



iQuestions Faculty, Michael and Amy Smalley

Question:

We live in the same town as our in-laws and our families won't leave us alone. They're always at our house, uninvited. We don't want to hurt anyone's feelings but should we say something?

Answer:

MICHAEL: Believe it or not, we know exactly what you're dealing with. Living in the same town with the in-laws and then having conflict on top of that can be very scary, because you want to bring it up, but at the same time, you don't want to destroy the relationship.

There is one word we want to share with you, and that word is "boundaries."

AMY: Boundaries are a perimeter around your relationship. It can be a perimeter around your house. And how you can make those boundaries really possible is having a conversation with your in-laws, and being able to say, "I want our relationship to be the best that it can be. And right now, I feel like . . ." and then introduce an area where you feel like there is some possible conflict.

Be able to say, "I realize that I am different, and that the way I run my house or the way that I feel comfortable may be different from you. But I truly want to respect you as a parent and as a grandparent. I want that relationship to be a really great experience. So how are we going to make that possible?"

We can do that by establishing, "*This* is what I feel comfortable with. And *this* is what I may not be comfortable with right now."



MICHAEL: You know, Amy, what I love is that you actually are concerned about not hurting their feelings. And that is critical.

If you go at your parents or your in-laws with a snobby, stuck-up, controlling attitude, then I can virtually assure you that you are going to fail. You should go into it by saying, "I really want this to go well, and the reason we are even establishing this boundary is because we love you."

Now, you might be going, "Okay. That's great Mike and Amy, but what is a boundary?" A boundary might be dependent on your situation.

If you have a parent—I know I once worked with a couple where the mom, the mother-in-law, was extremely offensive in her language with her children, and so that boundary had to be pretty thick. They basically had to keep their kids away from this mother because she had such a profoundly negative influence on them.

You might be at that level, or it might be something simple where your parents don't even know that they are bothering you. Just bring it up, stating, "We kind of need our privacy."

Remember, you and I used to live next to my dad and my mom, and we lived in a little log cabin, and they were in the big mansion on the hill. We finally one day had to talk to my dad, because he loved us and he would just come over—but he would come unannounced.

AMY: And we were newlyweds.

MICHAEL: Yes, we were. And those were good times—unless your father is knocking on the door. Then it ruins the mood.



So all we did was very lovingly and with an honoring attitude say, "Dad, when you want to come over, we want you here, but we need you to call first."

That's a boundary on the lower level. What you are struggling with will determine what the boundary is, but you have to understand that boundaries do not hurt and prevent relationships. They actually encourage them to grow.