



Spouses who love their MILs!

CARLY CLEVELAND

Air Force, New Mexico

"My in-laws are fantastic! I love that my MIL and I are both super crafty and we enjoy each other's company. My FIL is a very sweet and kind man. I so lucked out on the in-laws!"

NATALIE MILES

National Guard, Winston Salem, N.C.

"My MIL is wonderful! She called me every other day when my husband was deployed to Iraq! She also sent me and the kids a care package once a month, as well as my husband! It was great to have something to look forward to!"

DENISE MEDEIROS

Army, Fort Drum, N.Y.

"My mother-in-law is wonderful! She's a no-drama, no-nonsense kind of woman with a wicked funny sense of humor. Must be where her cute son gets it from!"

STELLA WHITED

Navy, NAS Pensacola, Fla.

"My MIL is amazing. She has helped me through a lot ... with pregnancy, deployments (2), and gave us a roof over our head while hubby was away. I've known her since I was 16. Our relationship started out rocky, but now we are two peas in a pod. We enjoy photography and scrapbooking together when we can. I love her and wouldn't know where I'd be if it weren't for all her love and support!"

Surviving the Drama with His Mama

How to make the holidays as happy as possible.

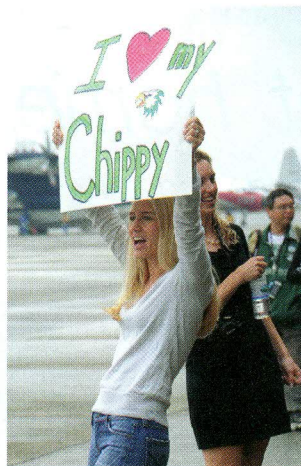
by Heidi Smith Luedtke, Air Force spouse

Strained relationships between military spouses and their mothers-in-law (MIL) are legendary. Maybe it's a supply-and-demand problem: Neither woman gets enough time with the military man they love. Tensions flare when family celebrations push everyone together or when stresses like cross-country moves or overseas tours pull everyone apart.

If you'd rather have dental surgery than spend an afternoon with your MIL, read on. We asked Ellie Slott Fisher, author of "It's Either Her or Me: A Guide to Help a Mom and Her Daughter-in-Law Get Along," for advice on addressing five common examples of the Mama Drama. Here's her advice for each one:

THE PROBLEM: Even after several years, my mother-in-law doesn't accept me. I'm polite to her, but she criticizes me constantly. To add insult to injury, my husband sticks up for her because he's used to her overly controlling style.

WHAT TO DO: *Man Up.* If a mother-in-law remains critical of her daughter-in-law despite the younger woman's attempts to be polite, it's the man's responsibility to correct her, Fisher says. But "men, unfortunately, prefer to stay out of the fray and assume the problem will correct itself," she says. "It won't." Discuss it with your husband. Although he may fear hurting his mother's feelings, a man must defend his wife or he sends the signal that he's not committed to her. When your spouse sticks up for you, his mom will ease up, Fisher says. She doesn't want to lose her son. ☒



» THE PROBLEM

My mother-in-law acts like I don't exist. She ignores me at family gatherings, doesn't acknowledge my birthday. I don't want to be best friends, but a little attention seems appropriate. After all, I am her son's partner. For life.

WHAT TO DO

Hold Back. This sounds like a middle-school social drama, Fisher says. "If I were the daughter-in-law, I would be pleasant (but not over-the-top) with his mom." Reserve your very friendly, caring and loving behavior for family members who treat you well. Hopefully, your mother-in-law will see what she's missing and change her behavior, Fisher says. If she doesn't, speak to her directly. Still no success? Then involve your spouse.

THE PROBLEM

My in-laws don't support my spouse's military career. It's no secret they think he's stupid for signing up, and it makes me angry. They refused to come to his re-enlistment. I feel hurt for him.

WHAT TO DO

Speak Up. You may hesitate to get involved in an ongoing family dispute, but Fisher says you should intervene. "You're proud of your husband," she says, "and rightly so." Let his family know how important his career is to him (and to you). Tell them that he deserves their enthusiastic support. "Even if this doesn't change his family's way of thinking," Fisher says, "they will recognize that their son has one terrific, loyal wife, and that's impressive in and of itself."

THE PROBLEM

My mother-in-law insists on visiting, even when it's inconvenient. She also makes herself the center of attention at every important event, including his homecoming. He's coming home to me, not her.

WHAT TO DO

Move Over. "Daughters-in-law have to understand that even if it's been decades since a mom raised her son, she will always be proud of him," Fisher says. Indulge her a little. "On more than one occasion, my son's girlfriend has allowed me to be the proud mom—for example, at my son's graduation from graduate school," Fisher says. "And I love her for that." Stand beside your mother-in-law at significant events and acknowledge her role in his life. If you're secure in your relationship with your spouse, you'll include his mother, Fisher says. It may feel like a delicate balance but it really isn't: He's yours to share.

THE PROBLEM

My mother-in-law doesn't respect my role as mom. She feeds my son junk food and soda, even though she knows we don't allow it.

WHAT TO DO

Be Firm. Grandma had her turn at parenting, now it's yours. "Childrearing rules change, so what was appropriate in the past may be inappropriate today," Fisher says. "A mother-in-law has to accept this and defer to her daughter-in-law in how she raises her children." Unless you're doing something truly harmful or abusive, your mother-in-law should stay out of it. Address any missteps his mom makes together with your spouse. Parenting is a two-person job: yours and his.

REMEMBER!

For better or worse – and, trust us, it *can* get better – you and your spouse have a starring role in the drama with his mama. Don't let in-law issues fester and grow. With a little teamwork and a lot of patience, you can all get along. ♥

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