

BEING SWITZERLAND IN YOUR FAMILY'S WAR

We love our families, no doubt about that. We cherish our friends, it's true. So, when two or more members from any of these groups are locked in a bitter feud and want you to pick a side or by default, achieve enemy status, how do you refuse to be sucked into the drama and remain a beloved?

Be uncompromisingly firm in your decision to stay neutral. Explain, in no uncertain terms, to the warring factions why you will not be a part of the quarrel. To avoid any situations that can color ambiguity into your words, do everything you can to make sure your reasons and statements are super clear and explicit. That way, none of your words can be twisted and misconstrued. Nothing can be more frustrating than being deliberately misunderstood for the sake of furthering an agenda.

After your status as Switzerland has been established, you can offer to play peacemaker. This will work only both sides want to reconcile. Try and force the issue and you can easily find your way back to enemy status. If your squabbling family members or friends do want a sit-down, bear in mind that you might be dealing with an emotionally charged situation. Don't take anything that is said, probably against you, personal.

With that in mind, it helps to choose a place as neutral as you are, for the peace discourse. It can prove a little tricky, depending on the personalities you're dealing with. If the dispute is over, say, a topic in connection to spirituality or religion, asking them to meet you in church after Sunday service will immediately alienate the party who thinks organized religion is a pile of garbage.

Think long and hard about any social situations which will involve either one or both parties. If the conflict between your loved ones is particularly volatile, you might have to rethink inviting either of them to your next gathering where they both have to be present. The next step will be to let them know why they are or are not invited. It could turn out to your benefit; either one might decide they don't want to be there if the other will be present. This only applies to a function or gathering where they are not really needed. If it happens to be an occasion like a wedding where your maid-of-honor (who isn't speaking to your other best friend) has to be there, your powers of neutral peacemaker will have to be in full effect. You will have to let your other friend understand why the maid-of-honor *must* be at the wedding and the decision whether to come or stay away will then be left up to your friend.

Let them know how badly this is affecting you, the one in the middle. You love them both dearly, and are possibly hurting because of their fighting. They need to know the impossible position their feud is putting you in. You are unable to have the two of them in a place together without it being uncomfortably awkward or plates and glasses flying, depending on the hostility of the conflict. Either way, you're the grass that's suffering in this elephant war, and they need to clearly understand that.

If they care about you as much as you care for them, this revelation alone could motivate them into wanting to end the fracas, so that you don't have to deal with this misery every time you have to be around them.

Hopefully, these few steps provide some guidance, if God forbid, a situation should ever arise where conflict shows up among your loved ones and all you want to do is be like Switzerland.