

9 Terrible Ideas to Avoid If You Want a Conflict-Free Christmas

If you are hosting a large group of family members at your home this Thanksgiving or Christmas, you want it to be a special and memorable holiday. Unfortunately, these annual gatherings can often bring out the worst in families. Old hurts can be rekindled and relationships can suffer.

INFO for Families consulted with a panel of relationship experts to learn what you can do to avoid emotional complications this year. We heard their advice and found it to be full of obvious platitudes most people can figure out on our own. So, we rejected their counsel and made up our own list of nine tips for imperfect and normal families like yours. (If you try these, please take pictures for the rest of us to enjoy.)

1. Before your guests arrive, take the time to carefully consider the different perspectives that others in your family have. Only then can you fully appreciate how inane their ridiculous opinions are.
2. Instead of dividing family members into the proverbial “big table” and “kids’ table” segments, scatter chairs and TV trays through every room of your house so each person can dine in silence and solitude.
3. If, however, you are a traditionalist and feel obligated to host everyone at a large table, make some “table talk” cards with questions like: “Which candidate did you vote for, the lying felon or the womanizing bigot? Ponder this, but keep your thoughts to yourself.”
4. Don’t correct, discipline or even comment on the behavior

of anyone else's kids. Whoever said "It takes a village" also said "Keep your mouth shut at gatherings of extended family."

5. If you need to work through a conflict with your in-laws, don't talk about it. Instead, challenge them to a battle of strength like arm wrestling or kickboxing. (I can usually take my mother-in-law in four or five rounds of traditional jiu-jitsu.)

6. For the single adults in your family, who often get upset when asked about their future prospects for marriage, go the extra mile by surprising them with a blind date/potential mate of your choosing. They will surely appreciate the gesture. (For an extra-special Christmas gift, a one-month subscription to eHarmony would be a nice touch.)

7. If you begin to feel your emotions rising due to a particular issue or a difficult relative, give yourself a little personal space. I recommend the Caribbean.

8. Because memories can be filled with painful emotions, don't ever talk about the past. Keep conversations centered on shallow and entirely meaningless current events. Like the Kardashians.

9. Finally, if your family is made up of a high percentage of crazy people, you might consider changing your name and moving to a different country. If you have an opportunity to enter the witness protection program, you should definitely take advantage of it.

A More Realistic Suggestion

Let's face the truth: Nothing can fully eliminate the potential conflicts that might arise when big families come together. The awful advice in this list probably won't work in most cases.

We love our families, and we can always hope and pray that

this year's holiday will be filled with peace, joy and precious new memories. Perhaps the best way to make that happen is by basking in the grace God offers us and then choosing as an act of our will to offer that same grace to our families.

It also might help to lower the bar on our holiday expectations for our imperfect and normal families. If we are hoping things will go perfectly (even if they never have before) we are probably setting ourselves up for failure.

Finally, as your family holiday gathering draws closer, ask God to show you exactly what it looks like for you to obey His command in Rom. 12:18. Paul writes: "If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men." Let's cast aside our excuses and our need to be right and do whatever we must do to have a peaceful, conflict-free family gathering this year.

And if you decide to forget it all and instead head for the Caribbean, let us know. We might want to come with you. {eoa}

*Adapted from , a ministry founded by **Barrett and Jenifer Johnson**. After serving in the local church for 25 years, Barrett and Jenifer launched INFO for Families as a ministry designed to encourage people through speaking, personal coaching and resource development. Barrett worked for 15 years in youth ministry before serving for eight years as the family minister at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta, one of the largest churches in the South. He has degrees from Texas A&M University and Southwestern Seminary, but he and Jenifer have received their best education through the no-holds-barred nature of everyday family life.*