

Anticipating Difficult Holiday Interactions

Holidays often put you in contact with people who might be difficult to get along with, leading towards a common psychological problem we'll call "holiday dread." Often, these interactions will be minimal compared to the many pleasant times of the day, but it is common for people to magnify their importance, so that just thinking about what may happen affects their mood for days or even weeks before a holiday gathering. This worksheet can help minimize the impact of dealing with difficult people at holiday events.

See if you recognize any of these behaviors and if you do, fill in the blanks with the appropriate names.*

_____ will talk about himself/herself and will show no interest in you.

_____ will be sarcastic and aggressive and will try to pick a fight.

_____ will be critical and is sure to say something negative about you.

_____ seems to hold something against you and won't even acknowledge your presence.

_____ will flirt with you inappropriately.

_____ will bring up topics of conversation that will make you uncomfortable.

_____ will be so obsessed with his/her children that you will feel ignored and unimportant.

_____ will look for some way to bully you and make you feel small.

_____ will control the conversation and will dismiss your opinions.

**Note: Keep this worksheet in a private place where people who might be offended won't see it and/or use fictitious names that only mean something to you.*

Most people find that if they are ready for these problems with some simple solutions, even the most difficult interactions are not so bad. When dealing with difficult people at a holiday gathering you can:

- Excuse yourself and walk away.
- Smile and listen while breathing calmly to relax.
- Think positive things about yourself.
- Change the subject of the conversation.
- State your feelings in a non-aggressive way.
- Interact with someone else.
- Be empathetic and think about why the person is acting this way.
- Take the high road, and remain tolerant, kind, and respectful.

Above all, be prepared. Use the next page to anticipate the difficult interactions that may occur and the positive responses you can make.

Fill in the blanks for at least three difficult interactions that you anticipate may occur. Be as specific as possible. Make sure that your planned responses are positive and will not make you or someone else feel worse. *If you feel that can improve future interactions with a friend or family member, you may want to schedule a time to work on your relationship at another time. Holidays events are rarely a good time to work out long-standing relationship problems.*

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