

The most dreaded topic at family gatherings

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(HealthDay)—Family harmony and talk of politics can be combustible holiday companions, a therapist contends.

A recent Reuters/Ipsos poll found that 62 percent of respondents said politics was the topic they dread most when relatives get together at the holidays. And nearly one-third said they planned to avoid the subject.

No matter how you vote, it's possible to maintain political peace over the holidays, said Katherine Hertlein, director of the couple and family therapy program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Medicine.

Some of her suggestions:

- **Lower your expectations.** Don't assume [family](#) members share your opinions. Doing so can set you up for disappointment.
- **Seek common ground.** Instead of making statements about your beliefs, ask questions in order to understand other people's views. This could help you find areas that you agree on and increase your chances of feeling empathy.
- **Think before you speak.** Instead of immediately responding to something you disagree with, take time to reply. For example, say you need to think about what was said.
- **Consider others' motivations.**

Try to determine the reasons for someone else's beliefs, such as concern for children or the poor. Understand that their stance may reflect good intentions.

- **Avoid confrontation.** If you think it's impossible to have a civil discussion, it might be best to walk away.

"Develop an exit plan prior to any conversation where you may anticipate difficulties," Hertlein said in a university news release.

"Having a plan ahead of time that you may or may not choose to use

returns you to feeling like you are in a sense of control, and reduces the likelihood that you will seek to obtain control through increasing the volume or intensity of your voice," she said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers [holiday health and safety tips](#).

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