



Handling Holiday Conflict: A Guide to Defusing Drama

Try these tips for defusing holiday drama...

Do your homework:

- ❖ Be strategic. Consider what “battles” you will be invited to engage in, and decide which, if any, will further your higher cause over the long term.
- ❖ Know your boundaries and your triggers – get clear on what you will and will not tolerate.
- ❖ Choose your own path. If you decide that your boundaries include choosing not to participate in a family tradition because it compromises your values and ideology, own that and stand by it.
 - State your intentions to create your own traditions clearly and without blame.
 - Understand and accept the consequences without bitterness.
 - Invite family to join you in your new tradition but keep your heart open and don't be attached to their decisions. They may not be ready to let go of their old ways yet.

If you choose to attend a holiday function, or engage with people on social media, before you do be sure to:

- ❖ Make a plan. Decide what action you will take if your non-negotiable boundaries are crossed.
- ❖ Practice! Make a list of all the inflammatory things you can anticipate people saying, and practice responding to those comments in a calm, compassionate and curious way. By speaking these out loud to yourself in a neutral environment, you increase your chances of having an effective response to fall back on in the heat of the moment.
- ❖ Contribute – a powerful invitation can be extended by bringing delicious vegan food to a family gathering for people to try, or by sharing recipes for amazing vegan options.

In the moment:

- ❖ Breathe!! Give that lizard in your brain a cookie and tell it to sit this one out – you're going to need your prefrontal cortex online so you can stay strategic.
- ❖ Breathe in through your nose for a count of four, hold for seven, breathe (blow) out through your mouth for a count of eight. Do this for a minute or two when you start feeling overwhelmed – your brain will thank you for the oxygen and your tongue will thank you for not actually biting it!
- ❖ Remember your priorities. Is it more important to be RIGHT or KIND (and effective)?
- ❖ Balance the energy – when they spike, you smooth. The louder others talk, the softer you do. The more emotional others get, the more measured and considered you are. It

works with horses, it works with kids, it works with irate customers – why shouldn't it work with family?!

- ❖ Acknowledge emotions – yours and theirs. Show you care by validating and affirming their feelings (it doesn't mean you agree with their actions, just that you see their feelings for what they are), and be open to sharing your own truth.
- ❖ Talk about YOUR experience – rather than telling what they should do, explain why you do and believe the way you do. Their responses are theirs, not yours – so try not to take anything personally.
- ❖ Encourage curiosity – yours and theirs. Acknowledge and affirm common ground. Validate any efforts they make to meet you where you are and leverage those successes. When you start to feel judgmental or angry, see if you can find your way back to curiosity and openness. Remember you may have been where they are right now.
- ❖ Resist the urge to attack, defend or advise. These are the drama roles rearing their heads! Instead – try to share, explore, and invite... and see where that takes you.
- ❖ Hold your ground... and let it go. This is not digging in – it's simply being unapologetic and consistent about your boundaries and needs, without getting attached to, say WINNING. You can only be responsible for yourself and for holding yourself accountable to your values and standards. BE the change; set the example. And let go of your need to determine how things SHOULD be.

After the storm:

- ❖ Practice self-care. Take some time to walk in nature, take a bath, spend time with your animals. Recharge and be gentle with yourself.
- ❖ Forgive – yourself and them. Don't get lost down a hole of "I should have handled that better!" or "they should have..." Remember the common ground and move forward as constructively as you can.
- ❖ Follow up. If someone has shown interest in your position, remember to follow up and invite them to learn more or experience your world in a positive way.
- ❖ Connect with like-minded people for emotional support and solidarity.

Useful resources for dealing with nonvegan family and friends

The holidays can be tough on animal activists, and they can also be an opportunity for outreach on behalf of the animals. However you move through this season, please take good care of yourselves, and know you are not alone.

- ❖ NARN Activist Support resources - [Resources-for-Activist-Wellbeing.pdf \(narn.org\)](#)
- ❖ NARN activist support calls – 2nd Thursday of every month, 6pm Pacific Time (Register in advance for this meeting: [Meeting Registration - Zoom](#))
- ❖ In Defense of Animals activist support calls - 4th Thursday Every Other Month, 5-6pm Pacific Time (Register here: [Webinar Registration - Zoom](#))

Websites:

- [Self-Compassion](#) resources by Dr. Kristin Neff

Videos:

- Earthling Ed's conversation with Melanie Joy about [Vegan Infighting & Why Your Family Won't Go Vegan | In Conversation with Dr. Melanie Joy - YouTube](#)
- There are some excellent nuggets of advice and food for thought in this [Sustainable Activism Webinar with Rae Sikora - YouTube](#) Start around 3:20 for tips on dealing with loved ones.
- And here's another perspective - [Family & Support - Straight Talk On Surviving The Holidays As A Vegan - YouTube](#)

Articles:

- [When we're Triggered: How to Stop Reacting Defensively. | elephant journal](#)
- [How to Calm Down: 15 Things to Do When You're Anxious or Angry \(healthline.com\)](#)

Books:

- "Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others" by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burk
- "Beyond Beliefs: A Guide to Improving Relationships and Communication for Vegans, Vegetarians, and Meat Eaters" by Melanie Joy