



Meeting Your Mother-in-Law Heart-On

BY KAY KOSAK ABRAMS, PH.D.

Dear Dr. Kay:

Could you please offer me some tips on how to get along with my mother-in-law? She and I do not hit it off. Sometimes she offers unwelcome advice. On occasion the tension is so great, one of us says something we regret. My husband thinks she envies me. She is not the warmest personality. Maybe I regret that she is not more loving because my mother and I are also at odds. I am tired of trying to figure it out. Is there anything I can do to get along better with my mother-in-law?

Dear Parent:

I am sorry to hear you are feeling disappointed with your mother-in-law. It is understandable that you are feeling at a loss, having tried to improve matters, yet feeling as stuck as ever.

Difficult relationships are often about unrealistic expectations, as well as misunderstandings. One of my favorite quotes when it comes to working on relationships is, "We cannot change another person; we can only change our response to that person." This will not satisfy your wish to have the ideal mother-in-law, but you might attain greater peace within yourself as you change how you perceive and respond to her.

A second favorite saying I often quote to my clients is, "Wherever you go, there you are," meaning we take our biographies, our memories, our belief systems and our values into



Photo by Judy Licht

every relationship. We view others through a very unique and personal lens, which is quite short-sighted.

In any relationship, there is potential for growth right in the hotbed of our differences. The challenge is in our ability to see and accept one another. Here are some behavioral and cognitive suggestions to help you create a more positive energy for your mother-in-law. In this manner, even if her behaviors and attitudes remain the same, you can completely transform your feelings and your behavior in response to her.

- Start over every day. Learn to let go of old grudges and tell yourself that such negative energy is like pollution that is harming your health. Practice letting go and free yourself. I know this sounds ridiculously ideal, but what is your alternative? When we stew in our anger and hurt, we hold the toxic energy in our mind and heart. Tell yourself you have no control over anything but what you choose to feel and respond to.

- If it is indeed true that your mother-in-law is a bit intimidated or jealous, recognize that sharing and caring is far more important than setting up a competition. Be determined to converse and share time in areas of common interest. Make an effort, as you would with your neighbor or any friend, to ignore topics or activities that might bring discomfort to either of you.

- Stretch yourself, whenever you can, toward her world view and her personal preference simply because you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by doing so. Try seeing her as simply made from a completely different cloth and from a different generation. Try appreciating the difference, rather than reacting or fighting to change it.

- When we stop needing our loved ones to see things as we do or be as we are, we find greater peace. When we can simply see another person's views or opinions as belonging legitimately to them, we no longer need to give their views such power by being hurt by the fact

