



COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

# how to suck up to your in-laws (for 48 hours)

Playing the nice card will make those extended holiday visits (practically) painless.

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Even if you hit the in-law lottery and won a stellar set of bonus-parents, it's hard to remain sane when you are staying in their home for the weekend or—yikes—a week. But instead of rolling your eyes or escaping to the bathroom for “me” time, try going with the flow. It will make the hours pass more smoothly, and you can always use your model behavior to blackmail your spouse next holiday season.

### bring a special dish

This 9 x 13-inch offering is your clever token of gratitude. It shows you appreciate how much effort your in-laws put into hosting the holidays. Aren't you a peach!

The real truth is you've guaranteed there's something digestible on the table, and you get to avoid the family specialty of Beef Cups with Pizza Rice. Best of all? Your winter squash gratin will limit the amount of time you'll have to spend in the kitchen.



### embrace how they do things

Your in-laws probably don't post a “House Rules” sign on the front door, but you know that their thermostat never rises above 60 degrees, everyone eats dinner at 5:30 p.m., and the whole gang gathers around the TV whenever there's a *M\*A\*S\*H* marathon. Welcome to clannish behavior!

Rather than recoiling, indulge in at least one family tradition. Remember: Your family's way of doing things isn't necessarily correct, so get over yourself and join in the fun.

### accept gifts strategically

No, you can't immediately go on eBay and list the bald eagle bookends your in-laws gave you because they'll look for them on



the next visit...unless you tell them you love the gift so much that you brought it to work. This response can be used with a plethora of tacky decorative items. What are the chances your in-laws will see your office?

### throw the family pet a bone

Nobody seems to mind that your in-laws' dog isn't house-trained and bites because “she doesn't like strangers.” The way to their hearts is through their best friend. So bring along pet toys. You'll be praised as a thoughtful daughter/son-in-law and may even avoid getting tooth marks in your leg.

Once you make nice with Fluffy or Thor, you'll notice a shift: The dog won't leave you alone. Which is why you'll need to softly repeat these mantras to yourself:

- I accept that there will be dog hair on my new J.Crew shirt/Michael Kors sweater.
- I accept that their 100-pound, slobbering golden retriever will climb on my lap and refuse to move, even when I need to get up to go to the bathroom.
- I accept that after all this tender, loving torture, the dog will probably forget who I am the next time I show up at this house.

### silence your inner cruise director

Recommending novels, restaurants, or movies can be risky. Sure, you brought the squash gratin, but you chance falling out of favor if your movie rental choice, *The Life Aquatic*, bores them to tears, or if your

seafood eatery (the one with the rave reviews) gives everyone the Norwalk virus. Sometimes, it's best to be bland, boring, and unopinionated—for once. [n]



### foolproof in-law gifts

#### A NICELY FRAMED PHOTO OF YOUR PARTNER

Their child is gorgeous! Brilliant! So why not make it a Hallmark moment for all of you? When they unwrap the framed photo of your sweetie smiling on a biking trip in Croatia, they'll see that you appreciate their spandex-clad star as much as they do.

#### A GIFT THAT SAYS, "I LISTEN TO YOU. I REALLY DO."

Hey, Columbo, you've done your homework! That *Fly-Fishing Legends* coffee-table book, Barbra Streisand box set, or Persian cats

calendar says: “I know and care about your fascinating hobbies.” Flattery actually does get you everywhere.

#### SOMETHING SPECIAL YOU MADE

Your in-laws will cry, “Aren't you crafty?!” Surely this means you're a perfect match for their child. Everyone loves a good story. Where did that unusual bird feeder, mohair scarf, or ceramic pig head come from? Their answer: our very thoughtful daughter/son-in-law. Game over. You win.



Check out Dina's book *I ♥ My In-laws* at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).