



## **‘Making Nice’ with Your In-Laws**

By Leslie Becker-Phelps, PhD

Like all adults, your spouse’s connection with their parents runs deep. This is true whether your in-laws interact daily or have little contact; and whether they get along well, are emotionally distant, or tensions run high. So, their relationship affects your spouse, which means that it affects you and your marriage, too.

While your relationship with your spouse is primary, the dynamic between you and your in-laws is also important. Your marriage will fare best when your relationship with them supports your spouse’s position. For instance, you might want to be close with your in-laws if your husband enjoys a good relationship with them. If his parents tend to be critical, then you will want to be more supportive of him and do what you can to avoid him feeling that you side with them. However, family dynamics can get complicated so it’s important to communicate well with your spouse and navigate these relationships together.

In addition to generally trying to work together, consider the tips below to help you get along with your in-laws:

***Learn from experience:*** Pay attention to your spouse’s family to help you gain insight into their dynamics. With an awareness of how family issues affect your spouse, you may find that you have greater empathy and compassion for the struggles you see between them and their parents.

When there is tension between your spouse and your in-laws, it can help to understand the parents’ perspective, even as you support your spouse. You can use this insight to help your spouse make sense of the situation. Just be careful to share it *only* when asked. Otherwise, your spouse might feel like you don’t understand or support their position.

***Enjoy time with your in-laws:*** You can strengthen your relationship by sharing good times and happy memories. Make plans with your in-laws based on your relationship with them. This might include you doing things with them alone or only in the company of your spouse. You might also want to limit your time or the activities that you do together.

***Be genuine and positive:*** The more you have an honest appreciation and respect for each other, the more likely you will get along – even when there are real differences or you

don't feel emotionally close. You can nurture positive feelings by finding shared interests and avoiding conflicts.

*Always be respectful:* This is a good policy even when you don't approve of their beliefs, behaviors, or lifestyle. However, there may be limits to what you are willing to tolerate. You and your spouse may decide to have little or no contact with your in-laws if you find the relationship to be toxic.

***Be a united front:*** When your in-laws' behaviors are unacceptable, be sure that you and your spouse are united in your response. Be calm and clear as you express decisions, expectations, and boundaries that you've both agreed upon ahead of time.

No matter how difficult the relationship with your in-laws may get, it's important that you and your spouse do your best to stay on the same "team." By supporting each other every step along the way, the two of you will at least continue to feel good about your marriage as you manage this painfully difficult relationship.