

4 Questions to Help Husbands Deal With Their In-Laws

Your mother-in-law is on the phone asking if she can visit. She sounds excited, but you feel sick even thinking about it.

You get a bad vibe from one of the uncles on her side of the family, and you don't like how he talks to your kids. Every time you get together with your wife's family, you notice that nobody says anything real. It's just surface or sarcastic or passive-aggressive, and you're tired of it.

Does any of this sound familiar? The old joke is that you didn't just marry your wife; you married her whole family. And family dynamics, particularly when dealing with the in-laws, can get complicated in a hurry. How do you know when to speak or what to say? When to say, "Yes," to a visit and when to say, "Not this time?"

No answer is going to fit every family and every situation. For example, there is a big difference between interacting with in-laws who are annoying but harmless and those who are abusive or dangerous.

Consequently, different circumstances require different choices.

Here are four questions—in order of priority—to help you think it through. Balance these elements, and you'll be on your way to a better discussion and better decisions.

1. What serves your wife? At All Pro Dad, we have made the point that your wife comes first. Good husbanding is about loving and serving your wife. So what serves *her* best as you think about her parents? Does she need protection or distance from an abusive father? Does she long for closer connection with her mom? Does she flourish when she's back

home for the holidays? Rather than thinking about your own interests and agenda first, what serves your wife's needs and desires the best?

2. What serves your family? Next, consider your family unit: your wife, your marriage and your kids. Wise husbands know they have spheres of responsibility that spread outward. Do your kids prosper around their grandparents? Is there something unique happening in the life of your family that means it is best not to have more stress in your household for a season? When answering this question, it is critical that husbands not make unilateral decisions that will leave their wife behind, nursing hurt or alienated feelings. Instead, have an open discussion together that balances your competing priorities.

3. What serves your in-laws? Wise husbands also consider the needs of their in-laws. Is what you want to say *for their benefit* or is it just to vent your frustration? Have you considered the ways your family might be able to bless them with access to your household? Are there ways your wife legitimately needs to care for the needs of her aging parents? If you have kids of your own, one day *you* are likely to be the in-law parents. How would you like to be treated when the time comes? Go and do likewise.

4. What serves your needs? You are an important part of your family. Self-sacrifice is important, but so is self-care. Some husbands are overly domineering, but some don't speak up enough. Is it hugely draining for you to be around your in-laws? Have you spent every vacation for the last 10 years with her family, and now it's time to try something different? Are you trying to encourage a healthy relationship that moves beyond familiar passive-aggressive dynamics? Choose your words with care and love, and then speak. It's a vital part of caring for yourself and your family.

The answers to each of these questions are important. Every

family and every decision will require different balance. But answering these questions in order can help you navigate your priorities.

When was a time you wished you handled things different with your in-laws? {eoa}

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