

Fixing Family Friction

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Discussion Guide

Part One

Welcome to the Extended Family

What do you most enjoy about your extended family? What do you most dislike?

What pulls your extended family together? What pulls you apart?

What one thing would you most like to see change in the way your family interacts?

Surveying the Extended Family

What are the major tensions in your extended family? How are those handled? Are you able to talk about them or do they go unaddressed?

How do you resolve extended family conflicts? Is everyone satisfied with the way conflicts are handled, or do some disagree or get hurt? Discuss positive ways you've found to handle conflict.

Do you feel that you can depend on family members and they can depend on you in times of trouble? Why or why not?

Part Two

Challenge One: Developing Realistic Expectations

What conflicts due to unrealistic expectations occur in your extended family? What are the results? Discuss ways to talk to family members about their expectations.

What kind of cultural differences exist in your family? Are those differences areas of conflict? How are they handled?

If you're a parent, do your parents express disapproval over the way you're raising your kids? How does that make you feel? Discuss healthy ways to respond to your parents' comments.

If you're a grandparent, do you express disapproval over the way your grown kids are raising your grandchildren? Why? Do they welcome your comments or does your disapproval cause friction? If there is genuine cause for concern (safety, health, etc.), discuss better ways to express that concern without stepping on toes.

Challenge Two: Moving Beyond Chitchat

What topics of conversation are unsafe in your extended family?

Are there family members who seem to look for verbal confrontations? How can you avoid encouraging this behavior?

Risk, trust, vulnerability, and commitment are all necessary to move beyond chitchat. Which of the suggestions found on pages 59–66 could you begin to use to go deeper with family members? What would that look like if you did? Are there some family members who would resist going deeper? Why do you think they would be resistant?

Challenge Three: Being Civil, Calm, and Clear When You Disagree

Do you and your siblings have an established pecking order that you automatically revert to when you're together? Discuss ways to stop those behaviors and develop more adult relationships with siblings. (If you're an only child, think about your relationships with parents, aunts and uncles, and cousins.)

Which of the civility tips on pages 72–74 could you begin to use in your family relationships? Discuss other strategies group members have used to maintain civility in their extended families.

Discuss the ground rules for staying civil, calm, and clear when you disagree (pages 90–91). Which of these are the most challenging for your family? What can you do to overcome those challenges, recognizing that other family members may not change or cooperate?

Challenge Four: Promoting Harmony When You Get Together

When your extended family gets together is there tension over family members who don't share the cost or the workload? Discuss ways to set and enforce ground rules so that some don't get stuck doing all the work or paying for more than their share.

Discuss ways to promote harmony when extended families get together for major holidays, family reunions, crises, and life celebrations.

Share favorite traditions that bring the family together. Do you have traditions that your family has outgrown or that some family members dislike (perhaps something you loved as a kid but your kids hate)? Discuss ways you might set those traditions aside without hurting feelings.

Challenge Five: Fostering Positive Relationships in the Clan

Is your extended family as close as you'd like it to be? Discuss ways group members have found to foster closer relationships. Share ideas for small things you can do to show love to various family members, especially ones you don't get along with or aren't close to.

Seeing things from another person's perspective can help build a more positive relationship. Whose perspective do you need to understand better? Discuss ways the group has found to see things from the perspectives of various family members.

If you have kids, how has the relationship between your parents and your children affected your relationship with your parents? Has it brought reconciliation or healing? Are your parents and in-laws as involved with their grandkids as you'd like them to be? If not, discuss ways you can encourage those relationships. If your parents are dysfunctional or dangerous, discuss ways your kids can have a grandparent relationship with surrogates.

If you do not have kids, is this a source of friction between you and your parents or in-laws? Discuss ways to calmly deal with “it’s time you had kids” comments and pressure.

Challenge Six: Facing the Hard Issues

What differences over values exist in your extended family? What do the clashes look like?

Which of the hard issues mentioned have occurred in your extended family? What ways has your family found to overcome differences related to those issues? Discuss both positive and negative ways these issues have been handled in group members’ families and the results.

Have relationships in your family been broken over the handling of hard issues? Discuss ways to heal those relationships.

Challenge Seven: Understanding Boundaries and Extending Beyond Family

Discuss ways to set boundaries with family members who

- are dysfunctional (addicted, codependent, abusive, etc.).
- forget that you are an adult or are married.
- use others or are irresponsible.
- are critical of you, your children, or the way you parent your children.

Does someone in your family not have a life of his or her own? Discuss ways to encourage those who don't to reach out beyond family, develop new interests, and form their own social networks.

Discuss ways to reach beyond your own family to others who don't have family nearby or don't have healthy extended families. In what ways can including them in your family life be a blessing to them? to your family?