

# Putting the “Fun” Back in Dysfunction This Holiday Season



With today’s technological advances, you can observe the comedy of maladjusted persons from the safety of your couch while enjoying a bowl of popcorn. Holiday movies are a unique goldmine of family flaws and mishaps. You may almost find it therapeutic to watch other people’s relatives experience funky dynamics and disastrous circumstances. How many books or movies can you name that dispense elaborate

stories of the chaos that ensues when generations gather around the table to celebrate the season?

I’d also like to ask, how well do you know your holiday movies? We are going to play a little game. Let’s see how well you know your dysfunctional families from Hollywood. Below are some random quotes from popular Christmas movies. Guess which movies they belong to and check your answers at the end. Along with the game, you will learn some helpful techniques to maneuver your way through gatherings of your own.

The holidays don’t have to be painful. With a little strategy and a lot of luck, you can navigate this time of year with laughter and maybe even some great memories.

## 10 Tips for Dodging the Dysfunction During the Holidays

**#1. “You’re skipping Christmas? Isn’t that against**

## the law?"

Go Do Something! Sitting around together can be prime opportunity for awkward moments and weird conversation. If you stay busy, then you can be focused on something else (and not the wart on Aunt Josephine's nose). Some ideas: Museums, Science Center, Shopping, Concerts, Movies, Volunteering.

## #2. "Merry Christmas, you wonderful old Building and Loan!"



Bring Out the Board Games! (\*Caution: This only works if there isn't past trauma associated with playing games together as a family.) A couple years ago, my son, Caleb, had discovered playing cards. One day, he was pestering me to play with him when I suggested he create a game of his own. Sitting on a large rug with diamond patterns in it, Caleb invented the game "Diamonds of Four". On a trip to the grandparent's house weeks later, we enjoyed teaching them and playing the game several times together.

## #3. "Since this is Aunt Bethany's 80th Christmas, I think she should lead us in the saying of Grace." . . . "Grace? She passed away thirty years ago."

Share Stories from the Past. Grandparents always love to tell stories. Some of my most treasured moments as a child were listening to the stories my grandparents told of when they were young. Hearing how they got into trouble as a child can help you feel more human and less

embarrassed around them. If you feel the conversation is growing dull or the questions are too close for comfort, turn the spotlight on to them and see what they have to share. Some ideas: “What was the worst trouble you got into as a kid?” “What were your teachers like?” “How old were you when you learned to drive?”

#### **#4. “Flick says he saw some grizzly bears near Pulaski’s candy store!”**



Use Conversation Starters. After the initial “How are you” have worn off and the silence grows awkward, it may add some spice to the occasion to provide your own conversation starters. Our family enjoys the game **Would You Rather?** “Hey, grandma. Would you rather go to jail for 4 years for something you didn’t do or get away with something horrible you did, but always live in fear of getting caught?” For some more great conversation starter ideas, [click here](#).

#### **#5. “Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night! And when I wake up in the morning, I’m getting a CAT scan!”**

Stay Well Rested. One of the first things you lose when you are traveling or having guests in your home is your rest. When you are not rested, you can grow irritable. This year, you don’t have to suffer from a lack of sleep. Make plans ahead of time to take a nap or leave early to get more sleep at night. Take some extra time to wind down (read a book, listen to soft music). Napping also helps to get a break from conversation. □

## **#6. “Where ya been? We ate already.”**

Decide Ahead of Time to Be Flexible. It benefits everyone to have plans for your vacation, but flexibility invites grace and consideration to the activities. When you determine beforehand to change your plans if necessary, you will not be as stressed or disappointed when it happens. It also helps to have back-up plans for yourself when things fall through. You may end up enjoying a good book on your phone as you wait for others to adjust. Some ideas: games or books on a device, a pocket novel, knitting, sketchbook.

## **#7. “I made my family disappear!”**



Allow for Quiet Time Together. With the abundant access we have to technology through televisions, computers, connected speakers and devices, our time with family can be boisterous and noisy. Requesting to share time together in quiet or with peaceful music can nurture a sense of calm unity and serenity everyone would benefit from. It may seem unusual at first, especially if the atmosphere in your family is a rowdy one, but you may start a new tradition that benefits the years to come.

**#8. “Aunt Clara had for years labored under the delusion that I was not only perpetually 4 years old, but also a girl.”**

Remember Your Favorite Thing About Each Person. Oftentimes, the idea of being together with family members brings dread, because you only recall the things you dislike most about them. Sure! That’s understandable, but there are also reasons we have enjoyed being with these people in the past. (C’mon. Admit it!) You will have to put your “positive thinking caps” on for this one, but I promise it will help make the holidays a pleasant one.

**#9. “It’s a one year membership to the Jelly of the Month Club. . . Clark, that’s the gift that keeps on giving the whole year.”**

Share the Joy of Giving. Everyone likes getting and giving gifts. Okay, most of the time. (It depends on what you get.) But if you plan ahead to get (or even create) a little something for each person, it will add to the joy of the season and even nurture a sense of good will. Just take a second and think of how you would feel if each person showed up with a gift for you. If that gift were (at least) somewhat pleasant, you would feel considered and loved.

One of my favorite memories of holidays in the past is my grandmother making divinity for Christmas. If you have never tried it, you have missed out in a major way. This candy tastes like it is born from heaven and resembles something between a marshmallow and fudge. Each year, she would show up to an event with a tin of candies she had made by hand. What a treat! Talking with her about the recipes and how she learned to make candy created fun memories I treasure.



## #10. “Don’t ever say Hickory Honey Ham again!”

Make Sure There’s Always Something Good to Eat. If there’s no way possible to avoid the trauma of family fellowship this year, you can always nurse the pain with overeating. Scope out the food early on, offer to go for a (silent) drive to get whatever’s missing and mention the food whenever you have to divert the conversation away from inappropriate questions. You may have to loosen your belt a little, but burning the calories off won’t be half as painful as the trauma you’ve avoided.

### How did you do?

Check the answers below and share your score, another favorite movie quote, some more ideas or holiday stories of your own in the comments section below. I’d love to hear from you!

#### Answers:

1. Christmas with the Kranks
2. It’s a Wonderful Life
3. National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation
4. The Christmas Story
5. The Santa Clause
6. Home for the Holidays
7. Home Alone
8. The Christmas Story
9. National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation
10. Christmas with the Kranks