

As published here: <https://www.divorcist.com/i-wish-i-had-advocated-for-myself/>

# “I wish I had advocated for myself”

Handling the holidays when family expects your ex

Your family loved your ex. Spent holidays together. Fond memories. Funny stories.

But you're not together anymore. So with the holidays approaching, how do you handle this? You'll show up without him and your Uncle Joe will ask where he is. But the last thing you want to do is talk about your ex or why you're not together anymore.

## Can't people mind their own business?

I know your pain. It happened to me. I was married for eight years. My divorce was a quiet event, as far as divorces go, but people did notice that my ex was absent from family functions. <<Cue uncomfortable questions.>>

Then there's my cousin, Julianne. (I interviewed her for this piece.) Our mothers are sisters, so we come from the same side of the family and share a lot of holidays together.

Julianne dated a man named Easton for about four years. He was very personable, a “natural connector,” as Julianne told me. I liked Easton. He always smiled and greeted me with a hug.

Julianne and Easton eventually broke up. That Christmas, Julianne showed up to the family holiday event with a different guy. And get this: our family asked, “Where's Easton?”, even with her new beau *standing right there*. I could see Julianne die a little inside, then quickly lead her date off into another room.

In that moment, “‘Embarrassed’ was the #1 feeling,” Julianne told me. “And sad, disappointed, hurt...like my own family only cared about Easton and not me.”

## People are human

So why can't your family be a little more respectful, and mind their own business?

First, it's important to understand that they might go through their own grieving process. People seek connection. It's in our genes. So it's only natural that your family might connect with your partner. Like you, they got used to your significant other being around. Maybe they really liked that person and had a genuine bond with them.

Your breakup might come as a shock. It can be hard, but try to grant them some grace. However, you shouldn't feel obligated to talk about your ex any more than you want to.

## Helpful Tactics

You can employ various tactics to deal with friends and family who are expecting your ex to be with you this holiday season:

1. **Be proactive.** Let them know in advance what to expect. Keep it simple, and don't go into details. For example: "[Person] and I are no longer together, and [she/he/they] will not be joining me at the holiday gathering this year." This gives the family a chance to absorb the news and get any awkward questions out of the way, especially if you're going to show up with someone new.
2. **Be vague.** This was what I tended to do. When asked, "Where's Rich?" I said, "We're still friends but we're just not together anymore." And my tone made it clear there was no juicy drama, and I didn't want to talk about it further. Sometimes this shut down the conversation neatly. Bonus: I maintained my privacy.
3. **Take the blame.** Julianne used this tactic with great success. Whenever someone asked, "What happened?" she said, "It was all my fault, I don't want to talk about it." Whether it really was or wasn't doesn't matter, but it had the effect of deflecting conversation. Julianne wonders if this was an emotionally healthy tactic, but it worked for her. People saw her sadness, and that shut down the unwanted conversation.
4. **Be brief.** Uncle Joe: "So you're divorced now?" Me: "Yep." The end.
5. **Use your phone.** This is a last resort, but if you must, pretend you need to take a call. Then, leave the room. Make up a story in advance so that if you're asked about why you had to take a call on Thanksgiving, you know what to say.

## Advocate for yourself

Above all, advocate for yourself. Make your wishes known. If you don't want to talk about the breakup, say so.

Julianne said to me: "It's really good to be upfront with people. Maybe I could have sent an email to the whole family. I wish I'd had the thoughtfulness to advocate for myself beforehand."

Remember that your closest friends and family will have the hardest time adjusting. The people who spent the most time with your ex will miss him the most. "My mom struggled a bit," with the transition, says Julianne, "and my close friends had a hard time." Try cutting them a little slack, even if it seems annoying in the moment. These are your close friends and family, and you care about them.

And they're certainly concerned about you, too. They've been through their share of breakups, and they know they're painful. When your friends and family ask, "Are you ok? What happened?", they're expressing an interest in your wellbeing. They're not just being nosy. You might not want to talk about it, but be gentle with them.

Give grace, and expect grace in return. Go forth in peace.