KESTON SCHOOL

RELATIONSHIPS · FREE SAMPLE

# Get Along With In-Laws

*Build a warm, steady bond with your partner's family as a team*

CHAPTER 1 + WORKBOOK SECTION

BEFORE YOU START

# How to use this book

By the last page you and your partner will have a shared plan for contact, visits, advice and limits, a few kind sentences for the hard moments, and simple rhythms that keep both families close without letting either one run your home.

1. Read one chapter at a time. Each one gives you a single idea and a single action.
2. Open the Get Along With In-Laws Workbook and complete the matching section while the chapter is fresh.
3. Do the “Try this” action within seven days. Reading changes what you know; the action changes what you do.
4. Finish with the checklist in chapter 12 and come back to it whenever you slip.

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# 01

CHAPTER 1

# You Married a Family

*Recognize the in-law tension in your own life and see why the usual ways of coping keep it going.*

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It is Sunday evening. Your partner's phone lights up with the weekly call from their mother, and you already know how the next hour will go. Your partner steps into the other room. You hear a laugh, then a long pause, then a careful "We'll see, Mom." Afterward they come back a little quieter. Somewhere in that call was a question about the holidays, a remark about your new job, or a suggestion about how you are raising the kids. You ask what she said. Your partner says "Nothing, really." And then the two of you spend the rest of the evening not quite talking about it.

If some version of that scene feels familiar, this book is for you.

## The quiet signs of in-law strain

In-law tension rarely looks like a dramatic movie scene. Most of the time nobody shouts and nobody storms out. It shows up in smaller, quieter ways:

- You feel a knot in your stomach when a visit is on the calendar.
- You replay a comment from last month's dinner while doing the dishes.
- You and your partner argue more in the week before and after seeing their family than at any other time.
- You hold back opinions at family gatherings because it feels safer to stay quiet.
- You keep a private list of slights, and so, perhaps, does your partner.
- Decisions about your home, your money or your children start to bend around one question: "What will your parents say?"

None of this makes anyone a villain. Most in-laws are not trying to cause trouble. Most partners are not trying to take sides. The strain grows because two people built a new household on top of two existing families, and nobody sat down to agree how the pieces fit.

That is also true in the other direction. Your own family may be just as hard for your partner as theirs is for you. Throughout this book, "in-laws" means both sides. The tools work the same way whichever family is causing the friction.

## Four usual fixes that fail

When in-law tension builds, most people reach for one of four strategies. Each one makes sense in the moment. None of them works for long.

**1. Keep the peace by staying quiet.** You smile, nod and swallow it. This avoids a scene at the table, but the feelings do not disappear. They come out later as coldness, sarcasm or a sudden argument with your partner about something unrelated.

**2. Keep score.** You track every unfair comment, every visit that ran long, every holiday spent with "their side." Scorekeeping feels like fairness, but it turns your partner into an opponent and keeps the two of you arguing about the past instead of planning the future.

**3. Leave it all to your partner.** "They're your parents, you deal with it." There is something right in this, and we will come back to it in chapter 4. But handing over the whole problem without agreeing on what you both want leaves your partner guessing, and usually guessing wrong.

**4. Win the argument once and for all.** You plan the big conversation where everything finally gets said. Sometimes it clears the air. More often it turns a dozen small issues into one big rupture, and the family remembers the explosion, not the point you were making.

> **Key idea:** Most in-law trouble is not really a fight between you and them. It is a missing agreement between you and your partner.

## What this book is and is not

This book gives you practical, everyday tools: a way to understand what is going on, a written agreement you make as a couple, calm responses to advice you did not ask for, kind ways to set limits, and simple routines that keep things steady. It is written for ordinary friction between people who mostly care about each other.

It is not a guide for situations involving threats, control, intimidation or any kind of abuse, from in-laws or from a partner. If someone in your life makes you feel unsafe, those situations need support from a qualified professional or a local support service, not a communication technique. The same goes for deep, long-standing family conflict that is affecting your health or your relationship: a licensed couples or family counselor can help in ways a book cannot.

It is also not a book about the holidays specifically. Holidays concentrate everything, and the tools here will help, but the focus is the whole year: the calls, the visits, the advice, the help and the small moments that make up most family life.

## Where you are starting from

Before you change anything, it helps to see the situation clearly. Most people carry a vague sense of "things are tense with his parents" or "my sister and my wife just don't click." Vague feelings are hard to work with. Specific ones are not.

Think about the last three months and ask yourself:

- Which family member do I find hardest, and in what kind of moment?
- What usually happens just before I feel tense: a phone call, a visit, a message, a comment?
- How do I usually cope: go quiet, keep score, hand it to my partner, or blow up?
- How do my partner and I usually talk about it afterward, if at all?

You may notice that the hardest part is not the in-law at all, but what happens between you and your partner after contact with them. That is useful information. It means the first tools you need are the ones you use at home.

## Try this

Within the next seven days, set aside fifteen minutes on your own. Use the first page of your workbook to list three recent in-law moments that left you tense. For each, write who was involved, what was said or done, and how you coped in the moment.

Then circle the one moment that you would most like to go differently next time. You will come back to it throughout the book.

Do not raise any of this with your partner or the in-laws yet. This week is only about seeing clearly. The next chapter explains why these moments happen in the first place, starting with the rules every family follows without ever writing them down.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- In-law strain usually shows up as tension between partners, not open conflict.
- Silence, scorekeeping and outsourcing it to your partner all keep the problem alive.
- Calmer in-law relationships are a skill a couple builds together.

→ Workbook, section 1

# 01 You Married a Family

*See your in-law tension clearly before you try to change it.*

FILL IN

### Three recent in-law moments

| Who | What was said or done | How I coped |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

CHECKLIST

### How I usually cope

- [ ] Stay quiet to keep the peace
- [ ] Keep score
- [ ] Leave it all to my partner
- [ ] Try to win it once and for all

RATE IT

### How tense do in-law relationships feel for me right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 · Calm 10 · Very tense

### The moment I circled, and how I would like it to go next time:

YOUR NEXT STEP

# Want the whole book?

You just read chapter 1 of Get Along With In-Laws and tried the first workbook section. The full e-book has 12 chapters, a complete workbook and a final checklist. Here is everything inside:


01 You Married a Family

02 Two Family Cultures Meet

03 What the Friction Costs

04 Your Couple Comes First

05 Write Your Couple Agreement

06 Answer Advice You Did Not Ask For

07 Set Limits Kindly

08 Four Common In-Law Moments

09 When It Still Goes Wrong

10 Rhythms That Keep It Easy

11 A Family That Grows Together

12 Mistakes & Checklist


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