

# **Your Thanksgiving Survival Guide:**

## *Handling Awkward Family Situations*



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# *Introduction*

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Thanksgiving – isn't it the most wonderful time of year?

Families get together and share a meal in celebration of the season.

Often, we travel all across the country or even from overseas, to visit loved ones we haven't seen in years.

Everyone looks forward to the once yearly get-together.

***Or, do they?***

Depending on what your family is like, you might actually dread this time of year.

Sure, you get to see your parents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles - but you also have to put up with the same drama as last year (or worse).

And, if you are the one hosting the meal (it seems like you always have to host the meal), the **stress level** begins to rise the day after Halloween.

Yet again, everyone expects the moon and murmurs under their breath when you deliver just half a star.

As excruciating as it is, you begin making your list and tidying up every nook and cranny of the house to try and soften those oh-so-critical eyes.



Does this sound like you?

Ideally, **Thanksgiving is about having fun** and catching up with people you really want to see.



Along the way, things do get a bit hairy at times. Unfortunately, it is the hairy bits that always stick with us and cloud our vision in subsequent years.



**Decide right now** that you are going to change this tradition.

No matter what happens (and even if it nearly kills you), take the high road (not the one that leads out of town) and be the calm center of the gathering.

When (or rather, if) things get out of hand, gently guide the rudder of your family back on the appropriate course – a memorable and peaceful family gathering.

Remind them of the **true meaning of the season.**

In this report, you will learn all about the different awkward situations that can crop up in families, both healthy and dysfunctional.

You'll smile when you recognize some of the characters in here.

(Or perhaps you'll be thanking your lucky stars that you don't have them!).

After that, you'll find a list of possible solutions for each situation you might encounter.

The best defense is a good offense. Be as prepared as you can this Thanksgiving, and you might just enjoy it more than any other year.

**This report is humorous, but you'll find nuggets in here that will help this coming Thanksgiving to be the best ever.**

# *The Dysfunctional or Non-Functioning Family*

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## *The Mother-in-Law*

We've all heard tales of the "Nightmare on Mother-in-Law Street" but for some these are true.

Perhaps she doesn't like your home very much. There are always the off-handed comments about the fabric on the chairs, the worn look of the rug...and let's not even talk about the bathrooms.

Maybe she meddles in what you are doing in the kitchen. Before you can even ask her, she has donned her apron (the one she packed in her suitcase) and is setting about to undo all that you have done already.

## *The Drunken Uncle*



him.

Have you ever noticed that some people aren't happy unless they have a drink in their hand? Well, on Thanksgiving, that person just happens to be one of your relatives. They come in with a beer in hand and then look for more. They might even bring their own supply.

You dearly love your uncle but you know full well that drinking and family don't seem to mix. Last year he got into a fight with your husband that you had to break up. You just never know what he'll do when he's got a few drinks inside

### *The Unruly Kids*

Holidays are not as much fun for kids sometimes. They get antsy when they are confined to a small space. And, they can act strange when it comes to meeting their other cousins who they probably haven't seen in a year.

When you aren't cooking, you are constantly yelling at all of the kids. Why? They are running in the house, playing with your fine collectibles, knocking things over or generally annoying the other adults in the house.

To make matters worse, kids can be the source of many arguments at Thanksgiving. One cousin acts like a bully and starts picking on the other kids. Of course, your sister won't believe that it was her kid that was causing all the trouble. You can't win.

### *The Ailing Grandmother*

Talking to your elders can be what makes Thanksgiving so interesting. They can tell stories about times before you were born when they used to get together. The stories remind us that we have a lot to be grateful for in this life.

But there's also the grandmother who sucks you into her vortex of medical ailments. Just saying hello can leave you with an earful about her bunions, her sciatica, her ill-fitting dentures and her lumbago. No one wants to be rude but they also don't want to have to pretend to be a doctor and try and diagnose her bodily issues either.



### *The Barely There Teenager*

If you think kids get antsy, what about your teenager? They would rather be strung up by their toes in front of the entire school than spend a whole day with the family on Thanksgiving. If you think you have a long memory, ask them about last Thanksgiving. They can run down the disasters faster than you can.

So what do you do? Unless you force them to socialize, they'll shut themselves in their room with a "Keep Out" sign on the door. At dinner, they will grab their phone and text their friends under the table while everyone else is talking. And they will give everyone in the house that wincing smile that says, "I'd rather have a root canal."

### *The Feet-Up Footballers*

We all know who they are. Mostly they are the spouses, boyfriends, sons and brothers of the family who do nothing but sit in front of the television watching football.



Actually, no. That's not quite true. There will be *some* activity. They'll eat all the snacks, complain that they are thirsty and ask incessantly when dinner will be ready.

Even though you have your hands full with everything else, they won't volunteer to do any of the preparation, nor clean up or even come to the table during dinner. "Why can't we sit in front of the television? It'll make more room at the table for everyone else." They are a veritable fountain of lame excuses.

### *The Head-Locked Sisters*

There is usually one fight on Thanksgiving – the combatants may vary but there's always an argument.

If you have a couple of sisters (or brothers) who always seems to be in competition with each other, then you have your competitors for the cage match.

Something that day will set them off.

It could be the way that one has made the stuffing or the fact that the other didn't contribute anything. Maybe it will revolve around the lack of Christmas gifts the previous year or how one hates the other's husband. This is the perfect time to bring up how mom showed favoritism to one over the other and they have been scarred for life. You just never know.

### **The Big News Brother**

This sticky situation will occur when he has everyone's undivided attention. That normally means right in the middle of dinner.

When everyone has a mouth full of food, he will announce that he is dropping out of school, getting a divorce, being indicted for fraud or that he has changed his sexual orientation.

Even though the meal table is not the time for such news (and you have told him so), it will happen anyway. Some people like all of the attention even if it causes the rest of us to choke.

### **The Surprise Girlfriend/Boyfriend**

No matter where you have Thanksgiving, there will likely be an extra person that someone in the family invited. They have told you that they are bringing someone but not who they are. When they show up, everyone gets to be shocked together.

Oh, and there's something else. They have nowhere to stay. They want to stay in the family home but mom is having nothing to do with unmarried folks sleeping in the same bedroom. This leaves your house or the expensive hotel.

An even worse case scenario is that you don't like him or her. Perhaps they are obnoxious, rude or lack proper personal hygiene. This is just what you need on a day like today. Do you tell your sibling or keep your mouth shut?



### **No Room at the Inn**

We all know this one. You've gone to a lot of trouble, expense and time and travelled a long way to get home for Thanksgiving to be with your family. The arrangement was that you would stay with your parents. But when you get there,



you find that they have made arrangements with everyone, not wanting to look inhospitable.

This means that either you're going to be sleeping on an air mattress in the living room floor or crunched in with your sister in the twin bed you used to own alone. Either way, it will be a very long four or five days at home.

# *How To Handle It All*

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Can you identify with any of these situations?

If not, hopefully you've found them amusing.

If you can identify, hopefully you are laughing to keep from crying.

Seriously though, these types of antics have torn families apart in one evening.

The last thing you want to do is see the backs of your family leaving because of an argument.

What's worse than a horrible Thanksgiving with a dysfunctional family? It is never speaking to them again until it's too late to say "I'm sorry" or "I forgive you."

So, in that spirit, here are some possible solutions to your sticky family situations. Give them a try. It can't hurt if things are bad already.

And, you might even experience that ideal Thanksgiving you have always wanted.

## **The Mother-In-Law**

Before you fume over her ruining your gravy, take a step back and regroup. Play to your strength – her ego.

Tell her that you really need her help, but in another capacity – activity coordinator.

What does that mean? Basically, you need her to keep everyone else in line.



So, for example, her duties might include organizing the dinner table, sending the others to the store for last-minute items, thinking up activities to pass the afternoon and organizing the snacks.

Often, mothers just want to be needed. You have married her son and now she has to visit you to see

him. Putting her in charge of a job you feel is indispensable can get you back in her good graces (at least for one day).

It helps her and you!

### *The Drunken Uncle*

This situation needs a delicate hand and some advance planning.

Seriously limit the amount of alcohol served this year – perhaps to just a welcome drink as people arrive.

Or decide to hold an alcohol-free gathering.

That doesn't mean water has to be served. Create a batch of apple cider, holiday punch or non-alcoholic brew for everyone to enjoy. For dinner, offer sparkling grape juice or apple cider in champagne glasses.

If your uncle brings his own beverages, set down some ground rules. One, he is only to drink them in the garage or on the back steps. Two, when it is gone, he is done. Third, if he causes any trouble, he will have to leave the house. Tough love is the only solution for what could turn out to be a volatile situation.

### *The Unruly Kids*

Kids need something to do. They seem to fall to pieces when they have too much nervous energy and no way to burn it off. Set up the back yard for outdoor games. Unless the weather is rainy, bundle them up and let them run to their heart's content.

Enlist the aid of your barely-there teenager. They don't want to be in the house, so give them a job to do. Offer to pay them to watch the kids in the back yard.

If you don't have a back yard, set up a room with a television and DVD player, toys and video games for them to enjoy. Your teen can still help you out by keeping the kids out of everyone's hair.



### *The Ailing Grandmother*

You can appease grandma on two fronts. First, get her busy. When she is working with her hands she has no time to show you where it hurts. Let her peel the potatoes, roast the chicken and whatever else she can do for you.

Most grandmothers would love to be asked to help in the kitchen but many never ask because they are older. Remember, the old recipes are usually the best and probably the ones you got from your mother to make the dishes you are going to serve.

Second, invite a guest. If you know a co-worker who doesn't have anywhere to go for Thanksgiving, they could do you a favor as you help them. They can listen to grandma's stories and run interference for you.

(On a sneakier level, many relatives will resist airing their dirty laundry if an outsider is in the house).



### *The Barely There Teenager*

We hit upon this with the unruly kids. Give them a job to do and they will try and perk up for you.

Maybe your teen has a friend who doesn't have a family to spend the holidays with. Invite them as well. It gives them someone to commiserate with and hopefully have a good time.

### *The Feet Up Footballers*

This is one of the easiest fixes. They say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Well, you will be employing a little gastronomic blackmail today.

Inform your menfolk that they will not be partaking in those scrumptious apple and sweet potato pies you have created if they don't help with the meal and the hospitality. And, there will be no day-after turkey sandwiches either.



Your next strategy is to tell them *exactly* what you want them to do. Prepare a list of chores for everyone in the family.



straightening up).

It could be prep work (cleaning up the house, decorating, cutting up food in the kitchen or making grocery store runs), hospitality (engaging everyone in games, television, watching the children and keeping the energy good) or clean up (loading dishwasher, taking out trash,

### *The Head-Locked Sisters*

To keep the cage match from happening, place your feuding siblings on opposite ends of the house. One can be in the kitchen and the other outside with the kids. You know who has what strengths, so play to those.

Enlist the aid of your mother, who is the perpetual peacemaker.

Oh, and place them at opposite ends of the dinner table too.

### *The Big News Brother*

A popular tradition at Thanksgiving dinner is to go around the table and say something that you are grateful for in your life. Here's a twist: instead, tell one thing that you love and appreciate about the person sitting next to you.

This takes the concentration off of big news brother and anyone else who wants to shock the family with news.

Besides, they will get to hear at least one good thing said about them so that can count for something.

Start the ball rolling with the person most likely to say something really humble, to set the proper example.

### *The Surprise Girlfriend/Boyfriend*

Get the skinny before they darken your door. Your brother's girlfriend can bunk in with one of your sisters. Conversely, your sister's boyfriend can bunk in with your teenage son or your brother. There is always a way to work things out if you give yourself enough time. If there truly won't be enough room, suggest an inexpensive hotel nearby.

### *No Room at the Inn*

Solidify your rooming plans before you get that plane ticket.

If you have to, get a hotel room for at least part of your Thanksgiving visit. On the one hand, you can have time away from the family. On the other, you know where you will be sleeping and it will be a comfortable bed.



# *Take Care of Yourself*

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With everyone else's problems taking center stage it will be easy to forget about you. If you are the one doing the hosting, a lot of the pressure floats your way.

But you don't have to accept what isn't yours to own. Meaning, someone else's fight or big bad news doesn't have to ruin your day or your memories of the occasion.

## **Get Away**

Before anyone arrives, decide on a place where you can hide away even for five or ten minutes to regroup and think through your next steps. It can be your walk-in closet or your bathroom, so long as it is quiet and you can't be found until you are ready.

(Keep a pillow handy in case you need something to scream into).



## **Put a Positive Spin on Things**

When brother announces that he is going on trial, express that you are sorry for his trouble and then move on. Don't give him or other family members time to dwell on the subject. In the spirit of the season, look for a positive nugget of hope in the situation. (Maybe another relative is a lawyer and can represent him pro bono).

If you ignore the snide comments, arguments and move on with a cheerful spirit, others will begin to follow suit. Everything is not all bad or all good to the point where a happy medium can't be found.

# *Conclusion*

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What would Thanksgiving be without family to share it with?

(For some, it would be infinitely more peaceful).

This year, use the information in this report to help you see the value in spending the holidays with family again.

And, for those difficult situations, remember that planning for them in advance, and knowing how you're going to handle them, will make them deflate if not disappear entirely.

## *Happy Thanksgiving!*

