

# Advice to the Groom

## about Interacting with his Bride

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Understand that your bride is under pressures you may not see or appreciate. When it comes to weddings, there is a much greater "performance" pressure on the bride than on the groom. As soon as the announcement is made and the engagement ring is on her finger, she steps into the temporary, specialized cultural role of "Bride." Primarily in the world of women, "the spotlight" is on her, and stays on until the wedding is over. Even the ring itself will be scrutinized and evaluated by her friends and associates. This can be a daunting, unseen pressure.

If her stress has focused on something like the decorations on the guest book table and she's telling you all about it, don't belittle the issue or label it as irrelevant or nonsensical. This would be a bad idea. Your bride's stress about this is not a problem to be solved; it's a fact to be acknowledged. She may be worried about performing well as "The Bride," and not being judged and found wanting. There may be other pressures on her to "do it right."

If your Bride tells you about her worry or frustration, she isn't asking you to make it all better or make it go away. Chances are, she's telling you how she is feeling because it's important to her that you, her emotional partner, know how and who she is emotionally. This isn't a problem for you to fix, even if the feelings are feelings of stress or hurt or anger. Three-year-olds ask their parents to make it all better, but adults in a loving relationship don't expect it of each other. Your job is to listen, respect and understand. Tell her you love her and you have every confidence in her judgment.

Whether you would have felt or done the same thing if you were in her shoes is irrelevant! You probably wouldn't have. Understand that what she's telling you is exactly what she feels because she is who she is. Let her know you respect and understand how it is she might feel that way. Don't try to "solve the problem." When you tell someone something you're worried about, you don't expect him or her to take over the problem and fix it for you.

Intimacy is defined as unconditional emotional accessibility. When your first response to your worried or frustrated partner is to listen (and not fix), you show her

you understand she is being emotionally open to you. Giving and receiving that gift of emotional openness increases intimacy. This is good. Jumping too quickly into fixing diverts attention away from the feelings she may be trying to communicate to you and focuses instead on the mechanics or logic of the "problem." This is bad.

Be sure to listen completely to the feelings first, and let her know you understand and respect how she feels. Then - and only then - should you consider moving on to examining the specifics of the problem or looking for a fix. You may find that after she has fully shared how she feels, she may take a deep breath and move quite quickly to resolving the problem herself.

Stress has a habit of focusing on the details. Just because worry about a certain wedding detail is resolved doesn't mean stress will go away. It's likely to float around until it finds another detail to focus on. This is what people do when they are stressed out.

Your bride may have very definite ideas as to how things should be and what should happen at the wedding; and at the same time she will ask you for your input. Tell her your preference if you have one. If you don't have one, let her know that as well. When your preference doesn't match what she feels she needs to do in order to satisfy the performance pressures she perceives, she may argue with you about how it should be or must be. The temptation is to back off and let her decide. The classic line is "I'll show up for the wedding. I don't care about the details." Although she has perhaps-passionate feelings about how she wants things to be, she may not want to be left alone with all the wedding plans, either. How do you express your preference, when asked, and not run counter to the expectations and pressures your bride perceives but you don't? Just say what you think. She would much rather have you tell her how you really feel, even if she doesn't agree.

Think about it: there are two possible problems your Bride can deal with at this point. On the one hand, by withholding your opinion you can present her with a crisis in intimacy ("why won't he share with me what he is really feeling?") On the other hand, by sharing what you really feel, even if she doesn't like hearing it for the moment, she faces the reality that the two of you are still different human beings with two differing "right ways" of seeing, feeling and doing.

Maintain intimacy and reaffirm the fact of your differences. You aren't clones of each other. You will see

things differently. This isn't a problem; it's just a fact. Your differences aren't a problem until you turn them into a problem. Understanding may be more important than agreement in the marriage as well as during your engagement. Communicating with respect, support and love as your Bride goes through what is for many young women a rather high stress time is more important than any other message she may get from you. You can help establish patterns of dealing with difference and stress that reinforce intimacy rather than create distance between you. These patterns will carry over into your marriage.

We all need to feel enjoyed and appreciated for who we are. Courtship isn't over when the engagement begins, or when the marriage begins, for that matter! You would be wise to continue to court your Bride and, later, your wife. Even if flowers don't mean that much to you, they may mean a great deal to your partner. Write it in your date book. Do it. Not just once, but every now and then. On a regular basis. Perhaps it isn't flowers. It's a safe assumption that she has told you - often - what would nourish her. If you don't know what she would occasionally like from you as a sign she's still loved and enjoyed, ask her. A well-nourished partner is like money in the bank.