

Why Holiday Visits With Family Can Go So Poorly

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Ah, tis the season for perfect holiday families and wonderful relationships - at least that's what all the holiday television shows, magazine stories and advertising images try to show.

Unfortunately, the reality is that most families are less than perfect, holiday visits often bring some conflict, and for many people just thinking of the holiday family visit means lots of anxiety and stress.

While there's no magic cure for family issues, it often helps to understand the sources of the stress you may be feeling about an upcoming holiday family visit.

One common problem is that you've become someone different. Parents, siblings and other family members may still be carrying images of the younger you. They may still see you as that little kid or immature teen you were years ago. They can't see how you've developed, changed and matured. It can be annoying when others can't recognize the changes that have made you the person you are today.

Another source of anxiety can be when you haven't met family expectations. Perhaps there's been a job loss, financial problems or a relationship that ended badly. It can feel difficult and awkward to go back home knowing you're not the success your family expected you to be.

Old, unhealed wounds are a common source of potential problems. A holiday visit can rekindle memories of stressful times, awkward relationships or an unhappy childhood. Family arguments or misunderstandings can start all over again.

While you can't just make these potential sources of stress disappear, the holiday family visit can be easier by simply recognizing that the stress you're feeling is a very normal reaction. Think about and try to understand why your upcoming visit seems stressful, then try to find ways to minimize such feelings. Maybe it means avoiding certain situations or people, or simply accepting that you're not going to have a constantly wonderful time with everyone.

Look for people to see and things to do during your visit that will make it more enjoyable. Spend more time in those areas and less time in the trouble spots. In awkward situations, use the cell phone excuse ("Oops, I forgot I have to call Bob by 4...") to walk away from potential problems.

And if you find that the whole trip is really going to be significantly traumatic, consider avoiding the visit completely. Don't let old problems ruin your current holiday enjoyment.
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