

# Happier Holidays with Uncle Harry

## Managing Holiday Stress when Visitors Come to Town



The holidays are about family get-togethers—and sometimes with family members we would rather, well, go another year before seeing them again.

### Reducing Conflict Is Possible

Are your family holiday gatherings sometimes a bit stressful, with personalities that rub each other the wrong way? If so, try the following ideas to help you enjoy the season a bit more and possibly look forward to getting everyone together again next year.

### Begin with a Positive Mind-set

Expect your best year ever. Such an attitude can create momentum for a positive experience, enabling you to detach from negativity, mishaps, and little slights and snubs in conversations with family members.

This year, refuse to allow your “buttons to be pushed.” Rehearse new responses to predictable interactions you might experience from loved ones who get under your skin—and do it six or seven times, as an actor would so it sticks.

If Aunt Flo criticizes your choice of pumpkin pie filling, saying that Trader Joe’s brand is much better, instead of allowing yourself to respond on autopilot, thank her for the tip.

### Use “Perfection” as a Guide for Success, Not a Measure

If you are planning the picture-perfect holiday family experience, go for it! However, remember, every family experiences interpersonal annoyances and conflicts.

Accept your family members as they are and keep the big picture in mind. More positive memories are likely to follow with your broader focus. Use your vision as a guideline, but don’t make it a litmus test

with degrees of perfection measuring whether your get-together was successful.

### Set a Time for Group Cleanup

Although family members are guests in your home, that doesn’t mean they can’t pitch in to help put your house back in order at the end of the visit.

Try a colossal pickup party, and have fun doing it with all hands on deck.

Ask everyone to spend 20 minutes participating in one big, rousing, music-supported, cleaning extravaganza. Divvy up all the chores—vacuuming, laundry, dusting, dishes, the works. Humans are “hard wired” for this sort of teamwork, and you will marvel at the positivity.

### Leave Politics at the Door

We aren’t far away from the next national election, so politics may be at the top of everyone’s mind.

If you like conflict, dive in, but to avoid stress and hard feelings, and to prevent dessert from being ruined, recognize that strong opinions of family members probably differ and can cause severe conflict.

Sports and the food served are safe go-to discussion topics. Rope in a few trusted family members and assign them to steer conversation away from unpleasant topics when they arise.

### Don’t Leave Great Memories to Chance

Plan interactive and enjoyable group activities before your family guests arrive that hold promise for becoming fond memories in the future. Will everyone head out to see holiday lights and grab a pizza, take a hike, visit the city, or play family games?

Be deliberate. Don’t let fun be an accident or a hoped-for outcome of your get-together.

Plan something fun for the family. It could be a session of karaoke, an indoor game, or a family quiz.

A family walk or an outdoor game will help everyone feel energized. Try a new hiking location no has been to yet. Make a family photo album of the event.

### Stay in the Giving Mode

Will someone remember to give you that special perfume from New York’s finest perfume store, Aedes de Venustas? After all, you have dropped hints about it all year. How will you feel if you don’t get it?

Instead of worrying about what you’re getting, stay in the giving mode during the holiday season, and make it about others to reduce disappointments and ensure fond memories.

### Include a Non-family Member as a Buffer

It works. If you’re worried about bickering and personality clashes, try bringing a neighbor or friend to dinner.

When strangers are present, relatives often avoid conflicts and exercise more self-restraint.



Holiday gatherings often bring loads of stress, but with these “survival strategies,” the time can be more enjoyable.

Stay focused on the true meaning of the holidays, and be grateful for the family you have.

**Happy Holidays!**