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Survival Guide for the Holidays

By Keith Varnum

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How to Have the Most Fun Possible with Your Family!

Does your father act like an attorney, interrogating you as if you were a defendant on the witness stand? Is your mother-in-law the master of the subtle put down? Are you the roasted turkey they carved up for dinner?

You love your family—yet dread the holidays because you know that, following the usual holiday debacle, the main thing you'll be thankful for is waving goodbye to Mom and Dad, knowing you have a year to recuperate.

How do you duck the potshots coming at you about your choice of friends, lack of a career, and the way you dress, spend money or raise the kids? How do you avoid the traditional land mines of religion, politics and sex? How can you be honest with your relatives and not dig your own grave? What kind of group activities can you get the group to do that won't lead to World War III? How can play, fun and spontaneity help you run the family holiday gauntlet? How do you put on the charm—and not the pounds—at the dinner table?

Why not change those exhausting holiday dynamics by taking some helpful tips from Relationship Expert Keith Varnum?

Here are some simple strategies that will not only help you to survive the traditional family holiday visit—but actually enjoy it!

PREPARING FOR THE VISIT

The Boy Scout's motto, "Be prepared!" has never been more helpful than when going to visit the family at the holidays!

Enlist Allies

Form alliances with brothers, sisters and other relatives who are sympathetic to your plight. Agree to run interference for each other when criticism comes flying across the dinner table. Hold mock question and answer sessions with your allies to practice gracefully fending off the slings and arrows.

Prepare for Cross Examination

Get your answers ready for the questions you know are coming about sensitive or touchy subjects. Have a ready response for the inevitable "Do you have a well-paying job?" "When are you getting married?" and "Are you eating enough?"

Know Who You're Dealing With

Brief yourself and your date/friend on the idiosyncrasies of your crazy uncle, your uptight aunt, your paranoid father, your over-protective mother, your bully cousin and the off-the-wall personal inquiries from the young kids in your family. Realize that holiday gatherings are a time bomb waiting to go off. A year's worth of pent up, unresolved tension and miscommunication show up at the holiday dinner table. Don't become collateral damage!

Neutralize the Opposition

The best defense is a good offense. Develop questions to ask that you can come back with to throw off your detractors. Lead the conversation into constructive, supportive and "safe" realms by subtly shifting the focus of the dialogue with a quick response from a "family-friendly" perspective.

Recognize Rivalries

Be on the lookout for subterranean rivalries between brothers, sisters and other relatives that might rear their ugly heads during dinner conversations. With lightness and humor, dance around the landmines of old grievances and competitiveness.

Defuse Hot Buttons

Before the visit, email, write or call your parents with carefully worded personal background information that will calm your folks' fears and pet peeves about you and your date or friend.

Create an Exit Strategy

Warn your family that your stay might be cut short. Come up with some good, socially acceptable reasons why you have to leave early. Have several backup exit plans ready to execute on short notice. Be real about how long you can handle being with your relatives. It's better to share fun and love with your family for a few hours—than boredom and hard feelings for a few days.

Set Realistic Goals

Shoot for simply "surviving" the visit, rather than trying to get everyone to like you and approve of your lifestyle. Better to leave doors open to future communication than to burn bridges with the older generations. Some new attitudes and social customs take the folks a few years of repeated exposure to become comfortable with. Many parents suffer from Chronic Cultural Shock Syndrome.

SURVIVING THE VISIT

"Be of good cheer, the end is near!" You only have to dodge the bullets of family expectations once a year—and you don't have to stay any longer than you can keep on top of the ruckus. Be light-hearted, playful and flexible—and enjoy the family circus as much as you can!

Creative Question Answering

You don't have to answer the question that is being asked! Subtly shift your answer to their question into a response concerning a related, but different question—one that you're willing to answer. For tips on how to answer the question you prefer, listen carefully to interviews with politicians and celebrities.

Take the Fifth

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If you don't feel capable of safely answering a question, tell them you're not clear enough on the situation to give them a response right now. If they don't let you off the hook, develop a bladder emergency or "accidentally" spill your drink on yourself. Watch cocktail party scenes in old movies for skillful hints on how to escape any interrogation in a socially acceptable way.

Turn the Question Around

When someone asks you a question you don't want to answer, simply ask them the same—or similar—question back. Or respond with a totally different question—especially about a subject that you know excites them. React in any way that will throw them off the track. To pull off this tactic, you have to use subtle skill. Add a dash of playfulness or humor and you'll get away with it.

Take the Japanese Diplomatic Approach

If you can't wholeheartedly agree with what someone is saying, you can respond in the spirit of the famous Japanese phrase, "Ah—So." This diplomatic response translates literally into: "So it would appear." Without compromising your integrity, you can respond to almost any relative's narrow-minded statement with: "I can see how you can see it that way" or "I understand how you feel."

Get Your Stories Straight

Make sure you and your date/friend are giving everyone the same information about the same topics. Some relatives have nothing better to do than compare notes on what's been said.

Be Consistent

"This is my story, and I'm sticking to it." Make sure all the facts fit what your family knows about the rest of your life. The "consistency police" are usually on full alert at family gatherings.

Honesty is the Safest Policy

Eventually, inaccuracies and cover-ups tend to surface over time, so being truthful—to the degree that you can—will serve you in

the long run. Study the pronouncements of politicians to learn how to express the truth in the most vague—and least risky or offensive—way.

Choose Your Words Carefully

Certain words act as trigger mechanisms activating touchy egos, raw nerves, old wounds and painful memories. Use neutral, generic words with hypersensitive relatives. Avoid overly specific or graphic religious, political, racial and sexual references. With some relatives, the generation gap can be as wide and deep as the Grand Canyon.

Put Yourself in Your Parents' Shoes

In the privacy of your own mind, see if you can relate to what your parents' perspective might be about a given subject and adjust your response to allow the possibility of their point of view—however rigid, shallow or intolerant it might seem to you.

Pick an Agreement

Find something that you can authentically appreciate about every member of the family, and, if possible, compliment them on that aspect of their lives.

Take Mental Health Breaks

Take strategic time outs when you feel you're reaching your limit of being able to cope with family judgement and scrutiny. Go to the bathroom and splash water on your face. Go outside. Get a breath of fresh air on the porch or patio. Take a short walk and let the singing birds remind you that someone's having a good time today!

Volunteer to Get Lost

Volunteer for errands and duties that will get you out of the house and out of the line of fire. Disappear into the kitchen to wash the dishes. Empty the garbage. Go out to pick up something at the store. Give someone a ride. These chores buy you brownie points and at the same time give you the freedom and space to blow off steam from the pressure cooker of family get-togethers. Use the time to re-group and recharge your batteries.

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Play Social Director

Suggest specific activities that allow everyone to happily interact—however superficial or contrived it might have to be. Group games, home videos, family album, tree decorating. Remember, the goal is a good time for all, not the spiritual enlightenment of your relatives!

Tap the Power of Humor

Wherever you see an opening, use humor, play, laughter and fun to keep the festivities light and flowing. The holidays are, after all, holy days—time to be spent celebrating the joy of togetherness and the love that connects you with your family and friends.

GOOD LUCK!

Drawing from the wisdom of native and ancient spiritual traditions, Keith Varnum shares his 30 years of practical success as an author, personal coach, acupuncturist, filmmaker, radio host, restaurateur, vision quest guide and international seminar leader (The Dream Workshops). Keith helps people get the love, money and health they want with his FREE "Prosperity Ezine" at www.TheDream.com.

It is that time of year again...

By Dove

It is that time of year again... by Dove

It is that time of year again, and the holidays are right around the corner. There is that sweater that you have to get for Dad, the special scarf for Aunt Martha, cookies to bake, lights need to be put up, decorate the tree, office Christmas party, so many things to do and so little time.

This is such a wonderful, joyous time of year for most people, but there are still those that find this the most lonely and depressing season of all. It is said that more suicides occur during the holidays due to depression and loneliness. Do you know of someone that is single and alone, no family to share the holidays? Invite them to share the holidays with you and your family, gather friends for dinner or a party. There are so many reasons for all of us to be thankful for at this time of year and above all we must remember what the season represents. It has become so commercialized in the last few decades that we forget that, YES, it is a time for celebration, but not of giving and receiving gifts; it is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

As the holidays rapidly approach, some find that loneliness and depression takes over their lives. STOP! No pity parties this year, do something for someone else, volunteer your time, go to your local homeless shelter and work the serving line, fulfill a needy child's Christmas wish, visit the elderly in a

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nursing home. The rewards and gratification you will receive from your outpouring will wash away the depression and the sadness you feel for you are giving of yourself unselfishly.

Here is a thought, look in your closet, is there a coat you don't wear anymore.....donate it, do you have some extra cash, a christmas bonus maybe, donate to your local foodbank, be fruitful this season, share what you have and even what you don't have, for the greatest give of all is love, and whatever you do this season, you have love to give and to share, spread it near and far and watch as the angels shine down upon you and fill your heart with joy. YOU, can be the light in someone else's life this year and in turn you may find the light in yours. Sad and lonely as this time of year may be for some, remember, there are those that have far less than you, and the sadness that fills their lives is the lack of daily survival necessities. Give hilariously, laugh in the face of sadness for happiness and joy comes from sharing with others. Share your heart and your love and whatever else you can give, for whatever you give, you will get in return.

"We not only live among men, but there are airy hosts, blessed spectators, sympathetic lookers-on, that see and know and appreciate our thoughts and feelings and acts."

Henry Ward Beecher

Happy Holidays To All and may the blessings of the season fill your life, your heart and your home.

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