

# K-State Professor Offers Tips for Surviving 'Meet the Parents' Scenario

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Will I make a good impression? Will I fit in? What if his parents don't like me?

No doubt these questions -- and more -- roll through the head of anyone meeting his or her significant other's parents for the first time. With the holidays approaching, these meetings are more frequent and the pressure to make a good impression is on -- for both sides.

Tony Jurich, a Kansas State University professor of family studies and human services, offers the following suggestions to help make this first meeting a smooth and happy encounter:

\* Plan ahead and do your homework. "Get some tips from your significant other, as he or she knows their parents better than you do," Jurich said. Make sure your boyfriend or girlfriend informs you of any topics to avoid. "Let me know so I can work at not hacking off your mom and dad -- I don't want to be dead in the water before I start."

\* Let your parents know who is coming to dinner and inform them of anything, such as racial differences, that could surprise the parents if they didn't know. "Your significant other needs to run interference for you and make sure you don't encounter any evil surprises," Jurich said.

\* Approach the parents with the idea of being respectful of them, their rules and their values. "Be respectful of not only who they are as people, but who they are in terms of values and traditions," Jurich said. For example, don't force the issue of sleeping in the same bedroom if the

parents are strongly opposed to the idea, he said.

\* Let the parents know you have strengths and weaknesses and one of your strengths is flexibility. "It's holiday time and we have traditions," Jurich said. "If your mom always does ham and your significant other's mom does turkey, don't get bent out of shape."

\* Realize that your boyfriend or girlfriend's parents view of their child is different than yours. They knew your significant other as a child, while you know them as an adult, Jurich said. "Things like sex are problematic for parents because they see their child as a child," he said. "Because it's there, I have to understand that they see you differently than I do and I have to cut them some slack."

\* Make sure your significant other is willing to fill in those awkward moments. "If there's an awkward moment, you'll help me out," Jurich said. "If you leave me alone with your dad and he looks at me and says, 'what are your intentions with my daughter,' I want you to be aware and be able to bail me out."

"The image you're going to present is respectful of who they are and their values, rules and traditions," Jurich said. "You're your own person but you're also flexible. If you can do all that, you're in pretty good shape."

There are some things that parents themselves also can do to make the meeting more comfortable, Jurich said:

\* Parents need to realize their son or daughter sees something in this person and they need to make room for them.

\* The parent of the same gender should try and bond with their child's significant other. The father should do "male bonding" with the

boyfriend, or the mother should ask the girlfriend if she wants to help cook or go shopping, Jurich said.

The holiday season is also a time where introductions to new traditions might occur. Jurich offers some suggestions on how to also deal with these new traditions when joining another family for the holidays:

\* Ask your significant other what their traditions are, such as what foods are typically served at the Thanksgiving or Christmas meal. "To be polite, I may take something, but not eat it," Jurich said. "If the parents are reasonable, they won't make a person taste an unliked food item."

\* Find a way to contribute to the meal, perhaps one of your traditions. "I can't trump your traditions," Jurich said. "But I can come up with something new and that would be fine. It does two things -- I am sharing one of my traditions and I am in the kitchen helping with my contribution."

\* Be willing to give up your traditions and be accepting of your significant other's traditions. "I have to give up preconceived notions and go along with what your family does," Jurich said. "If they have the meal in the middle of the football game on Thanksgiving, then the game goes away. You honor their traditions."

\* Attempt to weave in some of your traditions, whenever possible. If your significant other celebrates Christmas on Christmas Eve, but your family celebrates on Christmas Day, have your significant other save a present for you to open on Christmas Day.

But what happens if you don't make a good impression? For a "what-not-to-do" example, Jurich recommends seeing the "Meet the Parents" movies, where the boyfriend flushes the cat, knocks grandma's ashes off the mantel and teaches a toddler naughty words.

In addition, Jurich recommends determining which parent is more flexible and understanding, and asking to speak to that parent. Don't speak to both parents together, he said.

"Say that you apologize and ask if you can start over," Jurich said. "If the answer's no, tell the parent if they change their mind, you're here to fix things. If the answer's yes, thank them and ask the best way to approach a similar conversation with the other parent."

Source: Kansas State University

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