

Family Matters at Weddings

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Weddings are a time of great joy. But getting there can be challenging because blending families is not always easy. Today it is not just your future mother-in-law you have to consider. There are more second and third marriages that often involve children on one or both sides, not to mention step-parents and divorced parents, so making sure everything goes smoothly requires careful thought and planning. Even though much has changed over the 19 years I've been helping brides plan their perfect day, some basic rules still apply.

Who do you tell first?

Traditionally, the bride's parents are the first to be told that you are getting married, followed by the groom's parents. However, if either of you have children, they need to know immediately. The parent should be the one to tell them, alone. Sometimes children will need a lot of reassurance; sometimes they already know and are comfortable with the idea of a new dad or mom. In either case, it is a good idea to include them in the process as much as possible. If there is one or more ex-spouse, they should be told next by the partner who is remarrying. Don't let them find out by accident. Then you can tell your other relatives and friends.

Including the groom's family

In many weddings, the groom's family contributes to the wedding. How involved they are financially should determine how much input they have in decisions in those areas. It is very important that the groom is the one to approach his parents about sharing the expenses. However, it is up to the bride's parents, if they are planning to pay for the wedding, to decide if they want the groom's parents to help host it.

Sometimes mother-in-laws want to be very involved in planning the wedding because they don't have any daughters. Having good communication directly with your future mother-in-law can make your wedding a lot more fun. It's okay to say no as long as you do it nicely. Even if you don't get along well with your mother-in-law, keep in mind she did one thing right: she raised your future husband!

Handling divorced parents

It is a good idea to involve all parents, whether divorced or not. You don't want seem to show any favoritism. If the divorced parents are remarried and/or are on good terms, things are a lot easier. If two parents do not get along with one another, you will need to sit down with both separately to ask them to put aside their differences for this one special day. Usually that works.

At the reception, do not include divorced parents at the bride's table. Instead, give each their own table with members of their respective family and friends.

Second marriages when children are involved

Including children in the wedding plans from the beginning will make them feel better about this dramatic change in their lives. Inviting them to help in the planning, shopping and some decision-making can smooth the transition. You will need to decide if you want the children to be included in the actual ceremony as part of the wedding party-- flower girl, ring bearer, bridesmaid, best man. But if you invite them to participate and they don't want to, honor their decision.

Another way to include children is to have a special ceremony within the wedding ceremony where their parent, the officiant, and the new step-parent all hold hands to form a circle representing a new family.

Communicating and planning are the two secrets to having a wonderful wedding, one that everyone will remember forever. May you have the wedding of your dreams.
