

weddings

Manners Matter

Local etiquette expert Melissa Leonard answers the tough questions about how to manage your big day.

BY MELISSA
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I don't have the closest relationship with my father, as my stepfather was more of a father figure to me. Do I have to ask my biological father to walk me down the aisle?

Traditionally, the bride's father walks her down the aisle, but this is not a must. As the bride, you can choose anyone of significance—a brother, sister, stepparent, even a best girlfriend. This is a very special day, and as you know, relationships often ebb and flow, so you can always ask both your stepfather and father to do the honors. Keeping the wedding and family harmonious will serve you well and sometimes, allowances must be made. Regardless of whom you choose, make sure to have an open dialogue with anyone involved that may be impacted adversely by your decision. And remember, in the end, it is your day and your choice!

How do I decide who can and cannot bring a date to the wedding?

The rule of thumb is to extend an invitation to anyone who is currently in a committed relationship. This means those who are married, engaged, or living together. There is no obligation on your part to add a plus one to those who are single or not seriously dating. If the invitation does not say "Sarah & Guest," your guest should make the assumption that a date is not invited. Whatever you decide, consistency is the key. Be careful not to make exceptions, as guests talk, and you want to avoid unnecessary hurt feelings. And if Sarah does show up with an uninvited and unexpected guest, be the ever-gracious host that you are and make room for her date. The situation can always be addressed politely after the wedding day has passed.

My soon-to-be in-laws have so many "acquaintances." How do we tell them they can only invite their close friends?

You should enlist the groom, as you want to keep the peace with your future in-laws. Decide on a predetermined amount of spots they can fill at their discretion. It is better to tell them of the allocated spots, rather than asking

if this works for them. Check over the list and make sure none of those people are already on your list. If they are, then they have more to invite.

We aren't inviting children to our wedding. What if someone asks if their kids can attend?

It can be particularly awkward when you receive an RSVP with a resounding “yes” for the entire family, three kids and all. You need to politely take action. Call your guest and kindly yet firmly explain that the invitation was just for the adults and apologize if there was a misunderstanding. Tell them that you are still hoping they can attend. Again, be sure not to make exceptions, as this can cause issues and drama. Naturally, the exceptions include any junior bridesmaids, ring bearers, or flower girls.

I was a bridesmaid at my good friend's wedding two years ago, but we are no longer that close. Do I need to ask her to be a bridesmaid?

There is never an obligation to reciprocate bridesmaid's duties. Each wedding is different and based on the bride's current relationships, bridesmaid budget, and amount of female siblings on both sides. If you are afraid that excluding someone will cause a rift, you can ask them to play another role in your wedding, such as a reader at the ceremony.

What do I do if my guests don't RSVP by the date on the invitation?

Pre-addressed and stamped RSVP cards help to ensure you will hear from guests in a timely manner. If you haven't heard from guests 7-10 days before the wedding, make follow-up calls and let your unresponsive guests know that due to your vendors, you must have an accurate headcount.

My future husband has four sisters. Do I have to ask them all to be bridesmaids?

Etiquette dictates that it is a kind gesture to include your fiancé's siblings in the wedding party. You may have to adjust the amount of groomsmen to keep it equal. Or have two bridesmaids with one groomsmen. Including all is an important detail that will serve you well going forward. Did someone say future babysitters?

How do I address the envelope to someone who is widowed? Separated but not divorced? A same-sex couple?

We sometimes overlook our guests' attention to detail. And the envelope is no exception. I will use my name, Melissa Leonard, as an example. My spouse is Scott Leonard:

Widowed: Mrs. Scott Leonard is traditional, but Mrs. Melissa Leonard is also appropriate. You should call and find out how she prefers to be addressed.

Separated: Mrs. Melissa Leonard or Ms. Melissa Leonard. If they are not divorced, they will still be using their married last name.

Same Sex Couple: Mr. James Jones & Mr. Tony Smith. Be sure to keep the names in alphabetical order. Same rules apply for women.

I know some people won't be able to attend because of where they live, and I hate to waste invitations, so do I need to send them anyway?

If you are officially invited to a wedding with an invitation, you would be remiss not sending a gift. With the invitation comes the obligation of a gift. As the bride, if you know someone cannot attend due to location or preset plans, you do not need to send them an invitation, unless they are close friends or extended family. But feel free to write a small note stating that you know they cannot attend, but thought they would like to see the invitation. This way, they can feel a part of the wedding without the obligation of giving a gift.

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