



Dealing with Difficult Family members

Summary of Figuring out Families Podcast with marriage counsellor Derek Boylen

Interfering family members is an age-old problem and is an area that couples struggle with a lot in their relationships. It's a real challenge, particularly for couples in the early years of their relationship because they struggle to work out the right balance is because they care about and love their families and also care about and love the person that they're in a relationship with.

It could be the longest existing problem in couple relationships in history. There is this beautiful phrase in the bible. IN the book of Genesis it says *"for this reason, a man will leave his mother and father and joined with his wife and the two shall become one body."*

There are many reasons family members interfere.

Generally, family members meddle because of personality differences and because different families come with different norms and ways of doing things such as how they manage their money, leisure time and time off, how they express affection, like hugs, cuddles, kisses.

Families have diverse ways they do things. And in our own relationship, we're trying to develop a way of doing things that works for us. That means making change - and change is often difficult.

Marrying into a different culture, whether it's heritage or religion and those sorts of things can be both a blessing and a curse.

Approaching differences from a perspective of openness and curiosity to learn new ways can be a real blessing in family life. However, it becomes very

difficult when families get gridlocked into their way as being best way and makes finding a way forward very difficult.

There are financial reasons. Such who's going to end up with the money and investments.

They can be interests around power of attorney for older couples who are marrying or forming a new relationship. Who is going to make the decisions?

Traditions and cultural things of value can be a reason why families interfere. For example how a family celebrate Christmas and other culturally important times of the year.

Sometimes it's due to loneliness. For single parent families and the children find someone that they love and start a new relationship.

Strategies

According to Derek there are things that always stand out that are helpful for couples to keep in mind.

The first is that when we're stuck in a situation where a partner or spouse sees something one way and the extended family has another view can be tough and make you feel you're the meat in the sandwich and trying to make everyone happy and - not really making anybody happy.

Step one is to realize that **there is no sandwich**. You have chosen your partner and if you're married you stood at an altar somewhere and you said, "I choose to put you before all other people."

That doesn't mean you don't care about your family but ultimately when it comes to a really difficult decision, you prioritize your partner and their needs - then you're making the right decision.

We don't have to make financial or parenting, decisions with anyone else. It is only up to you and the person You're in this relationship with.

The second thing is for couples is to take responsibility for their own family and negotiating with their own extended family, because they have a much deeper history with their own family than we do with our partner's family.

For example a grandparent that loves to give kids lollies. In itself that is not a problem. But it may be if it happens just before dinner. In this situation it is much easier for the son or daughter to say straight to their parent not to give the kids lollies before dinner because each have a deeper history with our own families so it is easier to negotiate on behalf of the couple because they probably know the best way, to get what they want from their family.

It is very important also for couples to develop is 'we' language. When we use of the word 'we' it puts us in a position to be able to ask our spouse when we are dealing with other family members.

For example, my mum says "Why don't you, Karen and the kids come over on Saturday?"

Now I could say, look, I'll check with Karen and get back to you. The problem with that is that without meaning to it can sound like 'Derek wants to come for morning tea.

but Karen's the one who always holds him back'.

It's actually much safer for me to say, "I'm not sure what we are doing Saturday so we'll get back to you". Then it's not me or Karen it's us. 'We' as a couple make these decisions -together.

When we use 'we' language, it also confirms to our partner that we care and value their opinion and reinforce our value to one another.

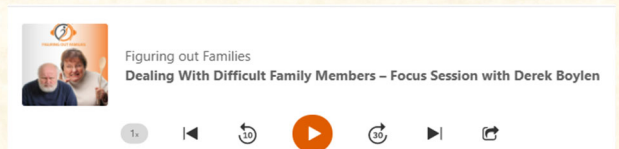
We have to set boundaries early with our families and say, this is what is, or isn't the way things are going to be.. And in particularly when, children come along,.

For couples, probably the hardest part is actually not so much dealing with the extended family, but how we as a couple talk about it within our relationship, because one of the challenges is that whenever we talk about extended family is it's really difficult for us to meet one another at the same energy level as a couple.

We like to think that our marriage is just about us. We love each other and want to spend the rest of our lives together and that's it. But the reality is whether we like it or not, we get their family too.

If you're struggling with the extended family remember it is really normal and it's been an age, old challenge.

Remember that there is no sandwich.



Figuring out Families Podcast

Derek Boylen is an experienced marriage and relationship counsellor and a lecturer in relationships at the University of Notre Dame. We have put together this most valuable podcast series which we are calling the Focus Sessions.

The series focusses on many aspects of family relationships and can help in strengthening your family. We hope you'll find the series beneficial and get some insights on issues you may face in your family.

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