

TEAM
NV

Juggling Family Dynamics

Kristin Caliendo on managing relationships and get-togethers during the holidays.

Cool weather kicks off the season as I start making my list and checking it twice. Somewhere between baking cookies and fighting off crowds at the mall, scheduling of the family gatherings tops my list.

Growing up, holidays were about time-honored traditions—gathering around the fire with kin and reuniting with loved ones. As the modern family takes on a new shape, making plans and setting boundaries can be a sensitive subject. Many North Valley families face the dilemma of juggling family dynamics, and one thing is for sure—it's no easy task trying to please everyone. Here are my top five suggestions for managing relationships and starting the season off right:

- **IT'S ALL IN THE APPROACH.**

Try to keep an open mind and, even more importantly, an open heart. Have a sit-down with your spouse before talking with your extended family. This is *not* the time to dredge up past family grievances but rather a time to come together as a team so that when you approach family, it can be done with dignity and respect.

- **SET A SCHEDULE AND STICK TO IT.**

When families are mixed, collaborate to assign or pick holidays. Be fair; try not to favor one side of the family. If all parties can reach an agreement, fewer feelings may be hurt. Finally, don't forget to mark it all on the calendar.

- **ADDRESS TRAVELING, AND ADDRESS IT EARLY BEFORE AIRFARES SOAR.**

It's common for young families to leave the nest and raise children away from their hometowns. Therefore, arranging time with grandparents can be a challenge. How about grandparents coming to visit on even years and adult children traveling home on the odd years? If it's not possible for parties to travel, consider installing Face Time or Skype on your home computer.

- **THE GIFT OF GIVING DOESN'T ALWAYS HAVE TO BE WRAPPED.**

Holidays can drum up a lot of anxiety about finances and budgets. If gift giving has created tension in the past, try thinking outside the box. An ornament exchange is a great idea, or consider a multifamily gift donation to a nonprofit, such as a donation of a brick to the Phoenix Zoo.



Scottsdale mom Kristin Caliendo is the face behind BeeingHappy.com, a site dedicated to helping others navigate the sticky situations that pop up in family life.

TIPS TO HELP YOU SAVE FOR A FAMILY GET-TOGETHER

- Great vacation deals hit the web in January. Take advantage of the money-saving offers and book your spring break and summer vacations in advance.
- Back to Basics. Convenience is nice, but saving a few bucks is better. Try packing a lunch instead of eating out. Reinvent leftovers, and cash in on money-saving coupons.
- Clean out your closets, and take what you don't wear anymore to a resale shop.
- Eating healthy and exercising daily will cut down on time spent on a doctor's visit.
- Give up one luxury service and put the money saved toward your "travel fund."

Don't forget to show appreciation to those who matter most, such as pet groomers, manicurists, gardeners, babysitters, and mail carriers. Popular gifts that express appreciation include gift cards, baked goods, and handmade cards from the kids.

