

How To Handle Family Conflict and Holiday Stress

By [Elizabeth Scott, M.S.](#), About.com

The holidays present many opportunities to bond with family, but this time of year can also present significant stress, particularly when family conflict arises. Some conflict can come from having to decide which relatives to see—if any. Here are some ways to divide up your time over the holidays and handle conflicts and holiday stress that may arise.

Here's How:

1. **Take Turns With Relatives.** If you and your spouse both want to celebrate with your families of origin, if you're dealing with a divorce situation where not everybody wants to celebrate together, or if you just have a lot of family, it can be stressful deciding who to see, and when. Taking turns is an easy solution. If you see one group in November, see the other in December, or alternate years. Then you can eventually see everybody.
2. **Host Celebrations At Your House.** If the stress of traveling each year is more than you'd like to handle, you may want to have family over to your home for the holidays. This is also a good solution when you have too many groups or relatives to take turns seeing: invite everyone to celebrate together, and you see everyone more often. While this won't work in every situation, it can build bonds between groups of relatives that may not know each other very well.
3. **Be Prepared For Some Conflict.** If you usually have conflict when you get together with your family, it's a good idea to be prepared for it. I'm not suggesting that you go 'looking for trouble', but rather approach the situation with a sense of realism. If your mother always criticizes your appearance or your brother always makes rude jokes, don't expect them to change their habits; just have a sense of humor about it and remind yourself what you love about them. These articles on [dealing with difficult people](#)¹ can also help.
4. **Just Say No.** If seeing family causes you great amounts of stress each year, it's okay to say no sometimes. Celebrating with just your partner or kids can be a wonderful alternative to seeing people who make you feel consistently stressed.
5. **Surround Yourself With Friends.** Many a happy holiday has been formed by groups of people who have decided to celebrate with friends instead of family. Whether you're unable to travel (or have family who is), or for some other reason find yourself without kin, celebrating with other people you know who are also without family for the day can be a great way to bond with friends and enjoy the spirit of the season.