

# 15 In-Law Holiday Survival Tips

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**Nicholas Aretakis is a top-selling author whose newest book is *Ditching Mr. Wrong: How to End a Bad Relationship and Find Mr. Right* (Next Stage Press, 2008).**

### ***Nicholas Aretakis--***

Spending the holiday with new in-laws--or potential in-laws--is bound to be a minefield of faux pas, etiquette missteps, and eggshell moments. If you make an effort to get along with your new in-laws, however, your loved one will love you even more.

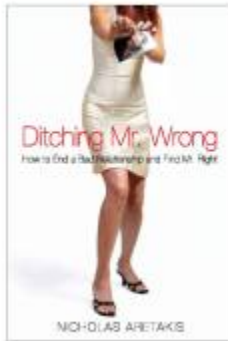
Here are 15 tips to help you navigate around the landmines at the next holiday.

**Don't pull a Ben Stiller.** Avoid calamities à la Ben Stiller in *Meet the Parents*, like being so uptight that you go overboard, exaggerating details of your livelihood or how wonderful you are--details that cannot be substantiated. Just be yourself. When in doubt, look at your lover and remember that he or she picked you for good reasons.

**Be reserved.** Holidays are emotional times when everyone's worst side comes out--everyone except you, that is. Be polite, respectful, and reserved; don't try to dominate conversations or overshadow your new acquaintances.

**Dress for success.** Consult your mate. Does the family get dressed up? *How* dressed up? Ascertain the proper attire, and dress in such a way as to make your in-laws comfortable.

**Woo them with food.** No matter what their culinary tradition, everyone loves to eat and drink. If you're hosting, make sure guests are well fed and they'll have a good time. If you're a guest, come bearing gifts of food and drink.



**Mind the menacing mom.** There's no figure quite as frightening as "The Mom." Please her and you're golden. Offend her and you'll have months of groveling ahead--or years, if she holds a grudge. Best advice: Display respectful, mature, and loving behavior toward her precious child--the one you're stealing from her! Don't pander to the mom or overly fawn over your loved one.

**Setup "safety zones."** If you're hosting, set up more than one area so you and others have a chance to move around and escape an obnoxious guest. Create food and appetizer stations in different areas of your house or apartment. If you're a guest, mingle and move about to avoid getting trapped.

**Bring a functional gift.** Purchase a gift your in-laws will use. Some ideas: a nice bottle of wine (assuming alcohol is not taboo); a bouquet of flowers; chocolates; a cheese-of-the-month subscription; car wash gift certificates; online gift cards; or movie-theatre passes.

**Name that relative.** Ask your partner to tell you a brief or funny detail about every member who will be there, and retell them to him or her. That way, when you meet relatives, you'll remember their names. Always address old-timers as "Mr." or "Mrs." unless they invite you to use their first name.

**Break the ice.** Come prepared with great ice-breaking questions, such as "What do you love to do in your spare time?" You can quickly learn whether Uncle Bob is into sports, guns, movies, etc., and get him to talk about what he likes. Even if all you did was ask questions and listen, your in-laws would have a good impression of you.

**Chat up the parents.** It may be more fun to chat with that kooky red-headed cousin, but be sure to spend time with your significant other's parents; they should be first priority. Come armed with backgrounder tips from your partner so you can begin conversations with, "I understand you and your wife met at a pro football game," or "I hear you are a Civil War buff."

**Sniff out the "nosies."** Beware the nosy relative who wants to do some fishing for problems in your bloodline or scandals in your past--there's always at least one. To avoid revealing things you'll later regret, make a mental list beforehand of taboo topics, and prepare diversionary conversations to steer the talk elsewhere.

**Be moderate.** Don't make a slob out of yourself by over-eating or indulging in too much alcohol. Limit yourself to one or two drinks, and then convert to water or a soft drink.

**Help the host and hostess.** Offer to bring in some wood for the fire, clear the table, or entertain the kids. You could have the wrong education, ethnicity, and religion for this new family, but if you're helpful, you'll be perceived as "blending."

**Follow up with a thank-you card, email, or call.** Make sure to let your guests or hosts know--within two or three days--that you enjoyed their company, family, and the event.

**Make light--or make nothing--of dietary obstacles.** If you encounter something you don't like or can't eat or drink, simply abstain. If you are questioned, be prepared with a neutral--noninsulting--answer, such as, "I'm not a huge fan of beef, but I *adore* all these side dishes."

The most important thing is being happy and compatible with your significant other. But it can be a real bonus if you can genuinely enjoy the company of potential in-laws and relatives. If you make a good first impression, it makes life so much easier on your partner, and also makes the holidays a time to look forward to instead of dread.