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### CROSS STRESS OFF YOUR LIST ■

Are you dreaming of a calm Christmas? Get help with these ten women-tested sanity savers

By Bonnie Schiedel

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### The dreaded family dinner

Every family has a least one: the aunt who drones on about her medication, the stoner brother-in-law, the mom who continually snaps at the kids – whether they're hers or not. Sure, you love your family, but they also know how to systematically fray you to your very last nerve. It's enough to make a girl commune with the eggnog.

### The solutions

**Choose your behaviour** Michelle Ray, a Vancouver keynote speaker and seminar leader who helps organizations such as McDonald's and the City of Victoria deal with difficult people, says that workplace techniques can carry over to the dinner table. Her tips: decide to respond by using logic and fact rather than your emotions. You should also give yourself permission to leave the situation by taking a walk or just cruising over to a different room. "One other effective strategy is called fogging," she says. "Respond to a criticism by asking a question in a very neutral tone of voice. It works very well because it disarms the person who's bugging you." For example, if your great-aunt Hilda demands to know why you didn't use her recipe for the Christmas cake, say, "I know your recipes are delicious, but I decided to give a different one a try. Do you have any suggestions for appetizers?"

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