Extra 3

The Holiday Table Plan

Your next family gathering on one page: before, during, after



How to Use This Plan

Your next family gathering already has a date. Maybe it's Thanksgiving, the winter holidays, a birthday dinner, or a family reunion in someone's backyard. The book looked at how gatherings like these tend to go. This plan is for yours: your table, your people, your day.

A 2018 study published in *Science* found that after the divisive 2016 election, Thanksgiving dinners between people from opposite-party neighborhoods were, on average, about half an hour shorter. It measured how long people stayed, not whether they argued. Still, it's a fair reason to plan. See Chapter 10.

Here's how the plan works.

1. A few days before, fill in three sheets: check your own side, decide what you want from the day, and pick the three topics most likely to come up, with an opening question for each. Starter questions come first.
2. Get ready for the hard moment. The two "If It Heats Up" pages help you choose your signs to stop, a stop line, a room change, and an exit line.
3. Put it all on one page. The One-Page Plan gathers your answers. Read it again the morning of the gathering.
4. Cut out the pocket card and fold it. It holds your questions and your stop line. Keep it in a pocket, a purse, or a phone case.
5. If you're hosting, use the host page. It has a light pact for the table.
6. The day after, take five minutes. Write five lines and send one short message.

Two blank copies of the One-Page Plan wait at the back, for the next gathering. There's always a next one.

Not every gathering is a holiday. At a birthday, the day belongs to one person, so what you want may simply be for their day to go well. At a reunion, plan for the few people you'll actually sit near, not the whole crowd.

A few honest notes before you start.

This is a plan for your half of the table. It can't decide what anyone else says or does, and it doesn't promise a calm day. What it can do is help you arrive with a clear head and leave with the door still open.

Use a pencil. Plans change, and so do moods. You don't need to fill in every line. One clear answer beats ten rushed ones.

If there is any risk to anyone's safety, yours included, your own safety comes first, and this plan is not the tool for that situation. See Chapter 10, "Keeping the Door Open—and Knowing Your Limits." Talk with a qualified professional, and if anyone is in immediate danger, contact your local emergency services.

Before: Check Your Own Side

Step One of the Same-Side Approach starts with you, not with them. Here it takes about ten minutes. See Chapter 3.

The gathering: what, when, where, and who will be there

_____

_____

The topic I feel most strongly about right now

_____

A post from my own side that pulled at me lately, and what it wanted me to feel (your Lever Log can help)

_____

_____

My lever: the feeling that's easiest to pull in me (fear for my kids, pride, anger, the pleasure of seeing the other side look foolish...)

_____

The answer I'll be tempted to give right away if that topic comes up

_____

One honest sentence I could say about my own side (for example: "One like this got me last week.")

_____

_____

- ☐ I've looked at a post from my own side, not only the other one.
- ☐ I know which feeling to watch for in myself.
- ☐ I'm not going to this gathering to prove anyone wrong.

What I Want from the Day

Being together, not winning. Pick goals you can actually reach. See Chapter 10.

What I'm setting aside for this day (for example: "an apology from my uncle," or "my cousin finally seeing it my way")

_____

Three small things I can actually get (for example: a long walk with my dad, one photo with everyone in it, the kids asleep in the car on the way home)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

The person I most want a good moment with, on any subject

_____

What we could talk about that isn't the news (a recipe, a team, an old car, a trip we took, the kids' school play)

_____

_____

How I want to feel on the way home

_____

My limit for this day, in one sentence. It's about what I will do, not what they must do. (For example: "If it comes up a second time, I'll go help in the kitchen.") The signs that tell me to stop are on the "If It Heats Up" page.

_____

_____

A first idea for the message I'll send the day after (you'll finish it on the After page)

_____

Opening Questions by Topic

Most family topics fall into a few familiar groups. Here are starter questions for each. They're examples, so change them until they sound like you. See Chapter 9.

Money and prices

- "What's the price that surprised you most this year?"
- "Does money feel tighter for you than it used to?"

Health

- "Who do you trust most when it comes to your health?"
- "Has this changed anything about how you take care of yourself?"

The news

- "When did you start following this story?"
- "What part of it do you keep thinking about?"

Local changes

- "What's changed around here that you miss?"
- "If you could fix one thing in town, what would it be?"

Family history

- "What would Grandma have said about all this?"
- "Has the family been through something like this before?"

If your topic isn't here—school, work, faith, the election—use the same shape: ask about their life, not about the headline.

Before you pick a question, say it out loud. If it sounds like a point dressed up as a question, try another one.

After you ask, listen. In experiments on disagreement published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, people who felt genuinely listened to became less defensive. Before you add anything of your own, say back what you heard in one sentence. See Chapter 9.

The Three Topics

Which three topics are most likely to come up at this table? For each one, write one opening question: one that invites more than a yes or no, and that's about them, not only the topic. The page before has starters.

Topic 1, and who might bring it up

_____

What might be under it (a worry about money, health, the grandkids, the country...)

_____

My opening question

_____

_____

Topic 2, and who might bring it up

_____

What might be under it

_____

My opening question

_____

_____

Topic 3, and who might bring it up

_____

What might be under it

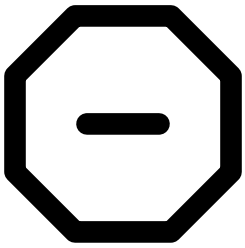
_____

My opening question

_____

_____

If It Heats Up



Stop early. You don't have to win the round, or even finish it. See Chapter 10.

Signs it's time to stop

Check the ones that fit your table. Deciding now is easier than deciding in the middle of an argument.

- ☐ Voices are rising.
- ☐ Someone has stopped listening and is just waiting to talk.
- ☐ The kids have gone quiet.
- ☐ We've already had one round on this topic.
- ☐ I can feel my own lever being pulled.
- ☐ My own sign: _____

Stop lines

These are examples. Put them in your own words.

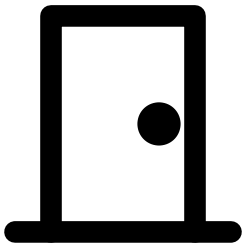
- "Let's put this one on the shelf for today."
- "I'd rather enjoy you today than argue with you."
- "We're not going to settle this before dessert. Let's let it go."
- "I need to think about that one. Can I get back to you?"
- "I can hear how much this matters to you. Let's take a break from it."
- "Truce for today? Pass the potatoes."
- "You know what? I want to hear about the grandkids."

My stop line

_____

_____

If It Heats Up: A Way Out



The room change

Have a reason to move, ready before you need it. It isn't running away. It gives everyone, you included, a few minutes to cool down.

- In the kitchen: refill the drinks, start the dishes, offer to dry, check on the oven.
- With the kids: visit the kids' table, start a card game or a board game.
- Outside: suggest a short walk, take the dog out, get something from the car.
- Together: bring out the old photos, put out dessert, ask someone to show you their garden.

My room change: _____

A backup: _____

The exit line

If the talk won't settle, close well and go back to other things. One sentence, said once, with no last fact tucked inside. For example: "We see this one differently, and I'm still glad you're here." Or: "I'll leave that one with you. Come help me cut the cake."

My exit line

_____

If safety is at risk

If anyone is threatened, or you feel unsafe, leave the conversation and the room. Your own safety comes first. If anyone is in immediate danger, contact your local emergency services. Then see Chapter 10, "Keeping the Door Open—and Knowing Your Limits," and consider talking with a qualified professional.

The One-Page Plan

Copy your answers here, then read this page the morning of the gathering.

Before · The gathering (what, when, who): _____

Before · What I want from the day

_____

_____

Before · The lever I'll watch for in myself: _____

Before · My limit for this day: _____

Topic likely to come up	My opening question
1.	
2.	
3.	

During · My signs it's time to stop: _____

During · My stop line: _____

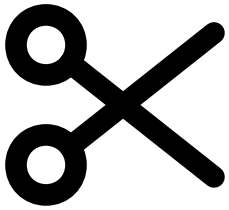
During · My room change: _____

During · My exit line: _____

After · My next-day message (a first idea): _____

If anyone's safety is at risk: my safety first. Emergency services if the danger is immediate. See Chapter 10.

The Pocket Card



One small card. Cut along the lines, fold it in half, and keep it in a pocket, a purse, or a phone case.

Front: Questions That Open

- “What got you thinking about this?”
- “What part matters most to you?”
- “How did you first hear about it?”
- “Is there a part you’re less sure about?”

Ask once. Listen. Say back what you heard.

Talk to the person, not the post.

Inside: My Plan for Today

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

My stop line: _____

My room change: _____

My exit line: _____

For Hosts: A Light Pact for the Table

Hosting gives you a little more room. A pact is an invitation, not a rule to enforce. See Chapter 10.

A 2020 study in *PNAS* found that Americans on both sides tend to overestimate how much the other side dislikes them. The guest you're bracing for may be bracing for you, too.

The quiet word ahead of time: who I'll talk to, and what I'll say (for example: "Can we keep today about the family? I'd really appreciate your help with that.")

_____

_____

Jobs I can hand out, and to whom (carving, drinks, games for the kids, photos)

_____

After the meal, so people have somewhere else to go (a walk, cards, old photos, a movie)

_____

Hosting a birthday or a reunion? A simple theme does the same job: "Today is about Grandpa's eightieth."

If someone breaks the pact, don't police it. Use your stop line or your room change.

Our Table Today

Set this card by the food, or read it aloud before the meal.

- Today is a day off from the news.
- Everyone at this table is welcome, whatever they think.
- If a topic gets hot, anyone can say, "Let's park that one for today."
- _____

Thank you for being here.

After: Five Lines and One Message

The day after the gathering. Five minutes. See Chapter 10.

Five lines

1. One good moment from the day

_____

2. Something I did that I'd do again

_____

3. Where a lever pulled at me, and from which side

_____

4. Something I learned about what they care about or worry about

_____

5. One thing to try, or to skip, next time

_____

The message the next day

Start from the first idea on your One-Page Plan. Keep it short. Send it in the morning, not late at night. Don't reopen the topic, and don't score the day: the point is to keep the door open.

For the family chat: thanks, a photo, a good moment. (For example: "Thanks for a great day, everyone. Here's my favorite photo.")

_____

If there was a hard moment: send it privately, and own your part, only your part. (For example: "I was short with you yesterday, and that's on me. I'd still love to hear your side sometime, no rush.")

_____

_____

☐ Sent

One gathering isn't the last word. The blank plans on the next pages are for the one after this.

The One-Page Plan

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Before · What I want from the day

_____

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Before · The lever I'll watch for in myself: _____

Before · My limit for this day: _____

Topic likely to come up	My opening question
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During · My signs it's time to stop: _____

During · My stop line: _____

During · My room change: _____

During · My exit line: _____

After · My next-day message (a first idea): _____

If anyone's safety is at risk: my safety first. Emergency services if the danger is immediate. See Chapter 10.

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About This Plan

This plan comes with the book *Mass Manipulation and the People You Love* and is for information and education. Its examples and sample lines are invented for teaching purposes, and it takes no side on any party, candidate, or election. It makes no guarantee of any particular result, including how anyone at your table will respond, and you are responsible for how you use it. Research findings are summarized in plain language and limited to what each study measured; the sources are listed at the end of the book. This plan is not a substitute for professional mental health, medical, or legal advice. If a situation with someone you love involves a risk to anyone's health or safety, contact a qualified professional or your local emergency services.