It is absolutely okay to cut toxic family members out of your life. If you experience mental and emotional fatigue just being around your family, limit or cut off contact with them. If there is a history of physical violence in your family, and you don't want your children subjected to that, look for ways to keep your distance. Don't feel bad for cutting off contact with your toxic family members; they are the ones who created the family situation and emotional abuse.

Can Family Be Toxic?

Yes, family can be toxic and cause a toxic relationship. Living with toxic family can also hardship within your family situation. Toxic family can cause mental and emotional problems, emotional abuse, physical violence, long term hardship, and many other sad situations. It's normal not to want to acknowledge that your family toxicity is hurting you, but when your family members don't respect your boundaries and continue to cause your harm, you can only change the subject for so long before you realize that your family is indeed toxic.

What is Toxic Parenting?

Toxic parenting is when you cause emotional abuse or challenging interpersonal relationships with your children.

A toxic parent may not realize that they are causing emotional abuse or long term psychological damage. They also don't feel as though they are doing another wrong. In fact, a toxic parent may find ways to change the situation so that you are allegedly causing them physical distress and emotional abuse.

How Do You Tell If Someone Is Toxic?

It can be challenging to determine if someone is toxic at first, but over time you may start to realize that someone is unstable. They may act out of sorts, befriend you, then suddenly push you away, tell related stories of harmful activity against them, but then you witness them partaking in the same behaviors and many other patterns of unhealthy and toxic habits.

If you realize that you are in a toxic relationship with someone, the best thing you can do for yourself is cut off ties as soon as possible. You may think that you can change the person or that they have never been given a fair chance, but the truth is that they have a mental disorder and

will eventually find a way to hurt you. Interestingly enough, they will play the victim and accuse you of hurting them, thereby perpetuating the problems.

What Are Toxic Traits?

Toxic traits include:

- Telling a lot of stories
- Repeating stories with subtle differences each time you hear them
- Lying
- Attention seeking behaviors
- Emotional instability
- Being a victim of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse as a child
- Refusing to get help; there is nothing wrong with them, the world is wrong
- Failure to respect your boundaries but get angry when you try to cross theirs
- While this is a shortlist of toxic traits, most if not all of these can be found in toxic individuals.

Is It OK to Walk Away From Family?

Yes, it is ok to walk away from family, especially if they are causing you mental instability. Toxic family members can be cut out of your life if they refuse to change or get help. The majority of toxic families have an undiagnosed mental health condition, and they do not want to admit they need help. Instead, they blame everyone else for their issues and often think that the world is against them.

What Is a Toxic Sibling?

A toxic sibling is someone who you are related to, but that causes constant drama within your family unit. They may be selfish, say hurtful things, and wreak havoc wherever they go. If you have a toxic sibling, sometimes the only way to manage it is to cut off ties. While this can cause issues with your parents, you only need to worry about yourself and your immediate family.

II. CONCLUSION

Living with toxic family dynamics can feel overwhelming at times. It's important to know that being in a toxic family is not your fault, and it's not something you should be ashamed of. While learning where to start or where to look for help may be hard, there are resources to help you begin a journey toward healing and happiness.

How to revise an unwanted role? Here are two steps to try:

1. **Watch for familiar cues.** One common dynamic Winch sees is tension between parents and adult kids who tiptoe home for the holidays. For example, maybe you're so used to your parents' bickering that you hesitate to start a real conversation because you're already braced for them to start arguing.
2. **Ask yourself, "If I were in a different environment, how would I be behaving?" Then behave that way.** "If you were at a friend's house, what would you be talking about?" says Winch. "It might not be comfortable to go into your parents' house when you're waiting for a fight to erupt and say, 'Guess what happened to me on the plane?' But you should."

Sherman cites the meddling-mom example. "Say she starts asking a million intrusive questions," she says. "Instead of giving her attitude, try, 'Mom, you're so sweet that you always worry about me. Thank you for asking. I promise that as soon as I know, you're going to be the first person I tell.'"

Resisting your usual family dynamic is going to create fallout. "It's going to feel funny," says Winch. "It can feel tense, uncomfortable, even unsafe. Those are all [common] responses when you're changing behavior."

Truth be told, your family pattern may not change right away, even if you radically revise your own behavior. But keep at it. While you may not be able to change your family, you can definitely control your own reaction to them. And that's a positive change in itself.

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