Even the most loving connected families often find the holidays stressful. The trick is to plan to minimize problems according to Dr. Ann Steiner, a California Marriage and Family Therapist. Dr. Steiner is a noted national and international speaker, workshop leader, author, consultant to therapists, and a highly-respected, psychotherapist with a practice in Lafayette. Her book, “Help Your Group Thrive: A Workbook and Planning Guide” offers advice on how to deal with family dynamics that can take a celebration from a loving event to an ear-splitting yelling match or a snooze fest as one family member dominates the dinner conversation. Dr. Steiner explains that conflict in families and relationships is normal and suggests that the Thanksgiving holiday offers a unique opportunity to show appreciation. She offers a proactive road map to steer your gathering from challenging conflicts to happy concordance.

“A host/hostess can guide what he/she wants to achieve for the gathering” says Steiner. “Possibly even use a timer. If the talk about what they did at night before Thanksgiving. Maybe have grandparents or aunts and uncles talk about what they did at night before TV, cell phones, or the internet. Use this year’s gathering as an opportunity to express gratitude, appreciation, and give thanks for what they all have, including each other.

To deal with a long-winded relative, have some topics that everyone can talk about. Possibly even use a timer. If the long-winded relative starts to take over, feel free to say something like, “I wonder what the children think about what you’re saying,” or pick out the theme or message everyone at the table “Who else has had an experience like that?”

Remembrance of related events can easily be re-awakened when families get together. Assume that every family member wants to feel like a valued member of a team of related people who despite their differences, love each other.

It helps to create a culture of respect and tolerance of differences. Creating agreements about managing disagreements in your family or group, and encouraging open conversations, if everyone agrees to, can dramatically increase feelings of comfort, emotional safety and connection.

Holidays can be opportunities to create positive lifetime memories. Think about how you want to make this year’s gathering more comfortable and enjoyable. Reasonable expectations make that possible. Have fun!

To learn more about Dr. Steiner’s work visit, www.DrSteiner.com. Her book, Help Your Group Thrive: A Workbook and Planning Guide, Roulledge Books, is available on Amazon. (https://amazon.to/2sIKG0X.)

A Guide to Managing Family Dynamics Over the Holidays

by Jill Hedgecock,
Author of Rhino in the Room, www.jillhedgecock.com

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