



Weddings and Children: Keeping it Smooth

When she was three, my daughter was the flower girl in her Aunt's Gen wedding. She looked beautiful and she knew just what to do; however, when it came time to walk up the aisle with her ring bearer partner, Zachary, she stopped in her tracks and demanded, "Make him go away." The music swelled, the wedding party was at a standstill behind her and she wasn't budging.

We all want special occasions – from weddings to graduations – to go smoothly. Someone is being honored or remembered, and we want the occasion to not only reflect that reverence but to be enjoyable, too. We want the segments of the ritual to flow seamlessly. As a wedding guest or as a member of the wedding party, children can have fun and participate fully if we adults do a little preparation and remain flexible.

First of all, know your child's temperament. Three temperament traits that may impact a child's participation in a wedding are **transition**, **hypersensitivity** and **energy level**.

Does she **transition** – move from one activity to another – smoothly or have difficulties? If she has difficulties, give her a lot of preparation time and give her a count down for all activities. For instance, "In five minutes, we will get dressed for the ceremony." Make sure she has time to get comfortable in her dress and shoes. Be sure she has a lot of practice time for whatever role she is playing in the wedding. Talk

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her through her part during the weeks before the ceremony while you are driving in the car or lying in bed at night. Role play the ceremony with her at home and make it about having fun. Use as many sensory details as possible, such as how the music will sound, what she will see and how the flowers will smell.

Is your child **hypersensitive**, especially to fabrics, itchy seams or tight shoes? To make sure those wedding shoes are not pinching her feet, purchase them as close to the wedding date as possible. Try them on with the socks or tights that she will be wearing. If you need to purchase them in advance, buy shoes that are a half-size larger than her shoe size. Have him wear his suit or tux well ahead of time to check out any sensitivity. For your daughter, bring a cotton camisole or slip just in case. Carry baby powder to use if things happen to feel itchy. If at all possible, work with the bride to plan children's attire made from a natural fabric with no rough seams or stiff petticoats.

Is your child full of **energy** or "high active"? If so, have things for him to do prior to the ceremony. Give her something to focus on during the ceremony, such as watching the bride or listening to the words.

Let children know in advance what happens at a wedding. That is important for children who are guests as well as children who are participating in the ceremony. Let them know the sequence of events, what to expect, and typical protocol, such as standing when the bride walks down the aisle. Also, if your child is in the wedding party, make sure she knows what to do after she walks up the aisle. Let her know in detail what will happen during the vows, how long they last and what is expected of her both during the vows and in the recessional when the wedding party moves down the aisle following the pronouncement of marriage.

Make sure that children have enough rest the day before and that they eat nourishing food. Minimize the sweets and simple carbohydrates.

Our attitudes are also important. Weddings are about love. Unexpected things happen, and the more we focus on love rather than the mechanics of the ceremony, the more flexible we will be.

What did we do on Aunt Gen's wedding day with the bridal party blockaded behind my daughter? We had Zachary and another young girl walk together first. My daughter followed alone, with some comforting adults behind her. We changed "the plan" and we laughed. We all still laugh about it, including Aunt Gen. I am not sure, though, that she has yet found the humor in her father's comment as they began their walk down the aisle when he said, "This reminds me of the Green Mile!"

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