

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

*I recently married, and I don't relate to my in-laws very well. How can I develop better relationships with them?*

There is no guarantee that your compatibility with your spouse will automatically transfer to his or her family. But over the last 35 years I have used some common-sense strategies that have helped me bridge that compatibility gap:

- **Spend equal time and make equal efforts with both sides of the family.** Nothing creates hard feelings faster than favoritism towards one side of the family. Discuss in advance how you will manage the holidays. During these times expectations are high and feelings can be sensitive.

- **Don't be easily offended; better yet, don't be offended at all.** We all make mistakes, and within the family circle, these mistakes can be scrutinized and analyzed. Instead, give everyone the benefit of the doubt. Accept the fact that some relatives may always be late, some may never RSVP, and some may be tactless. It is better to accept them than to criticize. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt.

- **Withhold harsh judgments.**

We cannot always know the burdens that others carry. I have found it beneficial to replace judgment with kindness and acceptance.

It is best to minimize small differences; in the eternal scheme, relationships are more important than traditions. My in-laws love my husband, and so do I. That is the great commonality that brings us together.

*Cathy Brundage, Arizona*

If you have a Church calling similar to that of one of your in-laws, ask for their advice with a struggle you may be having in that calling. This kind of invitation can demonstrate humility on your part and can help your in-laws feel needed and respected. My in-laws can offer advice where my own parents cannot because of differences in their talents and varying life experiences. Seeking the advice of my



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in-laws has helped me grow closer to them and realize that they are in my life not only as the parents of my husband but also as friends.

*Kaija Mortensen, California*

Like most newlyweds, we had some adjustments to make, but in addressing these, we made it a point to never speak ill of each other to either of our families; we knew that we would always forgive and love each other, but if we shared faults or disagreements with family members, they might not be so quick to forgive. Focusing on each other's positive traits and attributes with our families instilled love in their hearts too.

*Michael C. and Susan J. McGhee, Maryland*

Realize that you are the new person trying to fit into a group that has known each other for years and that it may take a while. You will have to build trust with each other. Attend family events. When possible, invite others to come over for your special occasions, such as birthdays and holidays. Learn everyone's names and who goes with whom. Be willing to listen to the stories others have to tell, and laugh with them. Never feel you have to top their tales.

*Terrance D. Leder, Oregon*

One of the best things for developing my relationship with my in-laws was preparing for my wedding. My mother lived far away, so my future mother-in-law became my greatest help and support. While we didn't always agree, we found a balance as we worked and spent time together. It's a lot like getting to know new friends. Spend one-on-one time with them. Find out their interests, and you might find you have a lot in common. If you find you still don't get along, focus on being kind and on loving and serving them.

*Sarah Lee, Utah*

In my experience, most friction with in-laws occurs because a marriage is a merging of two different family



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such as weddings, graduations, and birthdays. In learning about my in-laws, I have found we have more in common than I initially thought.

*Jeni Gates, Washington*

Look through family photo albums together and ask your in-laws questions. How did they meet? What was your spouse like as a child? What are some of their favorite holiday traditions? This will show your in-laws that you are interested in them and want to be included in their family. It's a great way to learn about your spouse too!

*Tara Johnson, Alberta, Canada*

I married a man from Central America who was studying in the United States. Even though I understood there would be some cultural differences, I felt we could overcome them as we worked together. My mother-in-law was very kind, but

there were times I felt that I would not measure up to what she wanted me to be. As I got discouraged, I turned to my husband to share my feelings. I felt he would be the best person to help me understand her. The more I understood the cultural aspects of his life, the more I realized the humility and love that was being shown to me. I have learned to incorporate the things that I love about their culture into our home and to blend while we make our own traditions.

*Amy Cabrera, Washington*

Through my first year of marriage, I never gave much attention to stereotypical in-law jokes. I loved everything about my husband, including his family. Things went smoothly until our first baby came. Suddenly there seemed to be advice flying at me from all directions: "You're feeding him too much!"

cultures, backgrounds, attitudes, and atmospheres. Try to see these things for what they are: something developed over decades that cannot be easily changed when one person marries into a family. While you may not agree with the way your in-laws do things, it is helpful to be optimistic. Like it or not, your in-laws had some influence on your spouse. Since you love your spouse, you must also love some of what his or her family instilled. Seek out and focus on those things.

*Deanne Winterton Chaston, Utah*

A fun project that has brought me closer to my in-laws is a memory book I started. Every month I e-mail or mail four questions to our grandparents, parents, siblings, nieces, and nephews and encourage them to send their responses to everyone else in the family. At the end of the year, I compile these questions and answers in a book with individual photos, brief biographies, pedigree charts, children's drawings, and material on important family events



“He’s not eating enough!” “Let him cry a little.” “Rock him—don’t make him cry!” I felt that as a new mother, I couldn’t do anything right. Although I listened as suggestions were given, inside I struggled. I refused to learn anything about motherhood from anyone besides my own mother.

More children came. I quickly learned that each of my children had unique personalities and that the “tricks of the trade” from my mother didn’t always work. Advice from my mother-in-law might be just what I needed. After all, my children possessed some of the personality traits of their father, and she had raised him. I found myself asking her for more advice after her initial counsel proved valuable. From that time forward, our relationship became stronger. I found that I was more adaptable to the needs of my children as I drew wisdom from both my mother and my mother-in-law.

*Emily Willoughby, Arizona*

Just three months after my husband and I were married, my mother-in-law asked us to move in with her to help out due to health problems she was facing. She has admitted being a bit hard to get along with. My husband is a man of compassion and tender feelings. In spite of the difficult circumstances, he works hard to keep her happy. His motto is “I try to do what my Savior would do.” Through his example, I too have learned to look at my mother-in-law as a child of God and to see her heart and concerns.

## A MISSION STATEMENT FOR MORTALITY



*“I believe the mission statement for mortality might be ‘to build an eternal family.’*

*Here on this earth we strive to become part of extended families with the ability to create and form our own part of those families. That is one of the reasons our Heavenly Father sent us here. . . . Indeed, nothing is more critically connected to happiness—both our own and that of our children—than how well we love and support one another within the family.”*

**Elder M. Russell Ballard, “What Matters Most Is What Lasts Longest,”**  
*Ensign, Nov. 2005, 41, 42.*

Serving her has become an easy task, and we have been blessed.

*Name Withheld*

When my husband and I got married, it was hard on both of our families. We’re both converts, and it was difficult for our families to understand why we were getting married at an age they considered young and before first completing college. Although I thought the initial stress we experienced at the wedding was resolved, there was still a lot of tension with my mother-in-law when we visited six months later. That’s when I became truly committed to trying to build a

relationship with her. It started out small: I’d call to ask how she made stuffed peppers. She loves to cook, so this was comfortable ground. I’d ask about her job, how her other two children were doing, anything I could think of. I’d tell her a little bit about the classes I was taking or the children at the daycare center where I worked. While we’re still not as close as I would like, we’re on the way there. I think it’s important to give it time. Marriage is a big transition, not only for the bride and groom, but for their families as well. Don’t feel as if it has to happen all at once.

*Olivia Anne Gbaforkhan, Florida* ■

## SHARE YOUR IDEAS

An upcoming Questions and Answers feature will focus on the following question:

*I work in a secular environment. How can I stand up for what I believe without seeming self-righteous or judgmental?*

If you’d like to contribute your ideas and experiences, please label them “secular environment” and follow the submission guidelines under “Do You Have a Story to Tell?” in the contents pages at the beginning of the magazine. Please limit responses to 500 words and submit them by October 19.