

## BUILDING IN-LAW RELATIONSHIPS

Tasks to be achieved in building successful in-law relationships:

1. Develop a relationship with your in-laws.
  - a. Establish parent/child relationship with new parents.

What will you call your in-laws? Will you knock on the door when you go to their home?
  - b. Do not interpret interest as interference.

These people have a great interest in your spouse, their child, and want the best for him/her and you.
  - c. If they give advice. . .

Remember, the decision is between you and your spouse, but be mature enough to recognize when advice is good and follow it. If you decide not to follow it, decline with respect.
  - d. Look for positive characteristics.

Everyone has good points. You will be much happier if you look for the positive instead of the negative and expect to get along. Accept them for what they are.
  - e. Treat your in-laws with respect and courtesy.

Avoid causing resentment by saying or doing things that can never be taken back. These people will be a permanent part of your life.
  - f. If conflict is unavoidable, keep visits short, thus allowing less time for problems to arise.
  - g. Give them (and you) time to adjust.

The first year is the hardest; you will all adjust to each other.
2. Grow into a new relationship with your own parents. (This will greatly help your spouse with his/her in-law adjustment.)
  - a. Withdraw closeness (not love) from parents and siblings.

Re-adjust your relationships; they are not your primary family now. This can be hard for parents, but the wise parents will help you do this.
  - b. Make your spouse your first priority (come home to him/her first, give news to first, etc.)
3. Build your relationship with your mate.
  - a. Do not discuss your mates' faults with friends and family.

This builds resentment against your mate and can even help to drive a wedge between you and your spouse. If you must complain to someone, talk it out with your wife/husband.
  - b. Continually build your marriage, making it the number-one priority in your life.
  - c. Do not hold your own family up as a model.

"My mother's cookies are a lot softer than yours."  
"Opening Christmas presents on Christmas Eve is a dumb idea."  
It is okay that your family has different habits and patterns from your spouse's. It's time to combine them for your own new family traditions.

Read and discuss the following information with the students.

### **WE ALWAYS DO IT THIS WAY**

Every family has certain routines and rituals that they follow. Some of these rituals are based on holidays, weddings, religious events, ethnic background, or socioeconomic class. Many times a family will not even realize that they have these rituals or procedures. They have done them for so long that they have become a part of the family.

The first year we were married, Christmas was disaster. I could not wait until Christmas Eve to open the gifts from family members. I was shocked and hurt when I was told, rather sternly, by my husband that there would be NO gifts opened that evening. Christmas presents were to be given on Christmas. We've since worked the difference out, but it took some time.

Most families have specific ways to celebrate holidays and special family occasions. They have never had a reason to even think about doing things a different way. A marriage combines two different backgrounds and gives an immediate reason to start evaluating why things are done the way they are.

Perhaps more importantly, are the day-to-day routines we follow. Do you brush your teeth before breakfast? Do you iron your clothes, or just wash and wear?

Is daily religion a part of your life? Do you eat meals at specific times as an entire family? These types of questions could go on and on and on. The first week of marriage can be a real eye-opening experience. The daily idiosyncrasies your mate displays may humor you or may annoy you. Just remember, he/she is feeling the same about you.

It is often helpful to spend time in the home of your in-laws and observe the way they live. It gives immediate insight into some of those strange things your mate does.

As important as it is to maintain family traditions and rituals, one of the most important tasks a newlywed couple can do is to evaluate what they want for their family, then begin their own family traditions and rituals. Many of these will be compromises formed from both sides of the new family. However, some of the most exciting rituals will be new, creative ones you and your mate invent on your own.

When you interviewed other couples, what things did they say that they argued about, and how did they resolve their conflicts? Were the disagreements always about big things, or were they sometimes about little things?