

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS AT FAMILY GATHERINGS

Though we would love to find serenity and complete unity when we get together with our families, unfortunately, it isn't always that way. It's often the opposite...it can become a war of words and actions. We may feel intense, anxious, hyper-vigilant, and oversensitive. Before stepping into our family gatherings, pausing, taking a minute and asking our Higher Power for the grace to use the Al-Anon program tools is important to prevent such stress occurring.

Easy Does It

Taking care of ourselves involves staying connected to our Higher Power, saying the Serenity Prayer, planning our days one day at a time, doing our daily readings, taking some exercise, having enough sleep, eating well, getting to a meeting and contacting our sponsor. One of the leading causes of stress is that we try to complicate matters. Keep it simple and HALT.

Let It Begin With Me

Remembering that we are powerless over other people, places and things is the key to keeping the focus on ourselves. Our personal needs ought to come first in order to maintain our serenity. It is vital to find the balance between the 'care of one's self' and taking 'care of others'. We can take a little time out from family responsibilities to rest and relax without feeling guilty. We may find a loving friend or relative to give us a hug if needed; or we can find some program friends with whom to spend quality time.

First Things First

These occasions are not about problem solving, family issues can be dealt with at another time. Choosing how we are going to feel and act, by deciding before any issues start to pile up, helps us from becoming slaves to old memories and behaviours. When that opportunity to disagree comes along, having the courage to say, 'I'm so sorry we have a conflict' is far easier.

Having & Maintaining Boundaries

Having boundaries in place prevent us from reverting to former harmful family or childhood roles. By knowing and expressing our personal limitations we can release unspoken expectations by sharing them with our families. We can still maintain our boundaries even when we are under pressure and there is a lot of stress around, by finding out what each member wants and needs during the time spent together; this includes household chores, gift giving, planning for outings and organising special events.

Progress, Not Perfection

It is not our total responsibility to please everyone; we don't have to create the perfect family occasion, or do all the work ourselves. We can say 'no' or 'enough' if we choose to. Other family members can be involved in sharing the work load and responsibilities of shopping, cooking, laundry and cleaning. If there is no cooperation or unity we can also 'let go and let God' to avoid getting angry or building up resentments.

Let Go And Let God

No matter how well we plan ahead, anything can go awry but assuming a positive attitude and acquiring a realistic perspective helps. Learning to stop, take a few deep breaths in the midst of a debacle and handing over the situation to our Higher Power opens a world of opportunities for us to grow and show others an invaluable attitude towards living. Instead of becoming reactive and hastily assuming the worst when problems arise, simply creating a pause allows God into the planning and unlocks our creativity and serenity.

Detachment

If we are going to be spending a lot of time with family, we can be intentional about building in breaks. This can be a special time for families to be together, but we don't need to overdo it. We don't have to deal alone with an alcoholic loved one, there are others to help. When there is excessive drinking, or we feel uncomfortable with the family dynamics, we can choose to 'let go and let God'. If something that's nasty or negative heads our way, we can step aside, and let it roll right off us. We have the option to detach; maybe by leaving the company, reading a book, going for a walk, taking a nap or going shopping. Then we can turn our attention back to the program and the serenity within us.

Our Common Welfare Should Come First

In order to prevent resentments we can avoid fighting, provoking, insisting on having the last word and being right. Instead we can allow others to go before us and give a bit of ourselves in order to promote harmony within our families. We can try to emphasize and celebrate the good, forgetting everything else for the time that we are together.

Live and Let Live

It may be beneficial for step-families to meet on neutral ground and to include every family member possible. Keeping a good attitude helps avoid conflict.

Just For Today

Whenever we encounter conflict, we can remind ourselves to be grateful for the gift of this special time together. We may ask God to help us as we let go of our own agendas and live in the present moment, one day, or one moment at a time. We could concentrate on being together, and use our time well in each other's company while letting go of the stress of figuring out our plans and decide to accept and be content with what we're doing.

Think

Thinking before we speak is another way of practising the AI-Anon program. Making a list of 'topics to avoid' before we meet together may be useful. Some safe topics are the recent news events, the weather, sports, gardening and the other person's interests. God gave us two ears and one mouth. We can use our words to help others feel good about themselves.

Acceptance

By accepting the reality of where we are and what is happening around us helps us to stay present and grateful. Acceptance does not mean submission to a degrading situation. It means accepting the fact of a situation, and then deciding what we will do about it. Acceptance simply means that there are things we cannot change. Avoiding all reactive behaviour and attitudes empowers us to become peacemakers.

There But For the Grace of God

Being prepared to let go of what hurts or upsets us can help us appreciate God's grace more; we can remember the many times we've messed up in life and been forgiven. Reading our gratitude lists of past victories can restore our serenity.

How Important Is It?

Building good relationships and creating happy memories with our families is of great importance to us, therefore we can try to keep a sense of perspective and decide what really matters. We can set aside our worries, irritations, and judgements and try to forgive so that we might truly enjoy our time together.