

Surviving Holiday Gatherings

Written by Ginny Grimsley

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For those of us from families built on Debbie Downer DNA, there's only one direction a mood can go during holiday get-togethers and that's down.

Sure, the running negative commentary, bubble-bursting barbs and rampant self-pity were funny coming from comedian Rachel Dratch on "Saturday Night Live's" Debbie Downer sketches. But few of us can foresee our own Negative Nancys giving us a good belly laugh.

Whether you're the smiley face among frowners, or a bit of a Depressing Dan yourself, there are tricks you can use to keep the table talk from getting lethal, says Paula Renaye, a professional life coach and author of *The Hardline Self Help Handbook*, (www.hardlineselfhelp.com).

"You can take control simply by thinking about what you choose to say – or not say," Renaye says. "If you hear yourself criticizing, judging or complaining, you're part of the problem. Happy, self-respecting people don't find it necessary to dump on others to make themselves feel good.

"If someone else is the problem, simply don't give them the ammunition they need," she says. Instead try these tactics:

• **Do not say anything negative.** Period. And no one-downing! One-downing is the opposite of one-upping. It's the art of coming up with something worse when someone else talks about their problem. No matter what negative thing anyone says, or how much you agree with it or don't, resist the urge to respond with a negative. Instead

• **Dodge, distract and detour.** Turn things around with a question -- a positive one. If you need to, make a "happy list" of questions before you go, so you'll have some at the ready. And remember, there's no law that says you have to answer a question just because someone asked it. With negative people, it's best if you ...

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• **Do not talk about yourself.** The only reason negative people care about what you're up to is because they want something to ridicule, brag or gossip about to make themselves look or feel good. Don't go there. Whether you just filed bankruptcy or won a Nobel Prize, keep it to yourself. No good can come of it. None. And why do you need to chatter like a chipmunk about yourself anyway? Might want to think on that one, too. Better to find some praise for someone else than to expect someone to praise you.

• **Do not share your woes.** Even if you're in a tough place and could really use a shoulder to cry on, don't start laying your woes on a Negative Nell. Even in a weak moment, when you've had a terrible day, talking about it with a negative person is a bad idea. You might get a microsecond of sympathy, but that's only so they can launch into telling you how much worse they have it. So, no talking about yourself unless you want to be the talk of the party, the family and the town.

• **Do your homework and become like Teflon.** Think of the times people said things that made you feel bad or made you feel the need to defend or explain yourself. If you want to avoid going down that trail again, start hacking away at the jungle of your own emotions. Get over needing anyone's approval or blessing. If you are still waiting for negative relatives to validate you, you're in for a long wait. Don't set yourself up to be miserable. Get over it and go prepared.

About Paula Renaye

Former eggshell-walker, emotionally-bankrupt wreck and utter failure at keeping her world from falling apart, Paula Renaye uses her journey out of despair into joy as a breadcrumb trail for others. She has been a consultant for 18 years, holds a degree in financial planning with a background in journalism and psychology, and is a member of the International Association of Coaches. Paula is the multi-award-winning author of *The Hardline Self Help Handbook*.