

FROM THE MOM

Here's Some Advice for the Mother-of-the-Bride

By Maureen Hart

My daughter and I endured over two years of wedding planning without losing our close friendship or breaking our special bond with one another. That said, nothing is perfect, and there was one day when she ended up in frustration and I was in tears over the wedding invitations. It took a 24-year-old to remind a fifty-something that in the larger scheme of things, the wording of invitations is not something to argue over.

She was so right, and we were so lucky to have had just one little disagreement. But many mothers and daughters practically come to blows over the organization of a wedding, and although I veered off the path momentarily with those invites, I still have some advice when it comes to helping with the wedding planning:

1. Try to avoid the thinking process that since you are paying for this, your word goes. If indeed you are paying for the wedding in its entirety, try to set ground rules about the budget and insist that the bridal couple consult with you before signing any contracts or making any decisions about something that will ultimately come out of your pocket. This gives your control over the price, but not over the color or flavor or fabric of things.
2. That said, while you have control of the purse strings, do not try to control the wedding itself. This is a day that should reflect the taste of the young couple—her choice of gown, their music. Remind yourself--daily if necessary--that this is not your wedding, but theirs. You had your shot at a wedding, now it's your daughter's turn.
3. My daughter was thoughtful enough to include me in many of the visits she made—for the gown, veil, bridesmaid dresses, tastings for the dinner and cake, even for the string ensemble and some of the bands and deejays. I went into each visit vowing not to sway her opinion unless I truly hated something. Luckily, I agreed, or at least could live with, all of her choices. I may not have chosen “Bittersweet Symphony” for my processional (actually, I picked Bach), but it was perfect for her. Keep in mind, however, that sometimes all the choices become confusing, and my daughter told me afterwards that there were times she really wanted my opinion and I was not forthcoming. I hope I erred on the side of caution, but I also wish I'd expressed my opinion more forcefully when she did ask for it.
4. Trust me, you will both get caught up in what I call the “wedding frenzy.” A wedding takes on a life of its own, and you begin to feel like you'll do anything to have the big day be magnificent and perfect. Or, on the other hand, you are in total panic at what all of this is costing (what do you mean centerpieces are \$250?). I think it is up to you, as the parent, to step back and look at what's important. When I had to do that, I would go over the options. Because she wanted a fancy dinner with great food, she chose candle centerpieces that she put together at a great discount (whew, no \$250 worth of flowers at each table

after all!). After listening to four or five bands, she made a decision to hire a deejay, at great savings, in order to afford fancy draperies for the cocktail hour.

5. Try not to live vicariously through your daughter. And avoid the guilt trips. I've had other brides tell me that their mothers would say, "This is my only chance...(to see my daughter in a flowing train...to see her toss a bouquet...to dance the Macarena at her wedding, etc." Don't force your daughter to tell you the obvious: "This is not your wedding." If she wants a slim gown without a train, if she thinks tossing a bouquet is so passé, and she really hates the Macarena--live with it. At the end of the day, she will be as married as the Cinderella bride with the pouffy skirt and 20-foot train!
6. Try to enjoy the process. We had two years to plan a wedding, and for a long time it seemed far off. Then, suddenly, it seemed very close, and the days really flew by. You spend a lot of time and a lot of money planning this one day on the calendar, and it only makes sense to try to enjoy the journey.
7. Prepare yourself for the day she finds her dress. Wedding professionals always say that a girl knows the minute she tries on "the" dress. In our case, I was okay while she modeled the gown, but when they added the veil, and there was my little girl looking like a real bride--well, there's a reason they supply tissues in bridal shops!
8. Needless to say, enjoy the day itself. Try to plan an affair in which there is someone else to take care of the last minute details. One bride I know hired a wedding planner just for the wedding day itself, so that her mother could just be in the moment. If the flowers hadn't arrived on time, if a hemline needed repair--someone else was there to handle the crisis. Many reception sites have on-site coordinators who will handle the details that day. Delegate responsibilities so that you are not rushing around making sure everything is in place!
9. It's the bride's day, for sure, but pamper yourself a little, too. When the hoopla is over and the happy couple is sunbathing on a beach somewhere, spend a spa day, or read a book, or go out to tea with the girls. It's been a long journey, and heaven knows you don't have much money left over, but you deserve some R&R.