



Dale V. Atkins, PhD

HOW TO GET ALONG WITH PEOPLE YOU DON'T LIKE

...but still need to see

It's inevitable that at some point we will have to spend time with people we don't like. Maybe you don't like your spouse's best friend or your daughter's boyfriend. Here are some simple guidelines for getting through these tricky situations...

YOU DON'T GET ALONG WELL WITH A RELATIVE

This is someone you can't avoid completely but with whom you can spend only so much time before he/she starts to drive you crazy. Perhaps your sister is a slob, and you're very tidy...or you have a parent you love, but who is overly critical.

With these people, it is best to keep activities confined to neutral zones, such as going to a movie or a restaurant. Usually, in these places, conversations don't get too out of hand. With a movie, you'll be able to talk only before and after, though you're still spending time together. Also, these activities have built-in time limits, so you will be spending quality time with someone you love, but you'll also be giving yourself an exit.

Keep in mind that while you may be tempted, it's usually not worth your time to try to redesign someone's personality. This almost always meets with resistance and can lead to fights. Just try to focus on the best aspects of his/her personality.

YOU DON'T LIKE YOUR PARTNER'S FRIEND

When you don't like your partner's friend, it can be difficult for both you and your partner. First, try your best to see things through your partner's eyes, and try to find something you like or can appreciate about his friend. It can be something as simple as appreciating his sense of style or a joke he told once.

Let your partner know that it's OK to do things without you, but try to be there if there's an important event in the friend's life—for example, a wedding or a party for a promotion.

Never try to turn your partner against his friend. You don't have to like him as much as your partner does, but you should respect the relationship. Don't be rude or say nasty things about him.

YOUR PARTNER DOESN'T LIKE YOUR FRIEND

Let your partner know that it is OK to not like your friend, but it's not OK to be rude or dismissive to him/her. Ask for the same respect to be shown to your friends that you show to your partner's friends.

Cultivate your relationship with your friend without your partner, and don't insist that everyone spend time together. Sometimes it's easier to do this during the week,

instead of the weekend, when you may have family obligations.

YOU DON'T LIKE YOUR CHILD'S SPOUSE

One of the trickiest situations is when your child marries someone whom you do not like. It can be very hard to hide your feelings, but for the sake of your relationship with your child, it's a good idea. Make every effort to get along with your child's spouse, and do your best to care about him/her and show him respect.

Don't say anything bad about your child's spouse. You don't want to put your child in the middle of a conflict between you and his spouse, and it is not fair to make your child choose between you and the spouse.

If there is a legitimate issue between you and your child's spouse—for example, if she is rude to you in public—it's best to pull her aside at another time and try to work it out.

YOU DON'T AGREE WITH A LOVED ONE'S CHOICES

It's always hard to see someone you love making bad choices. Maybe a child is spending too much time partying at college or a friend is in a damaging relationship.

Talk to him/her in an open way, and share your concerns—but don't pressure and don't be overly judgmental. Discuss with him the consequences of his actions. For

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Dale V. Atkins, PhD, psychologist and relationship expert in private practice in New York City and coauthor of *Sanity Savers: Tips for Women to Live a Balanced Life* (HarperCollins). She is author of the on-line newsletter *Sanity Savers and More*. Dr. Atkins also is a frequent guest on NBC's *Today* and other TV shows. www.drdaleatkins.com

Copyright © 2008 by Boardroom Inc., 281 Tresser Blvd., Stamford, Connecticut 06901-3226. www.BottomLineSecrets.com

example, if your child is partying at school more than studying, there is a real chance that he could flunk out. Remember that he must choose to change—you can't force that on anyone. Tell him that you love him and that you always will, but that you don't agree with his choices.

One way to reduce the stress you feel when seeing a friend or relative in situations you don't agree with is to focus on your own wisdom and

be grateful for what you have and who you are.

YOU DON'T LIKE YOUR HOUSEGUEST

Sometimes there's no way to avoid having your castle invaded by people who get under your skin—whether it is your partner's old college roommate or your great-aunt Helen.

Try to carve out some time for yourself. Find something relaxing

and recharging that you love to do. Take a quiet walk by yourself...have a relaxing bath...or meditate.

It may help to put your guests to work if they are staying with you for more than a few days. Having them do some dishes or fold some laundry can help to greatly reduce your own stress level. If you have less stress and less work to do, you might even enjoy your guests. ■ ■