

Sign Up To The Monthly Newsletter
Covering everything modern brides need to know

WEDDINGS

What To Do If... Your Family Doesn't Get On

Weddings should be a time of joy and celebration but they can sometimes be tricky to navigate if your parents are divorced, your siblings don't get on, or there's a rift in the family. To find out how to handle it and keep the peace in the lead up to and on the day itself, we asked a range of psychological experts and expert wedding planners for their advice.

9 January 2022 [Share](#) [Save to My Favourites](#)



SCENARIO: Your parents aren't on speaking terms, but you want to involve both of them in the planning process.

"You need to think about what makes you happy and listen to your own needs first. Each parent usually has their own strengths, and you need to play to these when it comes time to ask for their involvement. It may not be equal, but if they feel you're appreciative of the help they can offer, and are made to feel useful, everyone should be happy." – Dr Shadi Shahnavaz, head of family therapy at [The Soke](#)

"Be specific with each parent about what you need from them and take control over who does what. Don't expect your parents to collaborate or even communicate – make a clear game plan with your partner and go to each parent individually with the tasks you need their support on. If you have supportive siblings, it might be worth communicating this plan with them, too, and asking them to help in the lead up to the big day." – psychotherapist [Amy Launder](#)

"Nobody wants to be walking on eggshells in the run-up to the wedding. Talk to your parents to find out how they'd like to be involved and let them know what roles each of them will have so there are no surprises. Your parents should respect that this day is about you and your partner, and any personal issues should be put to one side. Roles and involvement might depend on who is paying for the wedding – so address this before you embark on the planning process." – Bruce Russell, owner of luxury wedding planning and events company [Bruce Russell Events](#)

"You don't need your parents to speak if things are not amicable – you just need to openly communicate your ideas so they're fully aware of your plans. The more understanding of the wedding they have, the better. Share your ideas for seating plans, speeches and toasts to make sure there's nothing that makes them uncomfortable." – Kristina Kempton, owner of luxury planning company [Kristina Kempton](#)

SCENARIO: You're very close to a stepparent and are unsure about who to ask to give you away.

"Many couples are throwing tradition out of the window. There are usually plenty of options as to who walks you down the aisle and as long as your father and stepfather get on, it might be worth talking to your biological father about asking your stepfather to join the two of you in walking down the aisle. If your biological father is no longer in the picture, or you don't have a good relationship with him, then feel secure in your decision to ask your stepfather to walk you down the aisle alone. Alternatively, if your mother has been the main person to raise you, you might ask her instead. They should all respect your choice." – Amy

"Some of my brides have chosen to walk down the aisle on their own and not have anyone give them away, just so they don't upset anyone. Remember, this is your choice – just be honest with everyone so they have the best understanding of the final decision." – Bruce

"If you ask your stepfather only to feel guilty all day for having hurt your biological father's feelings, then it might be better to ask your father to give you away and explain it to your stepfather by saying you feel caught in the middle. Add that you'd like him to be there for you as much as possible. As a mature adult, and someone who cares about you, he should support you." – Dr Shadi

SCENARIO: Your family don't get on – and having a top table sounds like a recipe for disaster.

"You could have a bridal table with your bridal party and their partners or your close friends instead. In these situations, getting each parent to 'host' their own table of people they want to sit with tends to work best." – Bruce

"You can have long tables with no top table at all to make it more of an even playing field. Or have a top table just for two – a sweethearts' table if you like – so you can feel relaxed and enjoy your celebration." – Kristina

"Many traditions are dying these days, including the idea of a top table. At my wedding, the top table included my siblings, my partner's siblings, our siblings' married other halves, and some of the bridal party. If putting your family together on one table is a recipe for disaster, then don't feel obligated to do it." – Amy

SCENARIO: *Multiple family rifts are making a seating plan impossible.*

"Emotions can run high at weddings so you should try to seat people at different tables only with people they can be social with. There are always a challenging few people to place, but they're grown-ups and should be able to manage for a few hours. It's also a good idea to assign a neutral family member to keep an eye out for any possible conflicts so they can diffuse any situations before they explode. This way you can relax." – Bruce

"Your best bet is to seat relatives that don't get on with each other far apart. Get a print-out of how the tables will be laid out so you can be sure that even if guests are on different tables, they won't be back-to-back. You can also create 'buffers' with other relatives such as cousins, siblings and friends." – Amy

"You could have different sized tables to make sure you can group people who are comfortable together – whether that's eight or only four. Try to keep numbers roughly the same per table so the balance doesn't look off, but a few less here and there can give you more scope to seat people where they'll be happy. Long tables also make it easier to slot people in so they're distanced from anyone they may have an issue with."

'Your parents should respect that this day is about you and your partner, and any personal issues should be put to one side. Roles and involvement might depend on who is paying for the wedding – so address this before you embark on the planning process.'

SCENARIO: *You don't know who to ask to make a toast.*

"This is completely up to you. I've been to weddings that have had the traditional toasts – father of the bride, best man, and groom – but I've also been to weddings that have had toasts from the mother-of-the-bride, parents of the groom, sibling of the bride, the bride herself, maid of honour, and so on. The key thing to remember is that this day is for you and your partner to enjoy." – Amy

"It's okay to break with tradition and make your own rules. You may want your father to do a toast on your wedding day and your mother may do one at the rehearsal dinner, for example. Think about the various celebrations you're hosting and who could speak when." – Bruce

"You might feel you want to have your father and stepfather do a toast. As with the speeches, you can have as little or as many as you wish. Perhaps have one of them announce you in as the newly married couple so they have a special role and have the other do the toast. They could each do a toast and say a few words if they're both a big part of your life. Another way to include people is with the readings during the ceremony." – Kristina

SCENARIO: *You don't know who to ask to take part in the father-daughter dance.*

"You can do one dance with your father and another one with your stepfather. Conversations about these choices need to be had before the wedding, and it's alright to ask your parents and stepparents for help in making the decision. Explain that you feel torn and that you need them to be supportive. It's always better to take a 'both and' approach rather than an 'either or' approach – that way everyone is included." – Dr Shadi

"It's perfectly fine to choose someone else other than your father to dance with. If your father isn't present or you don't have a good relationship with him, you might choose to dance with your stepfather, uncle, sibling, or any other parental figure in your life. Alternatively, you might choose not to have a father/daughter dance at all." – Amy

"You can have one song for your father and another for your stepfather. Alternatively, the bride can start the song with her father, and after a short time, the groom and mother of the groom join the dance floor, too. After a few more bars of the song, stepparents are invited to join, and new dance partnerships are formed. Make sure everyone knows where they need to be and when so there are no mix ups." – Kristina

SCENARIO: *You don't know who to include in official photos.*

"Think about who will want to look at the photos after the day is over. Of course, it would be nice for you to have photos with your whole family, but will your mother want a photo that your father (and possibly stepmother) are in, or vice versa? Personally, we organised four family photos – one with my siblings and father, one with my siblings and mother, one with my siblings-in-law and mother-in-law, and one with my siblings-in-law and father-in-law. This way, everyone is more likely to enjoy the photos afterwards." – Amy

"Ask both parents how they feel about the photographs. Ideally, they will both agree to have a picture with you and your new husband or wife, as well as with each other. If this is going to be strained, then you can have the formal photographs taken with them one at a time and with the new in-laws separately. It will mean a few more photos, and a bit of a higher cost, but hopefully it will keep everyone happy." – Kristina

"Discuss this with your photographer as you put together the shot list for the day. You can also split people up in the photo if you want everyone together or go with individual photos if it feels more appropriate." – Bruce

SCENARIO: *There's no way to keep guests apart for the entire whole day.*

"Know that there's only so much you can do. Outside of the seating plan, guests have to be left to their own devices. One tactic is to inform trusted friends about guests who don't speak or get on. You could ask them to run interference if you see that they're about to collide, or you might inform your bridal party about certain extended family members who shouldn't be spending time together. They can then intervene on your behalf, so you can fully relax." – Amy

Share This Story

FACEBOOK • TWITTER • PINTEREST • EMAIL

DISCLAIMER: We endeavour to always credit the correct original source of every image we use. If you think a credit may be incorrect, please contact us at info@sheerluxe.com.