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What You Want to Say to Your Mother-in-Law — and What You Should Say Instead

MOMS

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Sometimes it seems that mother-in-laws were put on the planet for the sole purpose of driving brides crazy. With the smallest of actions or phrases, they can turn level-headed women into raging lunatics in 60-seconds-flat. And sometimes, it seems impossible to bite your tongue. In those moments, you may let words slip that you wish you could take back.

"No matter how ill behaved she is, she is the mother of the man you love, and deserves respect for that reason, says relationship expert April Masini.

So before you spit out the following words without thinking, consider these more demure, peace-keeping alternatives:

"Why exactly do you think it's okay to drop over unannounced?"

It's time for your husband to step up to the plate when you want to spew these words. "Ask him to have his mom call before coming over to ask if it's a good time for her to stop by or not," Masini suggests. "When she does, tell her how great it is that she's calling first, and how much nicer the visit is when you can prepare for it!"

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"You already raised your child. Don't tell me how to raise mine."

Feeling vulnerable? Welcome to the club that is motherhood. "Instead of talking to her in broad strokes, be specific," Masini advises. "Say, 'I know you want spoil the kids with jellybeans and chocolates, but we're trying to limit their sugar. Would you be okay buying them books, instead? That would make things so awesome for us!' By giving her something to do that's different, you're not shutting her out — you're just giving her direction."

"Did you seriously just insult my mashed potatoes? Have you tasted the ones you make?!"

"A champion doesn't throw down insults like she just did," says Masini. "That's the smell of fear. When she insults your potatoes, you know they're good. So tell her, 'I don't think I'll ever be able to make mashed potatoes like yours,' and savor the private joke in there."

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"You do realize I married your son, no matter how much you like (and still talk about) his ex?"

It's time to change the subject. "Your mother-in-law is being rude," Masini says. "With any luck, your husband will jump in without prompting and tell her that what she's saying is disrespectful. Remember, that her opinion of your husband's ex is less important than your husband's opinion of her. You can tell her, 'I'm sure glad my husband didn't like her as much as you do!'"

"No, you may not have my husband to yourself on his birthday!"

Your mother-in-law isn't showing your marriage the respect and importance it deserves. "You can actually do a little teaching by saying, 'The wife usually gets, at least, a birthday dinner with her husband!'" Masini suggests. "This is subtly reminding her that all wives get birthday dinners with their husbands. Being able to say this requires you to have a little distance from the emotional sting of her denial of your marriage."

"Your son is a grown man! Stop telling him what to do!"

Tempted to say this phrase? It may not be your MIL who has the problem, Masini warns. "She's not talking to you, [and] he's not bothered by what she's saying," she says. "When this type of comment really, really bothers you, consider that you may be trying to control the situation yourself, and you're seeing your own behavior in a mirror. Roll up your sleeves, you have work to do — on yourself!"

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