

Alexis Larson

Professor Petersen

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So-So or Just-No?: A Brief Introduction to the Examination of Bad Blood Between
Family & In-Laws

Is it ethical to cut your in-law out of your life? This challenging thought is one that is often debated by those in the thick of the situation, thus it is rampant with the hot emotional states of scorned parents & in-laws and fed-up married couples. Many couples reach this stage of a relationship at one point or another. They must ask themselves whether the benefits of remaining in contact with a family member outweighs the cons.

They must ask increasingly complex questions that open more doors than they close. Some of the questions that these individuals face may include histories they share with their parents, new conflicts that may arise with new in-laws, or wedges that can grow between their own marital relationships. Issues that may lead to this decision being laid on the table could sum from abuse the individual experienced as a child and a desire to protect their new family from suffering the same way.

If an in-law is known to be reckless or perform dangerous acts, it may be considered deceitful to withhold that information from a spouse or children. In the worst case scenario it may cost lives. However, it may also be said that the parent themselves could be a risk factor to their spouse and children. It begs the question if it is ethical for

the in-law to inform their child's spouse of such a trait; would it make them accomplices if the in-laws knew and did not act on it?

To ask the main question, is as though you have found a rock partially buried in sand, only to uncover a whole pyramid of questions stacked tall by the hundreds. It is so complex, and dependent on situational awareness, that it often is glossed over in legal proceedings in favor of keeping the peace. "It is well documented, however, that a maternal bias exists in the United States." (Marx). This bias also can lead into the grandparent-child relationship, as Marx points out, "This intimate relationship correlates with the grandchildren having greater closeness to the maternal grandparents." It is this closeness, on which some states in the USA have predicated grandparent rights laws, which may force married couples into having legally mandated visitation (not unlike custody in divorces), between their children and their parents.

There may be reasons which a parent wants to avoid contact with their in-laws, such as if they experienced abuse, neglect, manipulation, or any number of unpleasanties or morally questionable behavior, yet they may be sued to force the relationship to continue. Should a parent have to risk themselves or their children in legally required relationships with known manipulators/abusers? Or should they be required to allow the grandparent the chance to prove otherwise for the sake of the relationship? The cultural norm predicates that grandparents should have that right, and laws tend to follow.

These pressures from in-laws can significantly impede the healthy continuation of a marriage, on which there stems further conflicts. Many couples, new to marriage, may

be unsure if they should back up their parents, or their spouse. On the premise of marital conflict, they can lead to issues such as divorce. On a personal level, one must decide if a bad relationship with their in-laws would justify a divorce. In a bitter and ironic twist, a divorce often amplifies the in-law relationship conflicts. Just as the spousal couple may fight for custody of their children, so too may the grandparents seek to fight for their own rights. For legal proceedings, would it be ethical to apply the same rulings of the divorcing couple, be applied to the in-laws, or should they have separate rights and rulings? Or if one of the individuals in a couple passes away, should the surviving individual be forced to grant access to their lives for their in-laws?

The benefits of relationships, albeit expressly healthy relationships, cannot be understated. "...a sense of shared family identity is indicative of intragroup and, hence, a more interpersonal and positive orientation." (Rittenour). It is on such grounds, of psychological analysis, which individuals base the importance of retaining family connections. It is the basis on which laws that enable individuals to demand a relationship are founded. If our society, culture, and even psychological and legal systems work so hard to ensure these relationships remain intact, it may be an uphill battle to convince anyone that there may be reasons for which disconnecting is valid.

The psychologists, legal authorities, and other systems that continue to perpetuate such rules should have increased minimum requirements of family research and investigation, rather than assuming the norm is applicable in each situation; this would be a suitable start to ensuring current and future generations have both rights and benefits in their relationships.

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