

*Restoring harmony when it comes to relationships with in-laws.*

There are a lot of jokes about in-laws, but there aren't a lot of resources on how to navigate through the intricacies of this important issue for families. I've put together some ideas for all parties involved: the adult child, the spouse, and the parents.

For the adult child:

1. Be patient with your spouse in developing a relationship with your family. Remember you've had a lifetime of adjusting yourself to their quirks and idiosyncrasies. You love them because they're your parents; your spouse needs the freedom and flexibility to adjust to your family members and may not be as tolerant of their behavior as you are.
2. Present your spouse in the best light possible when talking with your family. They're usually already on your side because of being related. If you complain to them about your spouse because you've just had a fight, guess who's going to look like the bad guy? You may get over your anger at your spouse, but your family only remembers the bad things you said. If you do bad mouth your spouse, then you'll have to be the one who sets your family straight on the status of your relationship.
3. Don't expect your spouse's experience with any of your family members to be different than your's. If your dad is generally a grumpy old man, don't blame your spouse for his behavior.

For the spouse:

Be realistic about the kind of relationship your in-laws are capable of. Some families are open and receptive to all kinds of newcomers, including in-laws. Other families are closed and exclusive when it comes to outsiders. Many families fall between these two extremes. The more realistic you are with your expectations, the less disappointment you'll experience.

One way you can show love and respect to your spouse is by being accepting of his or her family. Some families are easier than others,

As a couple (adult child and spouse):

Early on in your relationship, the two of you need to negotiate how much time and energy you should spend with your extended families. It's no different than other aspects of marriage like finances, sex, children, parenting, free time, etc. Like those other areas, it's a learning process. You may make mistakes and so might your families. It's important to remember that the only rules are to take care of your marriage and to work together as a team when it comes to your families. If this has been a sore spot in your relationship, it's never too late to start working together on this and changing how you relate to one another's families.

Finally, for parents of married children:

Give your child and their spouse space and time to figure out their relationship with one another and with you. Be patient with the process. They've never been married and you've never had to share them.

If your relationship with your child's spouse is strained, back off. Putting pressure on your child or on his or her spouse never works. The strain may have to do with you, it may have to do with their marriage, it may have to do with circumstances you don't know about. The best you can do is to show your love and support through accepting your child and his or her spouse as a team and that may mean honoring their distance.