

Our personal relationships often take centre stage at this time of year. So here are my tips for managing difficult encounters over the Christmas holidays.

1. Remember: Do not take anything personally. Nothing others do is because of you.
2. Take ownership of your feelings - they are your responsibility. Ask yourself 'where do those feelings come from?'
3. If you need to say something then comment on the behaviour and how you feel rather than criticise the person.
4. Avoid phrases like "You always ..." and "Whenever ..." "To be honest" is generally followed by something rather too frank or hurtful and "obviously" is probably one of the most inflammatory starting points of any sentence. Instead, frame a question to get a better understanding. Never assume you know what the other is thinking or feeling.
5. Pay attention to what people are saying. A few minutes in proper conversation can satisfy many who want to be noticed. Ask a question that demonstrates that you have been thinking about them or refer back to a story they told you some time ago.
6. Make sure you are using humour appropriately and definitely not sarcasm.
7. Old fashioned board games are a good way to channel competitiveness. They might be corny but they work. Choose activities that involve you and others and not always with the younger members of the group.
8. Go for a walk with the person. Make sure you stay 'alongside' and don't race ahead. Matching someone's pace is a very good way of demonstrating that you are paying attention and willing to adjust.
9. Don't ruminate! Rehearsing the wrongs feeds the flames of anger.
10. And if you get into an argument: The best way to regain composure is to breathe deeply. From the belly. You can do this at the dining table because no one can see your stomach move. Or takes five minutes out in a private space and whilst you breathe deeply think of a happy memory or a place where you love to be or a time when you felt really appreciated.

These approaches can be used in your business relationships too so practise on the family and then take them to work in the new year.