



Peace and goodwill to all

A relaxing and harmonious Christmas might seem like too much to ask – but with a little bit of effort, this year your family could find themselves having a much happier time.

By Pearl Bates

“The last time I spent Christmas with my family,” admitted a friend of mine, “I found myself pinning my mother against the kitchen wall by the throat, poised to punch her, while my pregnant sister looked on in horror, screaming at me to stop.” While many family ructions might not go quite this far, all families – even the most functional, well-adjusted ones – will have disagreements and arguments.

To find real peace as a family, whatever shape or form your family may take, each member must be ready and willing to give up winning battles when it comes to arguments. It’s important to recognise that when selfish feelings surface, we can choose not to act on them, and open our hearts to better things. I know this is easier said than done, but even if just one member of a family unit is consciously working on overcoming resentment or resistance, it will eventually begin to bring about similar behaviour in the others. Get out of the mindset that your sense of peace depends on other people conducting themselves in the way that you’d like them to. It’s so easy to say, “I would be all right if so-and-so wasn’t so aggravating,” or, “If so-and-so wasn’t so thoughtless, and always complaining, then I would be happy.” We are apt to carry about an almost unconscious attitude of grumbling at the various interferences to our own comfort, when the truth is that no one

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else in the family is responsible for how you feel. By refusing to let yourself be provoked, you will take the fire out of those who try to incite you. Consciously or unconsciously, no one will goad you without the expectation of reactionary anger, in the same way that you would expect a ball to bounce back if you threw it at a wall. If instead of bouncing back at you, the ball disappeared into a fog, you would stop throwing it.

When preparing for Christmas, have a think about any problems that might arise. Try not to worry about what could happen but see if you can come up with creative solutions to avoid it. If you can, work out compromises so that personal issues don’t become the focus of Christmas for the rest of the family. Keep

What is your argument style?

THE PEACEMAKER

Your priority is to cool things down as soon as an argument looks likely, even if it means ignoring your own needs

THE ATTACKER

You’re highly attuned to possible conflict and will act fast, laying down the law or issuing threats.

THE SUBTLE STRIKER

You prefer to wait for others to notice something’s wrong, using silence, nagging or complaining to make your feelings known.

THE FULL-ON FOE

You will always give as good as you get. Although you might look tough, you’re probably terrified of getting hurt and find every disagreement a painful experience.

THE NEGOTIATOR

You genuinely want to find a peaceful solution to arguments, believing consideration and compromise are the best tools for achieving this. You listen calmly to others’ viewpoints and confidently share your own.

Obviously, the last style is the one we’re all aiming for. Conflict is natural within a family to a certain degree, but it should be constructive rather than destructive.



an eye out for triggers that cause arguments and endeavor to get rid of them. It’s best not to try and force Christmas plans onto people – let them enjoy Christmas in their own way. In addition, responsibility for the smooth running of the festivities often falls onto one person’s shoulders. Don’t let them get exhausted – diplomatically offer to help out and make the day more enjoyable for everybody. If you have kids, try to keep the disruption of your normal routine to a minimum, in order to help prevent them from spiralling into a froth of over-excitement.

If an argument does break out, make the people involved aware of how it affects everyone else. Let them see the impact of it on the rest of the family and point out that it’s just not fair. Most importantly, don’t take on too much and keep your expectations realistic. We all fall short of the romanticised idyll of the nuclear family, gathered happily at the foot of the tree – it will never be as perfect as you would like so simply appreciate the time spent together with your family and enjoy the day.