



COMMON GROUND

WITH HOLIDAY SOIRÉE SEASON UPON US, EXPERTS OFFER SCIENCE-BACKED ADVICE FOR GETTING ALONG WITH PEOPLE THAT TEST OR VEX US

BY LAILA ELISE

We all have people in our lives who we wouldn't necessarily elect to spend our time with if we had the choice, from taxing work colleagues to family members who test our patience. While these vexing characters may harbor vastly different belief systems and values from our own (and it seems like there's very little you have in common), we often have to share our time with them in some capacity, be it at family gatherings or weekly staff meetings. As holiday season approaches and your social calendar begins to fill with soirées, dinners, galas, and more, the frequency of these encounters might increase. Prepare yourself with these expert tips on how to better handle these disparities while still protecting your emotional and mental health.

Meet on common ground.

Despite your contrasting views on a topic, there's a good chance you do share common ground in some arenas. We're all

human, after all, and it's rare to find someone with whom you disagree on every single subject. Samantha Stein, Psy.D. and author of *What the Wild Things Are*, said that instead of fixating on your differences, try recognizing that you have some shared beliefs and interests. Focusing on these areas of agreement can help you maintain a connection with the other person, even when your opinions diverge. This is an especially helpful tactic at the holiday dinner table, and with any luck your counterparts will feel the same way.

Put yourself in their shoes.

Approaching any conversation from a place of empathy can go a long way in improving your relationships, especially when you're dealing with differing opinions. Another tip from Stein is to try to look beyond the surface and consider the reasons behind their views. It could be a result of their unique upbringing, a different educational background, or

influences from family and friends. Similarly, exploring the roots of your own beliefs can provide you with valuable insights. By gaining this deeper understanding of each other, you'll find it easier to approach differences with compassion rather than seeing them as personal attacks.

Don't force it.

Finally, it's important to remember that it's neither healthy nor practical to forcefully impose your beliefs on someone else. In fact, having different perspectives can be a source of vitality and intellectual stimulation if handled correctly. Instead of trying to eliminate these differences, consider embracing them as a positive. Embrace different viewpoints as opportunities for growth, learning, and constructive discussions rather than potential sources of conflict. After all, the growth of society would be stagnated if everyone thought the same way. **1**