

Positively Engaging Your Non-Vegan Family

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Drawing on research from the field of social psychology, Corey Wrenn, VegFund's Spring 2013 intern, presents ideas on how we can positively engage with our non-vegan family members.

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One of the most important factors to going and staying vegan is a supportive network (Cherry 2006). Unfortunately, some individuals find themselves at odds with their non-vegan family, as most people do not associate a capacity to suffer with animals categorized as food (Bratanova, Loughnan, and Bastian 2011). Vegans are sometimes perceived by non-vegans as “thinking they’re better than everyone else.” This chastising of morally-motivated individuals is something social psychologists have termed “do-gooder derogation.” However, research shows that individuals who feel threatened by veganism will be more open if they are given the opportunity to combat the perceived moral threat (Minson and Monin 2011). So discussing veganism with family members, even if that discussion becomes uncomfortable, could actually reduce their need to bolster non-vegan attitudes.

Unfamiliarity with new foods may also be a barrier to eating vegan with family members. A 2013 study found that non-vegans who were repeatedly exposed to vegan alternatives to “meat” began to view them more favorably. However, participants also reported boredom with the same three products included in the study, indicating the importance of variety (Hoek et al. 2013). Indeed, the human brain is programmed to respond to novelty (Gallagher 2011). The variety offered by vegan foods and even the provocativeness of animal rights issues might actually pique the interest of family members.

Active involvement in preparing the food can also be advantageous. Parents may be familiar with overcoming picky eaters by having their children help prepare their meal. This works because effort increases liking. Known as the IKEA effect, creating something leads to pride and positive association with that something (Norton, Mochon, and Ariely 2011). Family members who are encouraged to prepare a vegan meal may find themselves more favorable to that dish if they have created it themselves. For example, Dad might really get a kick out of figuring out a tasty vegan dinner for his vegan daughter.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that individuals who are given snacks to munch on when presented with new information were more likely to be persuaded (Janis, Kaye, and Kirschner 1965). The positive associations with food seem to spill over onto the message. Sharing vegan food with family members will not only increase their familiarity with that food, but it also creates positive associations with veganism, and hopefully reduces tensions. Just be sure that the food is tasty—as Nathan Winograd argues in *All American Vegan*, [nobody is going to be won over by bland, flavorless health food](#).

Summary

- Give family members a chance to express their discomfort with your moral choices; an open dialogue may reduce negative attitudes
- When possible, expose family members to vegan foods to increase familiarity and liking
- Try to include a variety of vegan foods to peak interest and avoid boredom
- Encourage family members to create vegan meals themselves, as creating increases liking
- Provide delicious vegan food for family members when discussing veganism; snacks positively influence persuasion
- Opt for tastier foods over blander health-focused food when sharing with family members

Further Reading

Adams, C. 2001. [Living Among Meat Eaters: The Vegetarian's Survival Handbook](#). Three Rivers Press.

Askew, C. 2011. [Generation V: The Complete Guide to Going, Being, and Staying Vegan as a Teenager](#). Tofu Hound Press.

Torres, B. and J. Torres. 2009. [Vegan Freak: Being Vegan in a Non-Vegan World](#), 2nd ed. Tofu Hound Press.

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Bratanova, B., S. Loughnan, and B. Bastian. 2011. "[The Effect of Categorization as Food on the Perceived Moral Standing of Animals.](#)" *Appetite* 57: 193-196.

Cherry, E. 2006. "[Veganism as a Cultural Movement: A Relational Approach.](#)" *Social Movement Studies* 5(2): 155-170.

Gallagher, W. 2011. [New: Understanding Our Need for Novelty and Change.](#) Penguin Press.

Hoek, A. et al. 2013. "[Are Meat Substitutes Liked Better Over Time? A Repeated In-home Use Test with Meat Substitutes or Meat in Meals.](#)" *Food Quality and Preference* 28(1): 253-263.

Janis, I., D. Kaye, and P. Kirschner. 1965. "[Facilitating Effects of Eating While Reading on Responsiveness to Persuasive Communications.](#)" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1: 181-186.

Minson, J. and B. Monin. 2011. "[Do-Goooder Derogation: Disparaging Morally-Motivated Minorities To Defuse Anticipated Reproach.](#)" *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 3(2): 200-207.

Norton, M., D. Mochon, and D. Ariely. 2011. "[The 'IKEA Effect': When Labor Leads to Love.](#)" Harvard Business School Marketing Unit Working Paper No. 11-091.

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