

Separating from In-laws? 10 Tips for You

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While the blame may lie with either side, it is wise to remember that no one is perfect, says relationship and well being coach Pooja Khera.

"My in-laws just drop in unannounced... sometimes our work lives gets very demanding. Just because they decide to make a doting yet random visit we have to now rework our entire schedules and make the adjustments... sigh!"

"My husband's mother keeps finding faults with my cooking and wants me to cook like her. I did not know I couldn't cook. I am a trained chef heading a kitchen and I don't need her help."

"My wife's parents keep sending money to buy things we can't afford. I hate that. We should be allowed to live our own lives."

Do these sound familiar?

For years as a certified relationship and happiness coach, I have heard an endless number of clients who are having problems in their marriages because of their in-laws.

They have control issues with their in-laws, interference, disrespect, manipulation and so on.

As a woman who lives with her in-laws now for about 19 years, my own experiences have been plenty.

Taking care of your parents can be a wonderful experience.

Yet, at times, no amount of compromise, adjustment or understanding makes our relationship with our in-laws easy.

In cases where the separation is inevitable, go through with it, but make the separation as amicable as possible.

While the decision of separating from your in-laws should not be taken in a haste or unless discussed in detail with your partner, it always helps to weigh how it will impact the families.

Here are my top 10 tips that will help you make the separation from your in-laws as cordial as possible.

1. Consider the consequences of your choice

The decision of living separately from your in-laws is a significant one so it should not be taken lightly.

Hence it is extremely important to ask yourself these questions:

How will this separation impact the relationship with your spouse and also the rest of the family?

Will the children be emotionally bruised by leaving their grandparents?

If you are close to one of your in-laws, will your moving out end up in losing that relationship too?

Are there any financial risks involved?

At no point am I asking for unacceptable compromises to be made. But digging deeper into these questions is of utmost importance before taking any step which you may regret later.

2. Clearly identify the reason(s) behind this decision

If you are planning on taking such a huge step you need to be sure of the reason that is prompting you to do so.

Ask questions like: Is the relationship with the in-laws so unsatisfactory that it is damaging your marriage?

Is there any kind of abuse -- physical, mental or emotional that is severely affecting your self-respect and harming your self-esteem?

If the answer is yes, then separation is a must.

3. Make sure you have support from your spouse

Ensure that you have discussed threadbare with your spouse how you feel about your in-laws.

Work on finding amicable solutions.

Even then if a resolution cannot be arrived at, the decision of separation from your in-laws should be amicable between you both.

This is imperative. Your spouse would keep the connection with the parents yet, at the same time, should be supportive of your decision too.

A good way of doing this is by rehearsing your responses with your spouse before you get into the discussion with the in-laws.

This will help avoid unpleasant surprises and ensure you are both on the same page. Another good way is to have the spouse who is leaving their parents take the lead in the conversation.

4. Avoid taking this decision when you are angry

It is normal that in the heat of the moment you may say or do something only to regret it later.

In such a case take a few days to calm yourself down and for the situation to maybe settle down.

Blow off your steam by trying to journal your thoughts or by processing them with an expert counsellor or therapist.

Remember, anger impacts our ability to make rational decisions and so it is never advisable to make big decisions in outrage.

5. Plan to manage the impact on children

It is well-known that separation from their grandparents will affect the children.

The bond between children and grandparents is very special.

Neither you nor your in-laws should try and get the children involved in choosing between the two of you.

This can have disastrous consequences on the children's mind. Make sure you explain the situation to your children.

Give them the comfort and assurance that they will be allowed to visit regularly.

If you are unable to manage the situation with the children, seek expert help from a child counsellor.

6. Set a system for holidays and important family occasions

Festivals, holidays and special family functions are important days in a family's lives.

Plan the logistics about getting together on these occasions with your spouse.

If on any occasion, being in your in-law's house is difficult for you, it is perfectly fine to excuse yourself.

Your spouse and kids can be there without you.

Respectfully and without ambiguity, communicate these decisions to everyone involved.

7. Speak to your in-laws about your boundaries

It is important you discuss the reasons for this separation clearly with your in-laws.

Stick to the facts and don't make the conversation emotional. Avoid arguments and blame game at all costs.

It is very likely that your in-laws will oppose the decision. But no matter what, do not start defending yourself and justifying your decision to them.

8. Cut ties across multiple channels

In case any form of abuse is the reason for the separation, or a toxic family member is involved, then sever your ties with them across all platforms including social media.

Block them from wherever it is needed like your phone, e-mail, etc. This will help you from being pulled into the toxic cycle again and again and prevent any more negative impact on your mental health.

After all, you can only feel peaceful if you don't have to re-live the hurt time and again.

9. Set clear boundaries

After amicably discussing with your spouse, decide the boundaries moving forward.

Depending on what is working and what is not, be open to reevaluating the limits to see if any changes need to be made.

For example if your in-laws interfere with your parenting style, then you need to draw clear lines on what they can communicate and what they can't.

10. Always be polite and respectful

Kee in mind that even though you may be choosing to live separately from your in-laws, you will meet them often.

Therefore, to whatever extent is possible, make the separation civil without saying anything nasty to each other.

This will make it easier for both of you to be around each other as and when the occasion arises.

Avoid gossiping with relatives at all costs as that will only make the relationship bitter.

Being polite and respectful is the best choice you can make to avoid any embarrassment or bitterness.

While the blame may lie with either side, it is wise to remember that no one is perfect.

If you have tried everything and nothing has worked, then it is best to separate from your in-laws congenially.

Discuss the seriousness of the situation with your spouse and make them understand before matters take a turn for the worst.

There is no great happiness in walking on eggshells around your in-laws.

It is back-breaking to carry most of the burden of making the relationship work unless something is worth the effort.

My dear readers, living with your in-laws can have both its pros and cons. But if the cons outweigh the pros it is best that you think of parting ways with them. Just make it a peaceful one.

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