

Succeeding With The In-Laws

The most famous relatives are in-laws?

Most of us have heard mother-in-law jokes. Almost in self-defence some married people proclaim “*I have a great mother-in-law.*”

While the husband/mother-in-law relationship is the target for many jokes, it is more often the case that the real tension is between the wife and the husband’s mother.

Emotional competition for the son/husband can play havoc with an otherwise good marriage.

If your relationship between your in-laws is open and sound, give God thanks for His special gift to you.

If on the other hand this in-law relationship is somewhat clouded, here are some ways to promote harmony and love all round.

- Take a positive optimistic view of your in-law relationships.
- Open up lines of communication. Find the courage to say “*our relationship is less than it could be, and I want it to be better.*”
- Recognise the importance of your partner’s family to him or her. Plan enjoyable visits with them – ignoring in-laws will only increase the friction between you.
- Consider traditions of your partner’s family and how best to handle them. Special dinner, vacation preferences, times of gift exchanges, etc.
- Keep your in-laws high on your friendship list. Treat them with the same respect you would give to your own extended family and friends.
- When your in-laws show an interest in some area of your life and give advice, thank them for their concern and if it is good advice, follow it.
- Keep in mind that if your in-laws seem overly anxious about your affairs, it could be that they are really concerned for your welfare and are not trying to interfere. Give them the benefit of the doubt.
- Run your own household, take advice for sure, but let it be kindly known that you will make the final decisions. Agree between yourselves to discuss input from relatives, but allow your mate equal input before decision time.
- Focus on the positive qualities you see in your in-laws and consider their special needs.
- Keep visits to in-laws reasonably short. Be thoughtful, courteous, helpful and don’t just drop in. Be sure to visit at a convenient time for them, calling ahead and send thank-you notes afterwards.
- Accept your in-laws as they are. Treat them as you would want them to treat you.
- Your mother-in-law has been close to your spouse for many years, so recognise that the process of separation may be painful.
- Give in-laws time to adjust to the fact that you are now a married couple with intimate ties.

- If you want to give advice to in-laws, wait until they ask for it. If you offer a suggestion, remember it is just that, a suggestion. Don't be offended if they don't follow it.
- When you and your spouse have disagreements, never discuss them with your in-laws or with your own family.
- Don't quote your own family or hold them up as models to your spouse for this will make your spouse feel defensive.
- You are probably protective and concerned about your parents. You must also accept your spouse's concern for his or her own family. This is natural and normal.
- Avoid possible conflict with your in-laws by not discussing some areas that are the breeding ground for tension.

Some typical areas of tension can be:

Time – how it is spent and with whom.

Children – how many and how soon.

Discipline – how much and what kind.

Lifestyle – family holidays, reunions, who is involved, where and for how long.

What are the needs that your parents have at this point in their lives? Could you or your spouse help fulfil any of them?

Remember, regardless of your parents' age, they still are looking for love, honour and respect from you.

If they are looking for childhood obedience, they are wrong in expecting it. After you assume adult responsibilities, you are no longer obligated to childhood form of obedience.

Finally, be patient. If there are problems, focus on what your parents are doing right and ask God for wisdom in dealing with the problems.

Ruth 1:16 [NIV] *“But Ruth replied, “Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”*

This is what Ruth said to her own mother-in-law, and that is the way it should be. Relatives should have the privilege of feeling that they belong.

As you love them you are showing love to your own partner.

Succeeding with in-laws is a challenge.

But every effort made on your part will be well worth it.