Sometimes, the people that it is the most difficult to set boundaries with are the people to whom you are the closest. Even if your family is relatively happy and functional, there might still be members of that family that routinely cross the line or that simply treat you in a way that you would prefer not to be treated. Many people will play the role of the people pleaser with their families, but if there are members of your family that are being difficult and that are cutting into your happiness, it's time set boundaries for those difficult family members. Here are nine ways to do exactly that:

1. Understand that your needs are important.

Often, people will avoid building boundaries because they are afraid about hurting the other person, despite the fact that the other person does not appear to grant them the same courtesy. This is especially true of difficult family members, but it is important to keep in mind that your needs are just as important as that person's needs. This is a kind of manipulation, to make you feel as though you can't set up boundaries because their needs are more important than yours.

2. Seek out people who value you.

If there are members of your family that do genuinely value you, seek them out and use them to help you set boundaries with the family members that don't seem to value you. If there are not members of your family who can help you with this, find people outside the circle of your family. Your friend group is a good place to start. You are bound to have at least one friend that can help you start to build the boundaries that you need.

3. Be firm, but kind.

Setting boundaries doesn't necessarily mean you have to be callous. In fact, when you build your boundaries with those difficult family members, it can actually be more effective to do it with kindness. Anger or defensiveness will only rile them up and cause them to lash out at you. Kindness, however, leads to a greater likelihood of a calm exchange.

4. Keep your expectations realistic.

For example, it is not realistic to agree to attend Thanksgiving at that family member's house, when you know that they are going to belittle you the entire time that you are there. Giving in and attending family events or actively seeking out situations in which you and that person are together is the opposite of setting and keeping boundaries. Be realistic with yourself about how much time feels tolerable to you with that difficult family member and in what situations you are willing to see that person.

5. Be willing to walk away.

Something that most people forget is that if someone is being toxic, you do have the option to get up and leave the situation. You might feel like you want to defend yourself, but if your difficult family members are experts at making you look like the bad guy or making you feel bad for blowing up after the have been toxic to you for hours, the best thing to do is simply leave. Just get up and go. You don't have to explain yourself, you don't have to apologize.

6. Keep in mind that you are in charge of what you do.

No one else can make you do or feel anything. You are in charge of whether or not you maintain your boundaries. For example, say that you are at a family gathering and your difficult uncle says something derogatory about your job. When you tell him to stop making fun of you, he says something about how you've never been good at taking a joke. Right now, you have two choices. You can either pretend that everything is fine or you can say something like, "That crosses the line. If you're going to continue, I'm just going to leave." This establishes what is and what is not okay and puts the consequences of the action back on the difficult family member.

7. Be direct.

Dropping hints or being passive aggressive about your boundaries is the worst way to make sure that anyone understands what they are, especially because many difficult family members are difficult expressly because they are careless. Being very explicit about what is okay and what is not okay is the only way you can make sure that they understand what your boundaries are.

8. Seek to take care of yourself.

When you take care of yourself, you are very willing to set up and stick to your boundaries. Self-care can help you understand the importance of your own boundaries and can also help to motivate you to make sure your boundaries are defined and that they are being observed. While putting yourself first all the time isn't healthy, occasionally taking the time to care about yourself first and foremost, especially when dealing with difficult family members is very important.

9. Learn to be assertive.

Many difficult people get away with being difficult because no one stands up to them. Whether your father seems to enjoy cutting you down or your cousins' teasing often crosses a line and goes too far, simply being assertive and telling people what you need and what you want can be enough to set the boundaries you need. If you are assertive, you become someone that people do not trifle with, someone that is respected, rather than ridiculed. Stand up for yourself!

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