

Marriage & Family

Dealing with the Stereotypical In-Law

- A. Seek approval. If you aren't married yet, seek the approval of your parents and your spouse's parents for your marriage. If you have their approval, you're more likely to have their long-term support.

- B. Know what to call them. Ask your in-laws what they would like you to call them. Some might prefer that you call them Mom and Dad, but others might prefer you call them by their first names. Finding this out will help you feel more comfortable with one another.

- C. Get your own place. Some couples, for one reason or another, decide to start their married lives together by living with one set of parents. This rarely works out well. It may be difficult both for you and the parents with whom you are living. Having your own place is a crucial step toward independence and marital happiness.

- D. Be independent together. You are beginning your own nuclear family. You and your spouse should make your own decisions regarding such issues as schooling, finances, children, and employment. Asking your parents or in-laws for advice is okay, but make sure you and your spouse make the final decisions together.

- E. Set boundaries together. When you get married, it's a good idea for you and your spouse to set boundaries so that in-laws are clear about your time and privacy limits. This may involve a discussion of how often and how long you visit each other's families, whether it's okay for them to drop by your home unannounced, or whether weekly family dinners together are too much. Politely lettering your parents know how you feel will help them know when and how often they're welcome in your new home. *Also, it's important that each of you present your ideas directly to your own parents.*

- F. Share some activities. Identify some social and/or recreational activities that both you and your in-laws enjoy. Doing some things with your in-laws will help you get to know them better and feel more comfortable with them.

- G. Appreciate them. Be sure to thank your in-laws for anything they do for you, including being the parents of the spouse you love.

- H. Avoid financial puppetry. Remember that financial support from in-laws often has some strings attached, and you may end up feeling like they're using those strings to manipulate you. Know what strings, if any, are attached to their support, and abide by those expectations, or don't accept the money.

- I. Focus on their strengths. As with all relationships, it's always best not to focus on the negatives. Accept any differences that exist, and look for positive attributes.

Material comes from the *Alabama Marriage Handbook*, 28-29.

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