

Relationships & Marriage - Relating to In-laws

Worried about offending your in-laws? You should be. It is very important to maintain a positive relationship with in-laws, as you will likely be hanging out with them at various events/holidays for the rest of their lives. But, is it alright to set limits with them? Sure. Here are some keys to success: **1)** Be sure that you as a couple agree on the issue to be confronted and that the issue is really worth risking possible tension/strife in the relationship (depending on how your in-laws deal with conflict); **2)** The partner who is directly related to the parents does the confronting (although there are rare exceptions to this rule); **3)** The confronter confidently speaks for him/herself or for the couple as a “we”- that means the confronter does not in any way blame or put the confrontation on his/her spouse. The confronter says something like, “Dad, we appreciate it when you visit. But, when you say/do things like, ‘fill in the blank with the words/behavior you are confronting’ it makes us feel ‘fill in the feeling (e.g., sad, mad, hurt, bad, humiliated)’ and so we’d appreciate it if you would stop saying/doing that on future visits.” If the confrontation is about how one of your children are being treated (and they are too young to defend themselves), say, ‘We don’t feel safe/comfortable with...’; **4)** Remember that as long as you confront in a loving way, you are not responsible for the reaction of your in-laws. You need not apologize or back down, even if they distance themselves for a time or gossip about you to other family members. If you have trouble confronting your parents on behalf of your family, take a look at the boundaries you grew up with. This fear usually results from emotional caretaking for a parent, which will prevent you from fully cleaving to your spouse. Your first loyalty must be to your spouse- you are one flesh, and when one of you is hurt by in-laws, you are both wounded. You must act accordingly to draw limits on certain behaviors (e.g., repeated disparaging verbal comments toward your family members or expectations for constant help/favors), or you will jeopardize the connection between you and your mate.