



do your bridesmaids heart you?

How to make sure your best buds still want to be your buds once the wedding is over. BY KRISTIN KOCH

Trust us—as you're planning your wedding, you're going to need them more than ever. Which is why it's important to keep the bond between you and your bridesmaids strong (well, that and the fact that there's this thing called speeches...). Here's how to make sure there's no love lost throughout all the wedding drama. >>

DO YOUR BRIDESMAIDS HEART YOU? CONT.

respect their (other) responsibilities

Planning a wedding can feel like a full-time job, but that doesn't mean being a bridesmaid should too. Remember: While your wedding may be *your* number-one priority right now, your friend who's busting her butt at work, or who's adjusting to life with a new baby, may have other priorities. Translation: Don't ask them to help with DIY décor projects every weekend, refrain from calling your maid of honor at work for an update on the shower RSVPs, and don't expect your maids to be on call 24/7.

don't forget your other supporters

There's no need to throw every wedding-related project, crisis or tantrum their way. Keep in mind: There are plenty of other people willing and able to pitch in. That includes your fiancé, your family (and future family-in-law) and the professionals whose job it actually is to help you plan your wedding. Use them!

dress them well

The number-one bridesmaid complaint? No shocker here—the dress. Whether the style doesn't go with her style, the silhouette doesn't flatter her silhouette, the color doesn't work with her coloring or she just isn't psyched about spending \$300 on a dress she'll never wear again, there's a reason bridesmaid dresses get a bad rap. Want happy maids? Choose a dress they'll like enough to wear again (hint: think outside the bridal designer box) or at least one that they won't mind wearing once. And if you really want to win the bride-of-the-year award, let them pick their own. Listen, we get that you want your maids to match, but don't just think about what will go best with your wedding style—consider their figures too. You want each and every one of your maids to feel beautiful and comfortable (right?). Not sure one dress will work for all your girls? Come up with guidelines (say, a color and a length you like) and then let them choose the exact style. Nervous? Don't be. You retain final veto, and trust us, even with different necklines or silhouettes, they'll still look fantastic. >>

DO YOUR BRIDESMAIDS HEART YOU? CONT.

keep them in the black

It's not that your maids don't want you to have your dream shower/bachelorette/wedding; they just don't want to go into debt to make it happen. Bridesmaids have to shell out for quite a bit over the course of the wedding—dresses, shower decorations, wedding gifts, the bachelorette party, travel expenses—all of which can seriously add up and put a pinch on even the most financially flush of maids. Take your bridesmaids' budgets into consideration before choosing their dresses or requesting a Vegas bachelorette. And offer to pitch in when you can. If some of your maids will be flying in for the wedding, help them track down inexpensive flights and hotel rooms, or ask a local relative to put them up. Just letting your maids know that they shouldn't feel pressured to give you an extravagant shower gift (or one at all) will go a long way.

give the girls arm candy

We don't care if you've never met the guy, you're short on space or she has the worst taste ever in dates. Give all your maids—yes, even the chronically single gals—plus-ones.

don't treat them like indentured servants

Are you walking down the aisle or running a sweatshop? News flash: Unlike your vendors, your bridesmaids aren't getting paid to cater to your every whim (technically, they're paying for that honor). We get it—you need help...but an engagement ring does not give you permission to take hostages. Yes, part of the bridal party's job is to be your go-to gals when you need something done. But no, that doesn't mean you should be cracking the whip nonstop. Whenever you're asking one of your maids to do something—whether it's attending your gown fitting or tying 100 miniature bows around 100 favor boxes—stop and ask yourself: Would I do this for her? It's a good reality check to keep your requests reasonable (and will help prevent any bridezilla references come speech time). When you do ask for their help, sweeten the deal with vino and snacks. >>

DO YOUR BRIDESMAIDS HEART YOU? CONT.

be a gracious recipient

You pictured an elegant afternoon tea; instead, there's bridal shower bingo and mini crescent dogs. You wanted a spa day bachelorette party; instead, you got a night of pole dancing at a strip club. It might be tough sometimes, but you've got to smile and say thank you. While you can give your bridesmaids hints as to what you want for the prewedding festivities, and you should feel free to offer your two cents if asked (read: thumbs-up to barhopping; thumbs-down to skydiving), you don't get to actually plan them yourself. Whatever your bridesmaids come up with, remember they're doing it for you. So no matter what happens, always express your appreciation.

gift them well

There's no better way to show your gratitude than with your bridesmaid gifts. While it makes sense to get your girls the same thing so there isn't a feeling of favoritism, if they don't all have the same taste, consider picking a category and then personalizing the styles and colors. That way, you can show that you love them all but still acknowledge each as an individual.

be a good friend

Really obvious, right? But sometimes when you're caught up in wedding-related drama, it can be hard to remember that there's a world outside your wedding. So if "My wedding, my wedding, my wedding. How are y—wait, that reminds me of...my wedding" sounds a lot like something you've been saying lately, pick up the phone and call a maid, pronto. Ask her what's up; then listen. Do your best to go the whole convo without uttering the W-word once. Or next time you meet up with one of your girls—even if it's to wedding-dress shop—make a point to talk about things that aren't related to the wedding. Whether it's a project she's stressing over at work or the blind date she went on last weekend, she'll appreciate the chance to tell you all about it, the same way she always has. Similarly, when you're upset—whether about the wedding or anything else—you'll know she'll be there for you, now and after the wedding's over. >>

DO YOUR BRIDESMAIDS HEART YOU? CONT.

avoid maid micromanaging

No one likes being told what to do, especially when they're doing something for you. Your maids are supposed to be the people you trust and depend on most in the world, right? So do just that. Listen, we know that when you're in full-on planning mode, it's hard not to obsess over every little detail, but try. Trust your maids (you know, the people who know you better than you sometimes know yourself) to throw you a beautiful shower, to toast your single days good-bye in style and to order their dresses (without being reminded 10 times).

keep the meltdowns to a minimum

The occasional bridal breakdown is inevitable—your maids are counting on it. So don't worry if, during a particularly stressful week, you cry over boutonnieres or lose your cool over favors. Just try to keep the bridezilla moments in check, okay? Everyone gets that planning a wedding is super-stressful, but that doesn't give you permission to turn into a complete nightmare from now until the wedding (once again, remember: speeches).

be a good sport

Guess what? If you expect your maids to wear the dresses you picked with a smile and to spend an entire weekend stuffing envelopes sans complaint, you'd better be a good sport in return. Bottom line: It's unsportsmanlike to expect so much from a friend without giving a little back in return. So even if the thought of sipping a cosmo out of a phallic-shaped straw at your bachelorette, playing cheesy shower games, and oohing and ahing over gifts makes you cringe, suck it up and play along. Oh, and don't storm out of the rehearsal dinner if your maid of honor tells an embarrassing story that you would've preferred to keep a secret (at least from your future in-laws). Just smile and remember—it's all in good fun (and there's always her wedding...).



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