Family Invitations: Finding an Answer Together

Make room for both of you before you reply

A family invitation can bring up very different feelings. One of you may be looking forward to time together. The other may already be thinking about the long drive or how little time you have had to rest.

Take a little time to understand what the invitation means to each of you. These questions can help you find an answer that reflects both the relationship and the day you actually have.

You'll need: The invitation, your calendars and a pen. You can start with separate notes if that makes the conversation easier.

1. Start with your own wishes. What would you enjoy? What feels difficult? Talk about the particular visit and what it would be like for you.

2. Get curious about your partner's wishes. Ask what matters most to them. Try reflecting it back: "It sounds like you really want some unhurried time with your sister. Is that right?"

3. Picture the whole visit. Check what you are being invited to do and when a reply is needed. Include travel, cost, care responsibilities and the time you would need afterward.

4. Choose what you can offer. Could you make a shorter visit, attend separately, or suggest another time? Agree on who is doing what before one of you sends the reply.

For example

Your partner's family invites you for Saturday dinner and suggests staying overnight. You would enjoy dinner but need to be home that evening. Your partner would like a longer visit. You agree to arrive earlier, have dinner, and drive home afterward. Your reply is: "We'd love to come. We can be there at three and stay until seven."

A helpful reminder

Understanding why the invitation matters to your partner does not mean you have to agree to every part of it. You can care about their family and still talk honestly about your time, energy and responsibilities. If the invitation changes, it is worth checking with each other again.

Learn more: CCI: What is Assertiveness?

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Your planning page

Use this page to make a few notes. You do not need to fill every space.

1. What is the invitation, and when is an answer needed?

Include the details you still need to ask about.

2. What matters to each of us?

What are we looking forward to? What feels difficult?

3. What would our options involve?

Travel, cost, care, time and who would do what.

4. What can we agree to, and what will we say?

Who will reply? What would we need to talk about again if the plans change?

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Explore more: Boundaries and agreements