

## From Baby Boomer to Mother-in-Law: How to Play Your New Role

Now that your son has popped the question, the congratulations from your friends include some advice about the wedding: "smile, shut up and wear beige."

But it doesn't have to be like this. You have the right stuff to rewrite the rules without becoming the Mother-in-Law from Hell. You came of age during the sexual revolution, juggled career and family, broke new ground for women, enjoyed the role of superwoman. So if you don't plan to walk on eggshells around your daughter-in-law for the rest of your life, these tips are for you:

1. Be sensitive to your new role of in-law. Competition may surface with your daughter-in-law if she experiences you as supporting your son while they establish the ground rules in their own relationship. Help out when you can but don't overstep your boundaries. Debra learned "Even though I am very close to my son's wife, I wait for her to call me. And that has made all the difference."
2. The more facts you have about your daughter-in-law, the better it will be. Learn about her likes and dislikes. The average age for marriage in America is now 25 for women and 27 for men, so she has years of personal history to share with you. Get to know her and find out more about her childhood and relationships with her relatives. Ask questions, listen to the answers, and remember them.
3. Choose your battles. Be patient and let go of issues that are not crucial. Laugh to yourself about some of the petty concerns. Sandy related, "At first I was upset that my daughter-in-law never asked for any of my recipes. But then I realized that I didn't want this to turn into a 'food fight.' I could learn some new techniques from her and just enjoy her for who she is."
4. Begin to build a personal connection with your son's wife. Take this chance to enjoy each other as you share activities and experiences. Carol found that, "just going shopping together brought us new feelings of camaraderie. We could be focused on the hunt instead of on the tensions between us."
5. Place more value on the relationship than having your way. Don't hold it against your daughter-in-law if she doesn't see the world from your perspective. You can have more enjoyment as a mother-in-law by relinquishing power. Recognize that this is not a "zero sum game" - that is, there is not one winner and one loser - and you can all take pleasure in each other.
6. Share your frustrations with your life partner. When all else fails, and you are at your wits end, find support from your peers. Ann acknowledged, "Whenever I get angry about the relationship with my daughter-in-law, I call my friends. I don't feel so alone because they have some of the same problems. Commiserating takes off some of the pressure I feel. They really understand how it is to, all of a sudden, be totally out of the loop."

Your married children's lives are moving forward and so can yours. Focus your energy on taking care of yourself rather than on controlling them. This is a new chapter in everyone's life. You can best serve your emerging relationship with them, and your own personal growth as a member of the Sandwich Generation, when you choose to enjoy your new role of mother-in-law.

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