

HOW TO DEAL WITH A MEDDLING PARENT

1 Prepare yourself mentally.

Remember that the holidays are a time for celebration, and try to maintain a positive attitude no matter what your parents may say.

2 If your parents give unwanted or annoying advice, be polite and attempt to change the subject.

Thank them for their concern. Say, “I appreciate your advice, but I’d really rather talk about [insert new subject here].”

3 Avoid confrontation.

Never respond to a meddling parent with phrases that include “you always,” “you never,” or “leave it alone.” Suggest discussing the issue at another time. If you are a guest in someone else’s home, confrontation should be avoided at all costs.

4 Smother the conversation with kindness.

Always counter a negative remark with a positive one. If your parent says, “Your house really needs painting,” counter with, “This house is in such a great neighborhood. Isn’t that great for the kids!” If your parent says, “When are you going to get a real job?” counter with, “I’m making great progress on my novel!”

5 Do not discuss money in public.

How much things cost and financial success are attractive topics for a meddling parent. These are inappropriate subjects for group conversation, however. Do not get angry; deflect the inquiry. If a question about money is asked, say, “I can’t remember what we paid,” or “We’re just thankful for what we have.”

6 Avoid taking the bait.

If a meddling parent keeps mentioning how well other people are doing compared to you—how important a job, how many children, how big a house—or makes other implicitly critical comparisons, just say, “That’s wonderful.”

7 Ask for their advice about a less-irritating topic.

Meddling parents often simply want to be asked for their opinions. Seeking their thoughts on a less important subject or even on a made-up problem may placate them or distract them from sensitive issues (ask for their input on remodeling the kitchen, for example, even if you are not intending to do so).

8 If the meddling parent will not relent, excuse yourself from the conversation.

Casually excuse yourself (do not say, “I can’t listen to this anymore!”) and move to another room. For example, finish your drink and say, “I need to get a refill” (do not offer to get your parent one); or say, “Excuse me, I have to go to the bathroom,” or “I have to make a phone call,” or “I promised I would help in the kitchen.” Do not make any promises to come right back.

Be Aware

- It is best to preempt meddling parents by announcing lots of news before the holidays arrive. Phone or e-mail the week before with updates, keeping the news positive and upbeat.
- Remember that you do not have to answer every question. In advance of the holidays, practice non-responses or evasive responses, such as “Do you really think so?” or “That’s an interesting question. Let me think about it.” In front of a mirror, practice the blank stare.

