

# WAR & PEACE

*Planning a wedding won't always be plain sailing, with family and friends bringing their own, often divergent, ideas to the table. Irish Brides talks to couples' counsellor and integrative psychotherapist Hilda Burke about how best to avoid conflict with loved ones in the run up to your wedding.*

**THE PROBLEM**

*“My parents are helping pay for our wedding so think this entitles them to influence our planning decisions.”*

**THE SOLUTION**

“First rule of weddings – never accept financial contributions to your wedding without exploring whether there are any expectations in return for the ‘investment’. By ascertaining whether there are any ‘strings attached’ early on, it will minimise the potential for strife further down the line.”



**THE PROBLEM**

*“Our parents are insisting we invite their friends – people we barely know – to our wedding.”*

**THE SOLUTION**

“If it's been discussed and agreed upon at the outset, this shouldn't happen. The important thing is transparency – where disagreements happen is when there have been grey areas and a lack of general discussion early in the planning process. Decide how many people are to be invited and let both sets of parents know what their allocation is (if any) early on. It's good to clarify this in writing with all parties – however keep the tone breezy and avoid the temptation to draw up a legal document! A friendly email to all involved parties (usually the parents on both sides) confirming what the allocations are should suffice.”

**THE PROBLEM**

*“Friends and siblings are upset at being passed over for bridesmaid or best man duties.”*

**THE SOLUTION**

“Most reasonable people will understand that choosing bridesmaids and best men can be a minefield! A bride may feel obliged to ask an old friend for whom she has acted as bridesmaid to then be her own bridesmaid, passing over a closer but newer friend. The bottom line is that a genuine friend will understand these considerations and won't feel affronted for not having been chosen for a key role at the wedding. If someone does take umbrage, ask yourself if they really are that good of a friend if they're turning your big day into a drama about themselves.”

**THE PROBLEM**

*“How can we accommodate parents who are separated/divorced/remarried?”*

**THE SOLUTION**

“The second rule of weddings – manage your expectations! Weddings are a bit like Christmas in that we hope that ‘warring factions’ within families will come together and just get on for that one day so we can enjoy a blissful family for at least one joyous period. The reality is that life isn't like that. Even with the best of intentions, old wounds can resurface. It's not your responsibility to guarantee people's happiness on your wedding day. Accept what is! The best preparation for this is regular meditation. It may seem difficult to carve out some quiet time in the months leading up to the wedding but consider it as training for a calm mind on the day itself. The calmer you are within yourself, the less family tensions will affect you.

Anyone can meditate. All it requires is breath – something all of us living beings are blessed with. Initially, I'd encourage sitting on the floor – cross legged if possible but any reasonably comfortable seated position will do. It's nice to create a dedicated space – perhaps with a nice candle or some incense (but only if that works for you) in a corner of your home that feels safe and peaceful. The most important thing is to manage your expectations! Many starting out on meditation feel like they have to sit for 20-30 minutes or there's no point. They then feel discouraged when they cannot accomplish this and just give up. My advice is always to start small. Set your alarm for one minute, sit down, just focus on your breath – taking long deep breaths In and out, creating some stillness within yourself. When you get distracted, just keep focusing on the breath, letting the thoughts just drift by you. Once you feel comfortable meditating for a minute then try lengthening it to 90 seconds and then to two minutes and continue until you've reached a duration that you feel content with.”



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