

WHAT ABOUT: YOUNG GUESTS? MOTHERS-IN-LAW?

DEAR KATHY:

Q: We have decided to exclude all children under the age of 16 at our wedding, both because of the cost and because, frankly, we don't want younger children running around. In some families, one or two of their children will be 16 and above, and others will be younger. How do we handle this situation on our invitations to make certain they know who is invited and who is not?

A: On the surface, the answer is simple. Each young man or woman 16 and over receives his or her own invitation. Be prepared, however, for some possible challenges. A relative may contact you and insist that his or her child is perfectly well behaved and won't cause any trouble. Stand firm! In the first place, everyone's level of tolerance is different. Some parents might well see their child shove his fist into the wedding cake and hurl a chunk of it at his sibling and view this as a "cute" photo op.

Of greater import, however, is the potential effect on all of the other parents at the wedding who left their young ones at home. "Why did they invite *those* children and not mine?" Make sure that your parents and your fiancé's parents understand how adamant you are. Don't let them give the green light to some aggressive third cousin!

If you have out-of-town guests who must bring their little ones with them, you should make arrangements to have a sitter available to take care of the children while the parents are at the wedding.

Q: Do I have to invite my mother-in-law to do all of the things my mother is doing with me, like picking out my gown and going to the florist? She's very opinionated and I think it would make for a difficult situation if I didn't take her advice.

A: You don't have to take your future mother-in-law along on these outings. Indeed your own mother has probably been looking forward to doing all of these things with you since you were a baby. These are precious moments and you have a right to enjoy them. However, this is your fiancé's mother and you will have a relationship with her for the rest of your life.

If you think she would like to be involved make arrangements to have her with you when you make one your choices. For example, if she is a wonderful baker, you might take her with you for the cake tasting. Her input would actually be valuable. Or perhaps she sings with the church choir. Ask her help with the music. If you make that effort to include her, you'll feel better and you'll make the man you love happy -after all she's his mother!

We are having a really elegant wedding in August, at an exclusive club. My fiancé's family is not well off, and they cannot afford to throw a big

rehearsal party. They have suggested doing a cookout in their backyard. Would it be appropriate for my family to help underwrite the cost of something a little fancier?

Please don't do that. Sometimes we get so caught up in the minutia of an event that we lose sight of the overall picture. Your wedding will bring about the union of two families. Suggesting that your intended's family can't carry their end of the wedding sends a message that they are inferior. Even though that isn't your parents' intent, it will color the relationship going into the future.

The rehearsal dinner is supposed to be a more casual affair than the wedding, and it involves only the wedding party, the immediate families, and, perhaps, the officiating clergyman. Everyone will have a good time and enjoy each other's company. If your grandmother or your grandaunt Eleanor are too blue-blooded for a cook-out, tell them they'll be dining *al fresco* or *en plein air*. Your parents might offer to furnish the wine. That would be thoughtful, but not intrusive. This kind of respect for each other's families will start you and your intended off well.