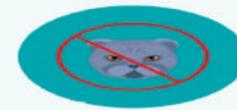


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Happy Mother's Day: Tips to strengthen bond with your mom



Mother's Day is a day to honor and celebrate moms. But not all adult children feel compelled to do this! I have had more than one client rant about feeling obligated to honor their mothers simply because of cultural peer pressure. Whether your mother was more like June Cleaver or Mommy Dearest, chances are she played a critical role in who you became. And this is what I told to Viktor. Your mother is the reason you are here -- talking, laughing, crying, feeling, loving, excelling and learning. You don't have to be her best friend, but as you grow older and so does she, there are some simple ways to strengthen your bond with her that have benefits for both of you. For those of us whose mothers are still alive, there are times when the relationship can be filled with conflict, anger or disappointment. So, whether you want to maintain your connection with your mother or need to repair it, here are some tips on how to improve that relationship with your mom.

Embrace what's positive.

In any relationship there are going to be ups and downs. Instead of focusing on what your mother does wrong (from your perspective) or the struggles you have with her, shift your attention to all that she does right and what's good about your relationship. This year, make a list of what you love about your mother and read those qualities to her, or write them in a card. Your true feelings are as good, if not better, than any card from Hallmark.

Respect your differences.

Each of you was born and raised in a different time with distinct values and ways of living. You probably don't agree on everything, even the important things in life. That's OK. But you can learn to acknowledge and respect her thoughts and feelings. There are many people who have been angry with their mother for years. Those are wasted years, and life is too short. This year, resolve to let the differences slide off your back. She never picks up the phone because she doesn't want you to spend the money? Fine. Tell her you like it when she calls you. She chastises you for divorcing? It's OK. Tell her you value her opinion. You're not going to change her, so accept her. Once you do, some of her annoying quirks will seem funny to you, and you'll feel as though you relieved a pressure valve.

Share your real self.

As adults, we don't spend much time talking to our mother about important topics in life. Think to yourself: Does she know my personal goals and fears in life? Strengthen your relationship by opening up new lines of communication between you and your mother. Too often we make small talk with our mothers. Try asking her for a piece of advice. Or tell her about something that has been stressing you out at work. Deepening the conversation with your mother is a way to share your real self. You might even discover that she is not only older than you, but wiser in some ways.

Get to know her.

Do you know what your mother's days are like? Who are her best friends? How does she feel about the events unfolding in the world? What does she love to do? What keeps her awake at night? These are the kinds of questions we forget to ask our mothers. You may have gotten into a superficial pattern of chatter with your mom that goes both ways -- you don't really share your inner life with her, nor she with you. Break the pattern! Many people discover new and interesting aspects of their parents at the very end of their life -- when they're dying and suddenly become very open. Don't wait till then. Start deepening your knowledge of her and your bond now.

Do something new.

This Mother's Day, resolve to make a date (it doesn't have to be on Mother's Day) to do something new with her. Go see a movie. Take her on a scenic car ride. Read the same book and discuss it. Go bowling. As in marriages, one of the best ways to strengthen bonds between people is to get out of the relationship rut by gently knocking them off balance. When you do this with your mother, you might be surprised by how changed the quality of the conversation is, or how differently she responds to you.

Set boundaries.

Respect each other's privacy. Limits in what you share with your mother (and what she tells you) are fine. Always remember that even when you try your hardest, there is still the possibility that she will be disappointed or you will not meet her expectations. These are the realities of any relationship. By setting boundaries, you are protecting yourself and the relationship. Telling your mother, "This is what I can do for you, and this is what I can't" will help set realistic expectations and hopefully increase her respect for you and your behaviors. She may be Mom, but your relationship still takes work. If things have been difficult or problematic, don't expect change to occur overnight. Keep working at it, because the rewards are well worth the effort.

Creative and Stress-Free Ways to Bond With Your Mother-in-Law



together.

If you're struggling to get close to your mother-in-law, here are nine ideas to get you started.

Cook Together

If the heart of the home is the kitchen, that's a great place to start bonding. Offering to help is always a good way to create warmth. Next time you're over, see if you can help her prepare a meal. If not, keep an eye out for other ways you could lend a hand—maybe she needs help gardening or watching after some younger family members. Just look for a way you can assist.

Have your mother-in-law teach you how to make a recipe that's been around for generations or that she cooked while your partner was growing up. It will make for an intimate bonding experience, and you'll inherit a valuable family tradition.

Ask Her Questions About Her Life

This may seem simple, but it's so important. Often, we only see our partner's family as extensions of our partner, and we ignore the fact that they have their own lives, histories, and passions. So, try asking your mother-in-law more about herself. Whether she runs her own business, grew up somewhere interesting, or has a lot of hobbies, try to gently question her (you don't want to look like you're prying) and see if you can get your mother-in-law to open up about herself.

Go to a Movie or Play Together

If you really have trouble making small talk with your mother-in-law, plays or movies can be a lifesaver. It's a way of spending time in the same space and experiencing something together while keeping conversations to a minimum—you spend most of the time sitting in silence watching something, after all. Afterward, you'll have an easy topic of discussion: the show's plot!

Ask Her for Advice

Another great way to build a connection is to make yourself vulnerable. You don't have to open up about all of your biggest fears but just asking for advice can help initiate a bond between two people. It doesn't have to be about something big and life-changing (although it can be), but reaching out and asking for her help might help soften things up, and it also shows that you respect her opinion. Whether it's asking for a recipe or advice for problems at the office, it's a good place to start.

Host a Family Board Game Night

As long as your partner's family isn't too cutthroat, a board game night can be a great way to bond and have fun. First, if you and your mother-in-law feel really distant, it can help to do a group activity before you get one-on-one time. Second, very few things in life are as revealing as watching someone play Monopoly. You'll make some memories, but you'll also really get to know each other.

Plan a Spa Day

If your mother-in-law likes a bit of pampering, a spa day is another opportunity for bonding that doesn't have to involve a lot of emotional sharing. Book some mani-pedis or massages (or both) for Mother's Day or a birthday. Everyone feels better when they're more relaxed, so you may find the conversation flows easier than you think.

Talk About Your Partner's Childhood

There can often be a weird, underlying sense of competition between you and your partner's mother. They raised them and knew them way back when, but chances are that you're the most important person in your partner's life now. Give a nod to the fact that your mother-in-law has been there since the beginning by asking about your partner's childhood, looking at old photos, and maybe even swapping embarrassing stories about your partner. It's a good way to show that you understand how important their relationship and history are, which can go a long way.

Participate in One of Her Hobbies

Pottery, yoga, gardening, rock climbing: It doesn't matter what it is, showing an interest in your mother-in-law's hobbies can be a really good peace offering. If they're a private person or you sense that they prefer a solo endeavor, it may be best to steer clear—but if they're up for a partner, try volunteering to join.

Go for a Walk

A good walk and some fresh air have a way of getting the conversation flowing—maybe it's because many of us do our best thinking when we're moving, or maybe it's just the outdoors that give us a gentle boost of endorphins. Heading out for an informal walk doesn't have the pressure of, "We're doing this because we need to bond." Instead, just take the opportunity when the time (and weather) is right and ask some general questions to get the bonding started.

Everyone has a different relationship with their mother-in-law, and it might be that you're never going to be super close. But taking opportunities to bond when you're able to will make you feel like you're on the same team. When in doubt, start small and build your way up—it's better to let it happen naturally than to force it. Simply spending time together in the same space can be a great start.

When you're in a relationship, spending time with loved ones can become complicated—there are now two families to contend with, each with its own quirks, difficulties, traditions, and dynamics. Perhaps one of the trickiest relationships to navigate, though, is the one between you and your mother-in-law.

There's no "right" way to have a relationship with your mother-in-law. You might hit it off right from the beginning, or you may find that you never really have a breakthrough and become friends. That's okay. You don't have to become attached at the hip, but there's always room to bond with your mother-in-law and make your relationship stronger. Having a good rapport (even if it's not a close one) will make life easier for you, your mother-in-law, your partner, and everyone else in the family. Luckily, there are lots of ways to bond with her; some are about fostering emotional intimacy and others about spending quality time

