



A young woman who is about to enter into Holy Matrimony is often tense about establishing a good relationship with her in-laws and with her mother-in-law in particular. In some parts of the world, you live with your in-laws after marriage. But even if you don't, as is usually the case, there are still possibilities for heart-burn and misunderstandings. Sometimes there is a bit of Cold War and this is because two women are trying to come to terms with the new situation in their lives.

When I look at the Bible, **the first mother-in-law was Eve**. But she had the unique distinction of not having had the experience of being a daughter-in-law. Also, her daughter-in-law happened to be her own daughter, since as the Jewish Midrash says, the sons of Adam married their own sisters. How did that turn out? We do not know, since the Bible says nothing further on the subject.

### **Here are 10 suggestions to improve your relationship with your in-law**

We shall refer to them as mil and dil henceforth for the sake of brevity.

#### **1. Go out on a DATE!**

Dils and mils, invite the other for some special mil-dil time together. Go catch a movie together, have brunch, buy each other gifts or just go on a shopping spree together. Maybe go to your local Catholic shrine or basilica and pray together. There are any number of things that you could do, but most of all this time spent together will help strengthen your relationship and help you to understand each other better. PS: Don't wait for after marriage to do this. Start early.

#### **2. Learn to let go**

Even though it can be heart-wrenching and difficult, mils, learn to let go of playing an active role in your son's day-to-day routines and decisions. Understand that you do not lose your son when he gets married. He stills feels the same amount of respect and love for you and will be there for you when you need him. But the young couple need their

space and time to set the course of their own life. Gently offer advice from time to time, but leave it to them to accept it or not. Even if you feel that the youngsters are making mistakes in managing their home, children or finances, be prudent in giving unsolicited advice. Don't expect them to do things as you did. Let them make their own mistakes and learn from them.

### **3. Youth learns from experience**

Dils, learn to listen to what your mils have to say in a constructive and discerning way. Understand that she won't want to ruin her own son's happiness. She has gone through all the struggles that you are just beginning to, and listening to her views may just help you to avoid a lot of it. If you don't agree with something, you are free to follow your own course. Youth never trumps experience!

### **4. No complaining**

Do not frequently complain or say negative things about your dil or mil to the common man between you. It just worsens the situation and there is nothing to gain from it. Of course, if you are accused of something, you do have the right to defend yourself. A man loves both his mother and wife, and he rarely likes to hear something negative about either one.

### **5. Cooperation, not Competition**

The relationship between parents and the new home should no longer be one of expected obedience, but of warm cooperation, in which each respect the independence and ideas of the other. There cannot be the same closeness of association, the same amount of attention parents have formerly enjoyed, for their children now have other responsibilities which must claim their time and attention.

### **6. Keep in touch**

If you do not live together, make sure you maintain regular contact with your mil or dil and not just on special occasions. Drop in from time to time or pick up the phone and call her. Ensure that you'll spend equal time with both sets of in-laws, his and hers. Offer to help out when you perceive that the other would be happy to have some assistance. But do set boundaries as well. If you find something unacceptable, communicate it in a loving way. This requires a prior strong relationship.

PS: Mils do not expect your son to be at your beck and call all the time; and dils, do not expect your mils to babysit for you all the time.

## **7. Don't let conflicts/hurts/misunderstandings build up**

If one has the hurt the other (intentionally or unintentionally) or if there is perceived misunderstanding, try to deal with the issue quickly and gracefully. Don't ignore it or let it simmer. Be humble and accept your faults. Be the first one to approach the other. Forgive one another and pray for each other. If either your mil or dil is stubborn and refuses to change, continue to remain cordial but keep your distance. If the other one is not ready to keep an open mind, there is nothing you can do about it. Keep the other always in your prayers. Whatever time you do spend together, be respectful and pleasant.

## **8. Marriage Preparation for In-Laws**

Diocesan Marriage Preparation modules must include one session for in-laws from both sides. Considering that frayed relations with the in-laws is one of the major reasons for heartbreak and conflict in the marital home, helping everyone to get the right spiritual and emotional perspective will go a long way in helping the soon to-be-married couple.

## **9. Above all, LOVE!**

Don't depend on your feelings to guide your actions. Follow God's guidance instead. No matter how you feel, decide to act lovingly toward your mother-in-law or daughter-in-law. Trust that once you act in love, God will reward you and transform your heart in the process. (1 Cor 13: 4-7)

## **10. The Book of Ruth**

The Book of Ruth in the Old Testament is a biblical testimony of the love between mil and dil, between Naomi and Ruth. It is one of the shortest books in Scripture and I encourage all mils and dils to read it.