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Title: There's no place like your Honey's home for holidays

Author: Laura Baron

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You've accepted the deadly home-for-the-holidays invitation. Your Honey assures you you'll be great and the Family will love you. You're not exactly convinced. You've heard the stories about the cousin who wraps herself in cellophane to keep away germs and the uncle who has a fetish for ferrets. As you put on your happy face and try to focus on the actual names of the aunts who look like Cheech and Chong impersonators, you start to believe you're doomed. No worries. It's just the holidays. Follow some of these tips, and you'll skate.

First, ignore the "just bring your smile" trap. Never show up empty-handed. Everyone likes presents, especially folks who are about to keep the dog off your leg and food in your belly. Try to make the gift personal. Whatever it is, keep it simple. Going overboard screams of insecurity. All you've done at this point is accept an invitation. Adhere your lips to the proper tush only after you've messed up.

Now if the old "don't worry, you can sleep in the same bed" scenario rears its ugly head, do not follow. The Family is watching if you take the bait. Insist on your own room, assuming they have one to offer. If they don't, set up camp on the floor, in the tub, it doesn't matter. Just don't cozy with your Honey in a cramped space. No matter how cool the Family seems, it's disrespectful. Besides, that bed stuck in a room since childhood is not going to hold up to your brand of action anyway. Give it an all-around rest at the Family abode. Let that crazy uncle be the only public ass-grabber in the family.

Remember, "make yourself at home" really translates to "makeyourselffollow-every-anal-rule-of-this-family-and-smile-while-you're-doing-it." That's right. It's their show, their code. If your Honey didn't think you could hang, you wouldn't have been invited. So be confident and just be yourself; actually, be the severely better version of you.

As you're offered another hot toddy watch yourself. Every party could use just a little more holiday cheer. Just don't get sloppy comfortable. You are still a guest.

But don't be too self-conscious; you aren't the only focus. The long-standing traditions of family dysfunction will always prove much larger than you. Just avoid tripping up. Sit yourself down and nod your head. Those grandparents have practiced perfecting the argument that after 62 years of marriage, seven collective hip replacements and 12 grandchildren, they still might trade each other in for a Tart. Don't try to mediate. If they didn't complain about each other, they wouldn't be speaking. It's their dance. Besides, watching the fireworks upfront will give you an opportunity to see where your Honey's left-of-center tendencies all started.

When the focus does shift to you and your Honey, share a united front. Anticipate an answer to that lovely "What's the next step in your relationship?" question from the

relative you just met. Stick together. In the end, the choice to lift each other up is always stronger than shooting each other down with sarcastic or embarrassing stories. The family will side with their half anyway. So choose to be sweet and take care of each other. Compliment and share each other's accomplishments.

Be gracious and giving. If something runs out, be a dear and offer to get some more from the store. Keep your eye on the eggnog--it's always first to go. And then get the car, grab your Honey, get the nog for them and a quickie on the side for you. Hit that market as many times as your holiday spirit will allow. Hey, holidays are all about giving.

Author: Laura Baron. REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR LAURA BARON IS A RELATIONSHIP COACH BASED IN CHICAGO. SHE CAN BE SEEN THURSDAYS ON "WGN MORNING NEWS."

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