

45. Handling Difficult Situations with "Aunt Karen" This  
Holiday Season with Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma



**FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT**

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**Michael:** Well, hey everyone, and welcome to another episode of Doctors Living Deliberately. Thanks so much for joining us today. And of course, welcome to my lovely co host, Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma. How are you?

**Arpita:** I'm doing wonderful. Michael Hersh, how are you doing?

**Michael:** I'm great. And this is absolutely my favorite time of year. I have always loved the holiday season and I love kind of just the decorations and having grown up in New York, going into Manhattan this time of year and the smells. It's absolutely my favorite time of year. What about you? Do you have any special fun things that the holiday season brings up for you?

**Arpita:** I think so. There's, there's always the nostalgia of having your kids home and, and, you know, enjoying the holidays. And like you said, the smells and the sounds and the lights, all the things kind of all compile and combine into the memories that we create each season. And I think to be realistic, we all also have sometimes some thoughts and feelings about situations that come up when we have the holidays coming up with regards to the obligations and the responsibilities and such. So I think it's a plus minus to be completely honest, but definitely a lot of good.

**Michael:** For sure. Yeah. You mentioned. Christmas lights and obligations in the same sentence, and that makes me think of hanging Christmas lights, which has to be probably one of my least favorite parts of the holiday season, but I do it because everybody loves the Christmas lights, so that's at least something. Yeah. What about you? Any, Anything that you struggle with this time of year?

**Arpita:** Yeah, I think when I think back to honestly, as, as life has evolved, and as our kids have gotten older, I kind of go back to when the kids were younger, a lot of the obligations that we had, that we felt that we had, you know, we had to get all the gifts, the gifts had to be perfect. We had to spend time with family, the cousins and everybody had to be together. And it got to the point that I remember it felt more like a chore sometimes. You know, I remember sometimes Christmas Eve we would be up to all hours of the night trying to put toys together, trying to do all the things and make it just absolutely perfect. All for really a couple of minutes, which may or may not be remembered in the, in the hours that follow or the days that follow. So, you know, that combined with also the obligations that a lot of times we feel to other people in our lives, the other adults in our lives, our friends, our families sometimes when you look at all the things that we try to do and try to make ourselves be perfect at doing, it becomes too much. And we, a lot of times don't give ourselves grace for saying, Hey, it's okay to say no. And so I think I want to talk a little bit about that today, you know, really diving into how we set ourselves up for maybe disappointment, failure, and quite frankly, exhaustion over the holidays and it doesn't serve us well, you know? So why do we do it? Tell me, does any of that resonate with you?

**Michael:** Absolutely. Yeah. I think, you know, as I was mentioning holidays, this is my favorite time of year, by far. However, you know, I live a thousand miles from where I grew up. And we live about 300 miles from where my wife grew up. And so I think we always, after we first got married, we, we had kind of come up with a plan of, of alternating years for where we spent the holidays. And that was not so hard until we had children. And then all of a sudden the traveling during Christmas became really, really challenging. And we had to make the really difficult decision of staying home for the holidays and not traveling for the holidays. Because for us,

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something felt like it was missing when we weren't home with our kids on Christmas morning. And so we do that now, but I will, I have to say that there was so much obligation. Kind of behind the traveling, our families wanting us to be with them for the holidays. It was really a challenging decision. And I think that there's a part of this for both my wife and I that is still a bit of a challenge because we of course miss our families too. And we just had to make the decision that was right for us. And even though it was a difficult one and I think that that comes up a lot with the obligations and the holidays and the families and all the things, right?

**Arpita:** Yes. And I think you, when you say you made the decisions and that they were difficult decisions, I want to just applaud you for actually setting your boundaries, right? Setting your boundaries in advance. And we talked about this, we've talked about it throughout a lot of our shows, but, you know, I think you were able to really recognize, hey, this is something that's really important to us, spending time with the family and the kids in our own home and we're going to do what we need to do to make that happen. Now, that doesn't mean that, you know, we won't invite people over, but when you set a boundary, that is protecting what is sacred to you in a way so that no matter what other people do, you're doing what you want to do. And I think that's exactly what you did here, you know.

And we had similar situations, you know, when you know, we have family members that you love and some family members that you may not as much, some distant relatives that you don't really know that well. You get to a point where you start to really recognize how much time you have in life and how valuable that time is and where and who you want to spend it with. And so what I recognize for myself is that a lot of times we would have get-togethers or interactions with family members that I really had no idea who they were, or I had, I spoke to them maybe every other year, every couple of years when we got together on the holidays and I started realizing that that was more out of obligation, you know, and I want to spend time with the people that I really enjoy and have bonded with on a regular basis. And that doesn't mean that the people that I don't know as well, I don't want to spend time with as well, but I get to pick how that looks. I get to decide how that looks and I get to decide how much time I want to put there. So I think that's really important as seeing where do you want to invest that time for yourself and for your family members? And then how do you create the boundaries so that you make that happen in that way? You know, I would love to visit Aunt Susie from 5 billion miles away who I know maybe from a five-minute phone call three years ago, and I have about an hour to spend at that Christmas party with the family, you know, you get to set it up the way you want.

Yes, that's kind of, I think one of the important things, I think the other piece of what happens to us in the holidays is the people-pleasing, right? And we want to do everything just to make other people happy. And that might be our parents, our siblings, our children, we're doing all the things to bring joy. And I want you to take a minute this season to sit back and ask yourself what brings you joy, right? And it might be that doing all these things truly brings you joy and that's wonderful. But if you're finding that really doing all of these crazy things like these, I don't know if you've seen this, have you seen the people that have the Christmas trees and then the presents and all the presents match underneath? I'm like, who the hell has time to do that shit? I don't have time for that shit.

**Michael:** Absolutely not.

**Arpita:** The wrapping paper and the bows and the ribbons, everything matches. I'm like, these people have too much time on their hands. However, if that's you, more power to you if you love doing it and it brings you joy.

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It does not bring me joy. What might bring me joy is paying somebody to do it. So I get the pleasure of seeing that beauty, but I'm not putting my time into it. So going back to the people pleasing part of it is what, what are you doing that you can let go of because it truly doesn't bring you joy, even though you think it's making other people happy. Where does this show up for you in the holidays?

**Michael:** Yeah, so I think so, my wife loves to do all the things during the holidays. Like we have tickets to the Botanic Gardens and the Polar Express. And if there is a holiday activity within 100 mile radius of where I live, we're doing it. And You know, I will say again, it's my favorite time of year. I love all the things. However, it can also be a little overwhelming looking to see how, you know, the months of November and December are completely planned out. And so, you know, she and I have had some discussions about, like, well, how, how can we figure out our calendars so that we get to do all of the things that are our favorite things while, you know, not doing things that maybe the kids don't love as much. And so one example is, you know, the, the botanic gardens here has a pumpkin glow with like a thousand carved pumpkins that happens around Halloween time. And my wife loves Halloween. And so we go every year, until this year, because we realized that the kids don't really enjoy it. And so, rather than, you know, hike out to the botanic gardens, and try and, you know, see all the things and do all the things, it was one thing that we were willing to let go of this year.

And I think being mindful about the things that you enjoy, but also the people around you. Right? So, you know, we're doing all of these things because we want our kids to have an amazing holiday season but if you're dragging your kids and it's, you know, the Chicago suburbs in October, and so it's rainy and cold and, you know, and the kids are unhappy, it doesn't make for a great trip. And so being mindful of, what do I love? What does my family love? And what do we love to do together? And then figuring out, okay, is this something that we want to do, all, all four of us? Or maybe just something that my wife and I want to do? Or maybe we don't want to do it at all this year. And then making sure that we're showing up in all the ways that we want to. So that we all have fun.

**Arpita:** And when you're talking about that, I'm picturing you dragging your kids in the rain, everybody drenched, screaming, unhappy, pissed off. And then we have the picture of everybody smiling with the pumpkins behind us, right? So that's like,

**Michael:** It's like you saw us last year.

**Arpita:** But that's what we think that we're like creating this joyful moment and memory when actuality it sucks and we don't want to do it and everybody's miserable so it's okay just acknowledging that and saying you know what it's a pass this year, we're moving on to the next thing so so i think that's kind of important to just build the awareness around what is really bringing us joy and what's not

**Michael:** yeah it doesn't mean we can't pick it up again next year right we're just making this this decision right now for what is going to serve us this year and that's it.

**Arpita:** I think another little nugget that I want to touch on for this holiday episode is talking about those people that push our buttons, you know, and I think we all have this in our life. There are those people that show up either at the holiday parties or at the family dinners or whatever it is that really know how to just set us off. And a lot of times we dread going to these events because we just don't want to be there with those

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people. And what I really want to do is Maybe empower us to be more present so that when we show up for these activities, we're not letting them take our power. We're not letting them ruin the event for us. And so how do we do that? Let's say, for example, you have an aunt Karen, since that's the name of the episode Aunt Karen, who is constantly bugging you about when you're going to have kids, when you're going to get a new promotion, when are you going to move up in your job? All the things that you really just don't want to talk about, all the awkward moments. How do we deal with this situation? How can you plan in advance for it so that when you show up there, You don't let her irk you and ruin your whole night with everybody else.

So there's so many different ways, like you get to analyze and the key here is planning in advance how you want to show up when you're in a situation that you know you're going to dread or that you're already dreading. And that's being intentional. So when this aunt starts asking me questions, I might say, you know what, Thank you for asking. I am not talking about this tonight. I'm moving on to the next thing or thank you for asking. Actually, I wanted to ask you about X, Y and Z instead and change the subject. Right? Some people may choose to not even show up. Hey, when is so and so coming? As soon as they arrive, I might leave. There are so many different ways you can handle this situation. It's giving yourself the out by planning in advance for what you're going to do. Yeah. Tell me, do you have any suggestions or tips for people when they want to avoid certain people over the holidays? Because that's pretty much what it is.

**Michael:** Well, yeah, I think first of all, as you were mentioning, it's about being aware and planning, right? And then, you know, I think it's super important to kind of be curious in these situations, right? And to wonder, like, first of all, for myself, why does this frustrate me so much? Like, what is it about this interaction that is so frustrating to me? Because sometimes it's not the other person, right? Some, maybe it's me. And when you can make that slight shift, from it's definitely them to maybe it's me. I think it opens up kind of some of the weight and the heaviness of the interaction. And then you get to choose how you show up in that interaction. And so just like you were saying, you can come into that interaction just as it, from a friendly and kind place where they ask you a question that maybe you don't want to answer and then laugh and pivot, right? And and move on to something else so that it isn't you right and so that you can continue on in the conversation, right? Because when we enter that initial conversation from a place of judgment and annoyance, because if you already know you're going into it annoyed the likelihood that you're going to show up in that conversation annoyed is pretty high but if you can remind yourself oh this is this is the conversation i was worried about, this is going to be annoying to me you And I'm going to now be curious with myself. Why is it annoying? And I'm going to choose kindness. I know it sounds a little like positivity, like, oh, everything is great. But I think it's really just a moment of trying to analyze, like, what the situation is. And then how to make it go the way that you want it to, because the truth is, all of that power is yours. You can make that conversation go however you want it to, and you get to choose. And so sitting in the power of choice, I think, is always really helpful.

**Arpita:** Yes, I agree 100%. One of my coaches gave me a little tool that I love to use, especially when it's those difficult people, the flamboyant, you know, very aggressive, outgoing people that tend to really push your buttons with how they interact with you. It's just a plan in advance when you're going to be in, in a setting where they're there, you know, that, oh, this is so and so. So and so is doing exactly what they always do. Why would I expect it to be any different now? Right? And then, like you mentioned, bring that curiosity there. I wonder why they're acting this way. I wonder why they're so threatened by what is at hand. I wonder what is making them ask me these questions in a way that is so aggressive or, you know, determined. When you can show up with curiosity there instead, you can actually flip it. So they're showing up with the kindness and the

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love so that it kind of takes the wind out of their sails. It deflates them where they can't continue that conversation in a way that's so activating for you. And when you're able to consider these other perspectives for why people are showing up the way they're showing up, it does help you keep your power. It helps you regain control of the conversation and how you want to show up in that situation.

So I think these are some amazing tips that have really, really helped me, I know dealing with difficult people sometimes over the holidays. I want to just maybe end with, as we talked about showing up and being intentional with how we're showing up, but also acknowledging that everything that people are doing or saying to you over the holidays and the interactions, I want you to ask yourself if you're making it an attack on you, right? So if your aunt never wants you to bring your favorite dessert to a party. And you think that's because she thinks it sucks and that you're a horrible cook. Is it that? Or is it potentially that she's threatened because you're an amazing cook and you do a wonderful job and she doesn't want us people to see how much better you are at making that dish. You know, it's what are you making things mean when people show up a certain way? Are you making it mean that it's an attack on you when it's really not? That's a different, another way you can kind of flip and take a different perspective on when you have those interactions. So,

**Michael:** And I love what you said before of just remembering right, if this is a family member that always shows up in the same way, we're just remembering the thought, like, of course this is the interaction. Like, obviously. Why would it be any different? And when you can approach it from that perspective, again, it just takes the weight away from the whole scenario, because you know, this is just them. And they get to be who they are, and you get to be you, and nobody's asking you to change, and we can't ask other people to change either. And so just again, raising the awareness around that can, can completely transform the holiday season. Cause remember like, this is such a fun time of year. And so, of course, you want it to be fun. And, kind of, creating some levity in these, what can otherwise be an awkward situation can really make the whole season a little bit happier.

**Arpita:** 100%. I'll say, I think it goes back to just being authentic. You know, you do what you really want to do for your own sake, what feels good to you, what brings you joy, and if you can stick to that for your own sake, You're going to have peace. You're going to be happy. And so let's move into this holiday season, planning in advance for what we want to do, how we want to show up, what we want to give our time to, who we want to give our love to, and do it in a way where it brings us joy without those feelings of obligation, without building any resentment down the road for how we showed up, how we wish we would have shown up and just being thankful and gracious for everything that we do have.

**Michael:** Fantastic. So great. Any final takeaways for the audience?

**Arpita:** I mean, I want to say the FOMO. We talked about the FOMO and the JOMO in the last episode, right? So that kind of ties into this. It goes back just to being your authentic self. And, and you know what, if people don't like what you do, they're not your people.

**Michael:** Absolutely. Well, Dr. Arpita Gupta DePalma, awesome chatting with you as always. And thanks to all of you for listening in. We will see you next time on Doctors Living Deliberately. Take care.

**Arpita:** Bye.