



You're invited... I think

Stay on budget, stay sane and stay friends with *Cosmopolitan Bride's* guide to beating guest-list angst

In the first months of engagement, sitting down with a piece of A4 and a glittery pen to draw up a wedding guest list is as fun as it is totally vague and impractical.

Only when it comes to the nitty-gritty of ordering, writing and sending the invitations do the real issues start to appear. Whittling down a guest list is rarely as simple as just inviting the people you love the most – in fact, it can be one of the most stressful elements of planning a wedding. But if you can decide

in advance how to handle these common hurdles, you'll be well prepared to draw the line between including people for politeness and keeping your wedding a meaningful personal day that won't blow the budget.

Help! Family you barely know

You think you have your guest list all worked out, but when you run it past both mums, they exclaim, "What about aunt Edna's cousin Marjorie? And you can't leave out all your second cousins – what >

were you thinking?" You want to enjoy the wedding as a family reunion, but connections between relatives can go on forever, so who's in and who's out? Predicting how many people will say yes to your invitation is impossible, but there will usually be plenty who decline. In many cases, relatives, especially those overseas, will be honoured to receive an invitation without feeling any need to attend.

It's easy to err too much on the side of duty – but remember, distant relatives will understand you can't accommodate everyone. "My family is huge," says Sarah, 29, from Cardiff. "I have about 25 cousins, and I didn't invite all of them to the wedding. There's an understanding in the family that, because we are so big, things like weddings are difficult."

Help! Invitation-happy parents

Dealing with parents' requests to invite their friends to your wedding seems to be a problem for every bride, and it's hard to say no when your parents are contributing to the cost of the day.

Jane, 32, from London, had to deal with a mother who invited everyone, even her window cleaner, to the wedding. Of course, if your parents are letting the invitations get out of control, it's up to you to rein them in. But Lucy, 28, from Warwickshire, ended up inviting all the people her mum wanted, plus some. She explains, "As long as you can afford it, let your parents invite a few extra people. You won't notice on the day and it's worth the concession to make everyone happy."

Help! Semi-friends

We all have friends we only meet up with once a year, ex-boyfriends we're still 'sort of' friends with, or friends we don't adore but who are part of our social circle. One of the trickiest aspects of planning a guest list is deciding whether to invite these

people. It seems obvious to invite only close friends, but when semi-friends can see excited guests writing on your wall on Facebook, you worry about offending them by leaving them out.

Making a gesture of friendship can revive an old bond. But a few moments of sentimentality can also induce regret as soon as those precious invitations hit the inside of the postbox – planning a wedding isn't the same as planning any other kind of party, and you have no obligation to include any semi-friends.

Then there's the question of whether to invite people because they invited you to their wedding. The consensus is that any bride who has been through the hell of organising a guest list would understand if you didn't invite them. "We're having several people to our wedding who I haven't seen in years, but who invited us

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to their weddings," says Lucy. "It's nice to return the compliment. But if I was having a small wedding, I wouldn't feel obliged."

Help! Other people's children

Yes, they'll look adorable in the wedding photos. But what about screaming babies in church and the notes your mum's scribbled next to some of the names on your list reminding you that certain invitees' offspring are 'a bit naughty' (read: brats from hell)?

There's no obligation to invite kids – a child-free wedding can go down well with parents who want a day off. But if you do end up with lots of children, it pays to plan thoroughly. Penny, 37, from Yorkshire, was four months pregnant at her own wedding, and decided that, with this in mind, it would be odd not to have a child-friendly wedding. Bravely, she and her fiancé had 25 under-fives, as well as 80 adult guests. The children were

entertained by a magician and served chicken and chips as the adults ate their starters. "It was lovely – they all looked cute and behaved very well," she says.

Help! Pesky plus-ones

Plus-ones can easily double a guest list. If space is limited, this is where to get strict – unless you know them personally, there's no need to invite them. And just because you enjoy a chat about last night's TV at the office, it doesn't mean that you have to invite workmates to your wedding, either.

Be honest about costs and find space for extra guests where you can. Sarah hadn't invited her friend's boyfriend – whom she'd never met – but one day when her friend casually said, "Well, you'll get to meet him at the wedding", Sarah explained that she couldn't afford any more people at the afternoon reception, but he was welcome to come in the evening. You could also tell friends that you'd love their partner to come, but that because numbers are limited, you'll have to see how many RSVPs you get before letting them know if you any space.

Help! You're overrun

If you have your heart set on a small wedding, a tried-and-tested way to juggle the guest list is to invite more people to the ceremony than the reception, or vice versa. This way, one element is kept as small and intimate as you like, and yet no one feels left out.

So how do you tactfully invite people only to one part of the wedding? It's fine to invite people just to the reception or ceremony ('Jane and Chris are getting married on 1 May. Please join us at 7pm for dinner and dancing') and to explain that the other element is for immediate family, or that, unfortunately, the venue is too small for everyone.

Having a wedding abroad is another way of keeping numbers down. Jo, 30, is from Sydney, but although she has lived in England for years, she and her English fiancé planned their wedding in Australia. She says, "On top of family in Australia, about 20 friends and family came from around the world to celebrate with us. I knew and loved everybody at my wedding. It had a really intimate, lovely feeling and I think that was because it was small."