



Wedding Fever

The cultural influences behind marriage mania—plus tips on what really matters when it comes to tying the knot.

6 Tips for a Happy Wedding

Are You Sacrificing a Perfect Relationship for a Perfect Wedding?

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The peak season for "I do's" is upon us, and if you're among the excited couples about to walk down the aisle, you're probably getting advice from all directions. Everyone from grandparents to groomsmen, coworkers to caterers are lining up to offer up suggestions for every detail of your big day. While planning your wedding can surely be a fun and exciting venture you share with the people closest to you, it can also be a source of stress and certain unanticipated tensions that act as bumps on your road to married life.

While we may think of a wedding as a purely joyous occasion, there are psychological factors at play that also arise as we approach this major life transition. As practicalities and details pile up, it's so important for couples to focus on the big-picture and keep certain values close to their heart. This means looking a bit beyond that fairytale-glow that seems to surround the wedding day and recognizing the real reasons you're getting married and what they mean to you on a daily basis. Here are a few tips that I recommend couples keep in mind as their wedding date approaches:

1) Don't Focus on Form Over Content. One bittersweet fact about weddings is that they tend to consume a great deal of time. Getting caught up in the frenzy of choosing the right napkin color or dinner entrée can be quite a distraction from other aspects of your life, even your relationship itself. Wedding planning leaves many couples at-risk of placing form over content. In other words, you can shift your concentration to everything looking perfect and away from actually being great in your relationship. Exhausting yourself with organizing a wedding can take its toll on intimacy. The "your day" mentality surrounding the occasion may feel good at first, but it's important not to let the occasion become all about you. Planning the event should always come second to enjoying this time with your partner. It's best to avoid absorbing yourself with making everything look perfect, and to instead think about what would bring you closest to your partner throughout the day. What would keep you in the moment? What experiences could you and your loved one share that would be the most uniquely meaningful to the two of you?

2) Pay Attention to Family Dynamics. One of the greatest things about weddings is that they bring the people you love together to celebrate love itself. However, it's not necessarily all joy and celebration throughout the process. Reconnecting with parents or certain relatives can stir up old family dynamics that aren't always pleasant and may actually have been harmful to you growing up. Jealous mothers, overprotective fathers, or critical step-parents can cause the bride and groom distress in days leading up to the wedding. These dynamics can actually leave a person in a more childish state, perhaps overreacting emotionally to minor issues. Or you may start to put up your guard and relate to loved ones in defensive ways. Acting out patterns from your childhood is not only something that is done with parents or siblings but with your fiancé(e) as well. In the course of planning your wedding, if you notice yourself changing the way you relate to your partner for the worse, this should be a red flag that something else might be stirring you up.

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3) Be Aware of Stirred-up Fears and Emotions. Getting married is a big step or milestone in life. Besides becoming a parent, marriage is perhaps one of the greatest culturally symbolic acts of adulthood. Most people who get engaged, at one point or another, experience an unconscious emotional reaction to the reality of growing up. No matter how old they are, getting married often makes people feel like they are letting go of being a kid. Not only is there the fear of saying goodbye to one's child self but also of losing one's self through this act of commitment. As the married couple leaves childhood behind, deeper more existential fears are aroused, especially when they start thinking about having their own kids and facing a future together.

4) Don't Let Stress Take Over. The natural fears that arise, coupled with more superficial pressures to make everything perfect, can leave you in a high state of stress in the months before your wedding. There are practical concerns to consider on behalf of yourself and your guests plus financial strains that can cause tension in your day-to-day life. Even as schedules fill up and tasks lists expand, it's essential to take time to simply enjoy being with your partner. Remember that this person is the reason you are getting married in the first place, and being with him or her should be the most enjoyable part of the process.

5) Be Aware of Insecurities that Arise. The attention you get in the course of getting married can feel good at times. However, it can also cause you to feel critical of yourself or insecure. The pressure to look perfect and make everyone around you happy can weigh on you, leaving many self-critical thoughts to flood your mind. Though it may seem illogical, throughout people's lives when they get what they want, their anxiety often increases. They have a tendency to experience more "[critical inner voices](#)" that cast doubt on their self-esteem or cause them to feel uncertain about their partner. Pre-wedding jitters often result from critical inner voices asking you "are you sure?" or picking apart your partner. You can combat this anxiety by paying attention to these thoughts, acknowledging when they arise, and disregarding them as an internal enemy undermining your real feelings of love and joy. Respond to these thoughts with a more realistic and compassionate point of view toward yourself or your partner. For example, remind yourself, "I do not need to be perfect. I just need to be myself. I am happy in my relationship and love my partner for real qualities that I deeply value."

6) Don't Get Lost in Fantasy. Very often, a wedding is treated like a fairy tale -- a dream-like day of happy memories. Even the terminology surrounding a wedding paints a picture of fantasy; brides are likened to "princesses," while decorative signs boast sayings like "happily ever after." Getting swept up in the fun of it is one thing, but getting lost in fantasy is another. Couples should be careful not to place too much emphasis on what their wedding (or their relationship itself) looks like from the outside.

Throughout a relationship, it's incredibly important to pay attention to ways you may be forming a fantasy of connection instead of experiencing your real feelings of love. A "[Fantasy Bond](#)" is an illusion of fusion couples form that leads them to give up their own identity and relate as a single unit. For an engaged couple, creating this connection may alleviate anxiety that arises from losing their youth, building a future, and, ultimately, facing mortality. This is a largely unconscious process. Married couples often lose the initial spark they had when they first fell in love or said "I do," because they forego genuine relating for a Fantasy Bond. In this state, they often give up passion, spontaneity, and mutual respect for each other in favor of form, routine, and mutual control over one another.

The idea often associated with marriage, that two people can unify, is a faulty illusion. You can never truly merge identities with someone else, and attempting to do so is dangerous to both the people and the relationship. Instead, you should aim to respect, appreciate, and admire each other as autonomous individuals. In doing so, you will help ensure your marriage will last well beyond any ceremony or honeymoon period, and it offers you the best chance at a real-life version of "happily ever after."

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