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(how•to) **guide**

What you really want to know...



Q: My fiancé's quiet, conservative parents are meeting my louder, more outgoing mom and dad for the first time. How do I ensure the dinner goes well?

A: BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THIS COULD WORK OUT JUST FINE, according to Bernadette Watkins, an etiquette expert and the executive producer of the DVD *The Fine Art of Formal Dining*. "Serious characters and comedians are often perfect ingredients for a fun evening." And despite your parents' contrasting personalities, Watkins notes there is one major factor working in your favor: Your happiness is important to them. "Because of this," she explains, "chances of either set of parents doing anything to cause friction are highly unlikely." However, it doesn't hurt to hedge your bets and set yourselves up for success. Brief your parents before the dinner (you talk to yours, he talks to his) about one another's differing personalities, and offer a little background information on any potentially sensitive

subjects. Be sure to remind everyone that this dinner isn't the time to talk wedding budgets and guest lists. "Those topics are always awkward, and the goal of this dinner is to make sure everyone feels comfortable with each other," says Watkins. Also, come prepared with some safe conversation starters: "Talk about celebrities, sports, TV shows or movies." These lend themselves easily to both thoughtful comments and jokes. Watkins also advises that you avoid politics and religion. Despite being armed with terrific talking points, you can't control what people say and may still have an awkward moment. If so, quickly change the subject and tell a lighthearted story about you and your fiancé. After all, you are your parents' common denominator, and a fun anecdote about the two of you should get things back on the right track.