

# What's the Secret to a Happy Family Gathering?



I was reading my latest issue of Real Simple magazine the other day and came across an article on family gatherings that I thought was interesting.

They had done a survey of readers to find out what their secrets were to a happy family gathering. I thought I'd share a few of them with you and run a little commentary. After that, I might add one of my own and then my favorite part will be to ask you for YOUR feedback on your secrets to successful gatherings. You can add your family secrets below at the bottom of the article.

The one that made me laugh was right up front:

**"An empty dishwasher and trash before the gathering begins."**

I have to say that this is important to me no matter what the occasion. The least stressful dinner party for me is one where I am so prepared that the dishwasher is empty and so is the trash. My husband is an ace at making this happen.

Next up:

**"We have a cell phone bucket at the front door."**

I wish I had the guts to do this at every dinner party; just to make the point. Truthfully, folks at my dinner parties and other gatherings are not spending time on their cell phones. I don't have that hosting issue but if I had a house full of my relatives, I can see how it might become a "thing."

Two more that go together in my mind:

**"I always send an invitation not an expectation."** And...

**"A start time and an end time with an open-house policy. Come by anytime between 3PM and 8PM. Stay as long or as briefly as you like. No pressure."**

I love both of these.

My family gave up a long time ago in the effort to get everyone together for a family event. It's not that we don't try once in a blue moon, but we have no heavy expectations on how many will come.

I think at last count if every one of my siblings show up with their kids (and their kids' kids) we'd have over 40 people. We are pretty spread out, too. It's nuts to think any date you pick would work for everyone.

And having an open-house is a great way to take the pressure off of the hosts and guests. Hey, both turkey and roast beef taste good cold anyway. Can you say buffet?

My last feature from the article is:

**“Creating space for people to have alone time.”**

Some folks just need a break from the maddening crowd. My husband’s family is very small. Ours is large. So, he likes to get some separation. He used to go into the den and let all the grand-kids climb all over him like he was some kind of jungle gym. That’s not alone time for sure, but it gave him a break from the crowd of adults all talking at once. The article talks about time for a walk in the woods to digest or even a brief nap.

One I will add of my own:

**“Let people help. And team them up.”**

I have been very successful with this concept. Think about it. It might free some of your time up if you give a couple of folks a recipe and let them make something. I get the ingredients out and set them on the counter. Then I enlist two people to make whatever it is. Salads are super easy. So are side dishes. I suggest you combine generations. Maybe Aunt Ruthie hardly knows her teenage niece. Let them work on the salad together. Or get a nephew. You might find out how talented a cook he is. You’re around working on other things in case someone has a question. First thing they will do is laugh and apologize for their cooking expertise (or lack of it). Then they get down to business. At the end people remark about all they learned about that other person that they never knew before. Of course, everyone enjoys the dish too.

Enjoy a fun-filled season of holiday events.

Cheers,

*Zola*



## **Topsy Plums with Sweet Cream**

So what are your secrets to family gathering success?

Chime in below and let us know.

We can all share these ideas like one big happy Zola family.