

Holiday Countdown Without a Throw Down

Common encounters, dilemmas and tips
on how to handle and respond firmly and
politely.

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INTRODUCTION

Holiday get-togethers have a different meaning for everyone. Some of us look forward to these holiday gatherings all year. While others, for a variety of reasons, dread it.

This year may be a bit different due to the pandemic. Which adds another layer of potential conflict.

In this e-book, I'll address a variety of common dilemmas, and how to respond to prying questions.

The options and tips I offer is not a one-size-fits all. There are so many circumstances to consider. But my hope is that these brief tips inspire you to consider the circumstances before blowing up at someone. It usually isn't worth losing your cool or dignity.

My tips are not a substitute for addressing serious conflicts or potentially violent behavior. Use common sense. Sometimes the best and safest option is to walk away.

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New Relationships

Q: I just started dating this guy, should I buy him a gift? How much should I spend?

A: Gift giving is tricky around any holiday when you've just started dating.

- You can discuss it. This does take away a bit of the surprise, but at least you know.
- You can buy a one-size fits all type gift. For example, candles, beverage of choice, games, certificate to a car detail...
- You might want to avoid anything too pricey. It could make them feel that their gift is inadequate, you are extravagant, and maybe have high expectations.
- Present it to them in private, just in case they don't have one for you.

Q: I've wanted to break up with my girlfriend for some time now, but every time I plan on it, there's a holiday, event, or birthday that keeps me from doing it. I can't take another holiday. What is the best way to break up?

A: It seems or perhaps feels like you were being mindful of your girlfriend.

However, having postponed the inevitable will probably be a bigger blow to her heart. Have you shared your dissatisfaction with the relationship? If so, it won't be that big of a surprise, but I'll be honest, you could have picked a less significant holiday to break up.

- Don't wait any longer.
- Don't buy her an expensive gift to serve as a token of apology or to soothe her heart.
- Don't make excuses or blame her for having postponed the break up.
- Do take responsibility and apologize for the timing.
- Do thank her for the good times you had together.
- Do wish her well.
- Don't get mad if she doesn't receive your news well.

Gift-Giving & Regifting

Q: I'm always concerned that I'll receive an unexpected gift from someone and I won't have one for them. Should I have some generic gifts or gift cards with me to hand out?

A: I can't tell you how to feel. And if handing out a generic gift feels right for you, then do it. However, it will probably come across as a payback gift. That wouldn't be sincere.

You could accept the gift graciously, "Thank you. It's so thoughtful." Don't follow it up with, "I left you gift at home."

Reasons why people give gifts without expecting one in return:

- It is an expression of gratitude. Maybe for a kind word or gesture; for helping them out during the year.
- They had a great year and feel like being generous.
- It's what they did at their last place of employment.

Q: I hate receiving regifted gifts. It's an easy way out. No thought goes into the gift. Is there anyway to let people know this?

A: There are many reasons people regift:

- They can't use it, but know that you can.
- It's an eco-friendly option.
- Their financial situation prohibits them from spending money.
- They think it's fun to give something out of the ordinary.

Letting people know how you feel about regifting, is your choice. But how will you know whether the gift is or isn't regifted?

Without sounding too corny, it's the thought that counts. Be gracious when you receive a gift. Whether it's expensive and new, or a modest homemade item.

When you regift, do put some thought into it. For example:

- Sausages-from-around-the-world = not for a vegetarian.
- Low-cal cookbook = not for someone who is considered over-weight.
- Political, religious, controversial-related books = has opposing views.

Invitations

Q: I haven't been sober for too long. Going to a holiday party now isn't advised by my sponsor. How do I decline an invitation without explaining?

A: Simple answer, *"Thanks for the invitation, but I won't be able to make it. Have a great time, and I'll see you after the holidays."*

If they ask or insist, repeat. If you are okay with a "white lie", you can tell them that you have a prior commitment. Which can be truthful, if your plan is to avoid parties that serve alcohol. While honesty is the best policy, your personal health and privacy comes first!

Q: My partner and I want to host a New Year's party, but want to keep it small. How do I avoid hurting some of our friends' feelings?

A: You have no control how people will react. Here are a couple of options:

- Host two parties, a brunch the following week.
- Don't post photos on social media. Difficult to impose this rule on your guests.

Q: I'm hosting Christmas dinner, can I require proof of vaccination of my guests?

A: My simple answer is, *your house, your rules*. My main considerations would be:

- Your purpose in requiring this.
- Are you willing to un-invite them if they don't have proof?
- Will you show them proof of your vaccination?

If you and/or anyone living in your household have anxieties or concerns, you might consider postponing your gathering.

Hosts: Expect last-minute cancellations.

Guests: If you are cancelling at the last-minute, call the host. Apologize.

Awkward Dilemmas:

Q: How can you reply to nosy questions without being rude?

Here are some awkward nosy questions and a couple of responses:

1. "When are you two getting married?" = a) When one of us asks the other. b) We'll let you know.
2. "Oh, you're still single?" = a) Yes, and thoroughly enjoying it! b) Yes, I like variety.
3. "Don't tell me you're still into (vegan, 'that religion', that job, etc.)" = a) Yes, I am, thanks for asking. b) Yes, I am. How are you doing?

Naturally, you have the option and right to say, "None of your business." But it doesn't sound as polite.

Q: My brother in-law took a gourmet cooking class. Since then he thinks he's a chef. He hangs out in the kitchen taste-testing my food and offering advice. It drives me crazy! How can I ask him to butt out?

A: Consider this:

- Ask him to bring a dish.
- Invite him to help you make dish (one that you're okay letting go of).
- Tell him that you appreciate his tips, but this year you're sticking to your recipe.
- Ask a family member or friend to keep him out of the kitchen.

A few party do's and don'ts:

- Don't use someone's party to make an announcement like, "We're getting divorced." "We're getting married."
- Don't criticize the host's decor, food, children, etc.
- Don't get drunk. This involves everyone, and ruins the evening.
- Don't bring uninvited guests.
- Do bring a "hostess" gift or send something post party.
- Do excuse yourself if a conversation starts to get heated.

Holiday Greetings: We have become so hung up on the specifics of a greeting, that we are missing the intent in which it's meant.

If the greeting begins with happy, merry, best wishes, feliz, bless you, or any other positive word or phrase, why wouldn't we accept it? Accepting a greeting doesn't mean we subscribe to or signed on to any type of doctrine.

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My books: "Don't Burp in the Boardroom" and "Keep Your

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