



Life With Grown Kids

## Don't Be *That* Mother-in-Law

Build great relationships with your growing family.

by: Judi Hasson | from: [AARP](#) | July 2010



— Jeff Mermelstein/Gallery Stock

For generations, mothers-in-law have been the butt of jokes, the villains in movies, and OK, probably occasionally a total nightmare in real life. But now you're playing that role and you certainly don't want anyone to cast you into those old stereotypes.

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Don't worry: There are plenty of ways to be a mother-in-law without those negative vibes and strained interactions.

"You have to humbly recognize that your son or daughter's primary attachment has shifted from you to his or her spouse," advises Dr. Kay Kosak Abrams, a clinical psychologist and family relations expert in Kensington, Md.

That's not always easy. Sometimes you have to bite your tongue, forget about nagging, curb the urge to be judgmental, and just avoid the furrowed brow, the frown or "that look." In other words, accept what is and what you cannot change, savor this phase of life and avoid alienating your child's spouse.

Liz Bluper, co-author with Renee Plastique of *Mothers-in-Law Do Everything Wrong*, has some tough advice for the mother-in-law: Don't be overbearing. Don't go on the honeymoon, avoid redecorating your children's homes while babysitting the grandchildren, and refrain from buying underwear for your sons.

Here are a few other dos and don'ts for mothers-in-law to help ensure peace of mind and good relationships:

- **Stay out of their bedroom!** Don't ever ask: "When are you going to make me a grandma?" It's theirs to know and yours to be delighted when they share it.
- **Butt out.** You'll lose every time you try to get between your child and his or her spouse. Your son or daughter has a new allegiance, and you're not part of it.
- **Don't talk about finances.** Unless it involves money from you, respect their decisions to spend or save — even if you secretly question their choices.
- **Steer clear of religion.** Don't pressure your son-in-law or daughter-in-law to join your church or convert to your faith. You'll lose your own son or daughter and your grandkids, too. Include them in your world. Don't force them to be part of it.
- **Have the "name" discussion.** If your daughter-in-law is still calling you Mrs. Smith and you'd rather be referred to as "Mom," speak up. But accept that she might prefer to keep that designation for her own mother, and who can blame her? If you have strong preferences on what you like (and don't like) to be called, let your in-law know.

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- **Be careful with advice.** Avoid giving unsolicited suggestions, and even when asked, tread carefully. Try asking, "Have you thought about doing it this way?" Don't get offended if your in-law ignores your recommendation. After all, you never took your own mother-in-law's advice, did you?
- **Embrace the role.** Having an in-law expands your family and increases the joy of being a mom. And when you're a grandma? Be a willing babysitter and seize every opportunity you can to enjoy your grandchildren. Give of yourself out of love without expecting anything back. No doubt you will get plenty in return.

*Judi Hasson is a freelance writer in McLean, Va., who is learning how to be a mother-in-law.*