

## Donna Barnes tells all: The Parents: to meet or not to meet?

**New York adds a different twist to the holidays because most people are from somewhere else. Thus they have to travel to see their families. In a new relationship, the question ultimately looms: "What are you doing for the holidays?" That can get a little complicated. How soon should you introduce him to your family?**

First you should evaluate your relationship. Are you serious about him? Does he know? Is he serious about you? If the answer to any of these questions is "I don't know" or a definite "No", it's too soon to add the family dynamic. Even with the best of kin, first meetings at holiday functions can be overwhelming, sometimes disastrous. You don't want to push him or risk tarnishing his opinion of you because his feelings haven't had a chance to fully develop. Remember love makes you more tolerant.

On the other hand you might be sending him the wrong message. I once invited a guy I had been casually dating to Philadelphia for Thanksgiving dinner. His family lived in Florida and he had no where local to go. I thought I was being nice. But he assumed I was serious about him and started coming on way too

strong. It made me uncomfortable and we broke up shortly after. To make it worse, my little nieces had fallen in love with him. They didn't understand why I wouldn't bring him back. But it could have gone the other way. If he wasn't ready to get serious it could have scared him away thinking that I was.

Another caution is if you've never traveled together you might be better off with a neutral first destination. Itinerary tribulations can bring out the worst and spoil crucial first impressions; which are hard to reverse. In many cases a trip to meet family ends a relationship.

If you are serious about your guy and you think he's receptive, try to make the invitation as casual as possible. Have him meet your parents separately before the entire family. And if he's going to spend the

night, consider staying in a local hotel or with some friends. Explain to your parents he's important to you and you want him to be comfortable. Prepare your boyfriend in advance of any family quirks or topics to avoid discussing. Politics and religion are usually good to avoid. Equally prepare your family about anything you want them to avoid, especially relationship questions! I wanted to crawl under the table when my mom once asked a guy I just introduced if we had any wedding plans!

Most men aren't in a hurry to introduce you to their families so if he wants to he's probably serious about you. Congrats. This is a perfect opportunity to learn more about him and if he's really right for you. Try to relax and be yourself but also a bit of a sleuth. Observe how his parents interact with each other. Do you approve? They're his relationship paradigm. And how does he treat his Mother? Is that how you want to be treated down the road? Ask yourself if you'd like to come back again. Did they make you feel comfortable? Don't put so much emphasis on wanting to be liked that you compromise yourself. If you marry him, you're marrying them as well.

Overall, if you like the guy you'll probably like his parents. They are a part of his life. Believe me I was nervous to meet my boyfriend's conservative Italian Catholic Mother who had seen me on *Naked New York*, but she could not be more enchanting.



Photo by Ron Finaid

**Look out for  
Donna's column  
next month!**