

MODERN MARRIAGE GUIDANCE

Miss to Mrs isn't just a change of title. Here's how to make the 'just-married' friendship, career and sex-life shake-up work your way



Every bride-to-be on Facebook knows the power unleashed when you change your status from 'single' to 'engaged'. With one word, all your friends see you in a different light. But it isn't just getting invited out on singles-only pulling sessions that's about to change – everything from family relationships to your bank account could be set for a shake-up. Our crash course in the rules of modern marriage will help you negotiate the changes saying "I do" brings to every aspect of your life.

FRIENDS FOREVER?

As soon as you've announced the happy news of your engagement, even long-standing friendships may start to change. Modern brides typically wait until they're older to marry, so brides in their 20s often have single friends who don't grasp the emotional whirlwind of engagement. But Marriage Care's head of relationship and marriage preparation, Bridie Collins, says it's important to preserve friendships outside of your relationship. Having your friends' support at your wedding will create lifelong bonds, plus your fiancé may not want to talk about *Gossip Girl*.

Still, it's normal for a fiancé to become a best friend. Bride-to-be Louise, 32, from Kendal, says of her couple-y weekends, "I do miss my cocktail evenings with the girls, but, ultimately, what I always wanted is what I've got now."

BETWEEN THE SHEETS

Committing to one sexual partner for the rest of your life can take some getting used to. Suddenly, harmless flirting feels wrong in a way it didn't used to be before. Jane, 32, from London, says she found it difficult when an ex started paying her outrageous compliments online. She didn't respond and told her husband about it. She admits, though, "I sometimes find it hard that no-one apart from my husband is supposed to find me attractive."

Natasha, 30, from Tenerife, says when she first got engaged she panicked about only having sex with one partner again. She decided to talk openly with her fiancé and it was the best thing she could have done. "He asked me what I thought I'd miss out on and we ended up sharing intimate thoughts and secret fantasies, which has improved an already great love life."

Ultimately, sex is more intimate once you're engaged. Louise says, "There's something very attractive about a man who's blown away by you and has no hang-ups about being open about it. Sex with one person for the rest of your life feels like a massive stroke of very good luck to me."

FOR RICHER, FOR POORER

By the time most women marry today, we've been looking after ourselves and our finances for years. The prospect of pooling our savings with someone else can be scary, especially if your incomes are different, if one of you has a bad credit history (this can affect the other's ability to get credit) or if

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you're a saver and he's a splurger.

But this is 2008, so keep your private bank account if you prefer, says Olwen Jones of money coaching service The Money Tree (mymoneytree.co.uk). "Some couples pool all their money; some have totally separate finances. It's common to have a household account for joint expenses: food shopping and bills. You can each put a percentage in according to how much you earn – this is a fairer system if there's a big difference in your salaries."

It may seem unromantic, but being able to tick a 'married' box rather than a 'single' one has financial benefits. Wives who have cared for children rather than worked can sometimes claim a state pension based on their husband's national insurance contributions, for instance.

KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY

Whether you adore your in-laws or can't stand them, they're family now. The good news is it can be a blessing to have an extra family to turn to, and to learn from.

Marrying also gives you a valuable independence from your own family.

Olivia, 30, from Bishop's Stortford, says one of the most important lessons she learned after her engagement at 24 was that "First and foremost I would be a wife. Not that I'd ever stop being my parents' daughter, but I wouldn't have to run everything by my mum and dad anymore. The change in status gave me a real boost of confidence."

If things do get difficult with in-laws, remember you married your husband, not his family – you're now his next of kin. Bridie advises, "Respectfulness is important, but you've also formed a new family that will have its own culture."

CAREER WIFE

Re-evaluating your career when you marry is totally legitimate. And if you want children, the sooner you start planning, the better, says Olwen. "You'll have to take at least some time off work, and the reduced income can be tough to manage on."

Even if children aren't on the horizon, marrying can be a catalyst for a new career. "When we got engaged, we realised that together we could afford for me to have six months off to re-train," says Olivia. "I went from a job which bored me to one I love."

Then there's the dilemma many of us face about changing our name. Cathryn, 29, from Cardiff, got married in 2007 but still uses her maiden name – she built her career on it and says, "Changing my name would feel like erasing part of my identity."

ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE...

Committing to love each other for life takes even the strongest relationship to a higher level. But in marriage, Bridie warns, "Couples who lose themselves totally in each other can find themselves in trouble. No one person can fulfil all our needs all of the time." Alice, 30, from Cape Town, who got married in 2005, says her independence enhances her relationship. "I love my husband completely, but I don't rely on him to have all the answers or to complete me."

It's sensible to prepare for hurdles – they're an inevitable part of every loving marriage. But while life will have its ups and downs, the one thing you will always have now is each other. "Sure, we have areas that we disagree on, and things that crop up the more we get to know each other," says Louise, "but none of the little things matter when you just want to be together and make each other happy."

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