

## 6 Tips: Surviving Post-Election Thanksgiving Dinner

### PerceptA Therapeutic Blog

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Thanksgiving can be an awesome holiday filled with family, food and fun! However, it can also be a difficult time for many, due to the stress and anxiety it sometimes evokes. We have just come through a very polarizing election campaign, and for most, this Thanksgiving dinner may probably be the first family get together since the election results. Many dread the inevitable Thanksgiving dinner political/post-election banter, as they know they are probably going to encounter angry and/or gloating relatives, which may trigger powerful emotions leading to irrational, uncomfortable and acrimonious discourse. These emotionally charged political discussions could inevitably ruin Thanksgiving with the family. So, what do we do and how do we survive? Here are a few tips to help you navigate the uncharted waters of this unique post-election Thanksgiving dinner, and ways to make the conversations and experience more comfortable and less unpleasant for all involved.

1. **Don't go to Thanksgiving dinner.** Emotions of sadness, anger and fear are still raw for many this post-election time. If you know in your heart that the wounds of the election are still present, and you cannot emotionally regulate yourself in a room full of passionate Trump or Hillary supporters, depending on your political affiliations, then you may need to stay home. It would be a shame to miss an opportunity to celebrate with the family, but, if you are a Hillary supporter, for example, and you find that one wrong statement from a relative who is a Trump supporter might just set you off and trigger an explosive situation in an already tense family environment, then, just stay home. So, be honest with yourself about what you can handle emotionally, and if you think Thanksgiving dinner might be too much for you, make an excuse to the host, and avoid saying something you might later regret; your mental health is important. If you are the host of the Thanksgiving celebration, this first tip will probably not be an option.

\*\*The Holiday Season can be a difficult time for many. If you are alone during this Thanksgiving, not by choice, please reach out to family, friends, and people you trust. If you are in a fragile mental state, please contact your therapist or seek the assistance of one immediately. Call 911 for an emergency.

**2. Respectfully avoid any political conversation.** Post-election conversations can be potentially threatening because of the heightened emotions attached to the rhetoric. If you decide to attend Thanksgiving dinner with the family, you can avoid the conversation all together, and respectfully decline to engage, stating that because you know how incredibly divisive the rhetoric can be, you're respectfully deciding not to engage. As a guest, you can decline to engage in political banter, and say, "These things can get acrimonious and intense fast, so I'm just going to respectfully decline to participate." If people insist on discussing politics around you, and you are uncomfortable, you can politely leave the room. As the host, you can set the tone for not engaging in the topic, and let your guest know, "I love you all, and we all love our country. I really just want us all to have a peaceful and joyful time, without any talk of politics. Anyone want more wine?" Ending further debate about the topic.

**3. Steer/Guide the conversation into positive topics.** Engage in different topics like complimenting the host on the food, decorations and table settings. Discuss family successes, new jobs, and new family additions. Discuss interesting things you are working on and discuss in detail so that the family can engage with you constructively. There are so many things to be Thankful for, discuss the blessings in your life. Again, if you are the host, you can guide the topic of conversation in your home, and deflect any political rhetoric.

**4. Use humor.** The Thanksgiving table is probably not a good place to unload your political thoughts, frustrations and anger. Nor is it a place to gloat, if you are a Trump supporter. It's fair to say that we are all still trying to figure this stuff out, and the Thanksgiving dinner table is not the best place to explore these feelings. However, if you do decide to engage in political discussions, always use humor to lighten the mood. There have been many humorous moments during the campaign and post-election that can bring two opposing sides to common ground. Some funny moments include, many *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* skits with Alec Baldwin and Kate McKinnon, and Zach Galifianakis' interview with Hillary Clinton on his comedy show *'Between Two Ferns'*. Funny stuff!

**5. Listen, don't bully or threaten each other.** The beautiful thing about America is that it is a place where we are all free to express our thoughts no matter how different they are from each other's. With that said, we all have to remember that not everyone is going to share our political ideology, no matter how much we think we are right. We have just lived through the worst election campaign in decades, where both sides of the campaign did not listen to each other, reacted, some bullied and threatened each other.

If engaged in political discourse with people whom do not share your worldview during

## Thanksgiving:

- Listen to others who do not share your opinion, respectfully, validate feelings, and ask important questions to try to see the other person's perspective, and maybe even find some common ground.
- Yelling accusations of racism, sexism, fascism, or socialism has no place at the Thanksgiving dinner table, and only triggers uncomfortable misinterpreted emotions.
- Avoid anger, blame and defensiveness during conversations. It only feeds the negative discourse.
- However, expressing your feelings about what the election results mean to you, listening and exchanging ideas, creates safe spaces and conditions conducive to successful outcomes- it's a great way to understand each other.
- You can also disagree with others respectfully without threats. There's been enough bullying and threats during the campaign season, so let's do less of this at the dinner table. So, speak for yourself and don't bully anyone into seeing things your own way. This conversation could be a great opportunity to learn from each other through insightful conversation, as we all have so much to learn from one another.

**6. Remember the meaning of Thanksgiving, and choose peace.** Keeping the peace does not necessarily mean that you concede or agree with the other person's opinion. It just means you choose love and peace above being right. Chances are high that you are not going to change the mind or worldview of the other person in one conversation, nor should you try during the Thanksgiving dinner. Again, if you are the host, you set the tone for a loving and peaceful Thanksgiving. As a guest and/or a family member, always end the conversation with a family member with opposing views, with love and respect. Make sure you have heard everything the other person has said, and if you disagree with them, take the high road, "I still love you, and let's just say we disagree on this topic." Or, "It's awesome that we live in a country where we can freely express opposing opinions, and we did it here together today, respectfully, with love." Always end with a hand shake or a hug. After all, they are still your family. Remember the spirit behind family togetherness and the celebration of Thanksgiving. Not every day is promised to us, so, enjoy your family!

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