



Split decisions

How to pull a wedding together when your parents are divorced

WHAT DO YOU DO when your father and stepfather each has his heart set on walking you down the aisle? Or if your parents refuse to say “cheese” in the same shot? Drama surrounding divorced parents can put a damper on any day, let alone the big one. But you don’t have to stress out. We’ve teamed up with Rita Bigel-Casher, a New York-based psychotherapist and the author of *Bride’s Guide to Emotional Survival* (Authorhouse, 2003) to help solve some of your dilemmas.

DADDY’S (OTHER) GIRL

“My mom can’t stand my dad’s girlfriend because she broke up their marriage. Mom says she won’t attend the wedding if Olivia will be there, but Dad says he’ll pay only if Olivia is invited. I want everyone to be happy—including me. Help!”

Bigel-Casher: Try to understand that

your mother is still living in the past and having a hard time moving forward, while your father is getting on with his life. You have to be sensitive to their feelings, but you’re not responsible for solving this mess.

Our plan of action: In a situation like this, in which someone is going to get hurt, we’ve got to side with Mom (the fact that your father is playing the money card isn’t helping his case). First, take control of the finances, which gives you power over the guest list. Next, invite each parent to attend without a date. Then let each parent host a party in your honor (with guests of their choosing) when you return from the honeymoon.

WALK/DON’T WALK

“I’ve grown close to my biological father, but I adore my stepdad. Who should walk me down the aisle?”

Bigel-Casher: Chances are, you have a special relationship with your stepfather because he was there for you on a daily basis while you were growing up, but your biological father has a unique place in your heart. It’s natural to love both of them and to be torn. Whatever you decide, talk openly to them about it—communication is key here in preventing hurt feelings.

Our plan of action: Have a frank conversation with each man and find out who this honor means more to—you may even want to enlist the opinion of your mother as well as your siblings. If you give the privilege to your stepfather, let your father have the father-daughter dance or allow him to give the first toast at the reception. If it seems that both men are equally invested in escorting you, you could give each of them an arm and walk down the aisle as a trio. Or, you can stroll down the aisle by yourself and give each of the fathers a different >>

(Continued from page 294) role to play at the ceremony. One could be a greeter for arriving guests; the other can give a special reading.

LOOK WHO'S ASKING

"My fiancé and I each have two sets of parents. What's the best way to word our wedding invitation? Do we have to list all eight of them?"

Bigel-Casher: Remember that a wedding is a family affair—it's not just about the bride and groom. Listing all the names may not be the solution, but acknowledging your families is important.

Our plan of action: Putting that many names on the invitation would not only confuse your guests, it would also point out the complications in your family history—which you don't want to focus on. Keep things simple and go with your name and your fiancé's only. For example: Lucy Smith and Davis Jones request the pleasure of your company at their wedding. Another option: The families of Lucy Smith and Davis Jones request the pleasure of your company at their wedding.

IN THE HOT SEAT

"How do I handle the table seating when my parents aren't capable of being civil to one another?"

Bigel-Casher: It's clear that your parents are still dealing with their divorce conflict, so be considerate and respect their desire to be separate. Seating them at different tables allows them a comfort zone, which makes it easier for them to focus on the joy of your wedding rather than on their own discomfort.

Our plan of action: Reserve the head table for you, your groom, and the bridal party, and have each of your parents host a table with his or her

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spouse, family, and friends. Bonus: An extra parents' table makes more room for honored guests.

STANDING ROOM ONLY

"What's the best way to arrange the receiving line so that my parents don't stand near each other?"

Bigel-Casher: Trust your instincts and try your best to create a situation that causes the least amount of stress for everyone involved.

Our plan of action: The good news is that a traditional receiving line is limited to you, your groom, and your mothers. The fathers spend their time mingling with the guests.

THE DANCE DILEMMA

"Who do I dance with during the father-daughter song—my biological father, whom I love but have never

really spent a lot of time with, or my stepfather, who's generously paying for the entire wedding?"

Bigel-Casher: Each of your fathers wants to feel special and it's up to you to make that happen. With some consideration and a little effort, you can include both of them in this significant wedding moment.

Our plan of action: One idea is to balance their roles—if one is walking you down the aisle, ask the other to join you for the first dance. Alternatively, you could change partners halfway through the dance. Some brides opt to have two father-daughter dances. In this case, it doesn't matter who takes the floor first, but be sure to give each man the honor of choosing his song.

PICTURE IMPERFECT

"What's the best way to keep the peace during the photo session? I'd like to have a family portrait taken, but I can't imagine that my parents will cooperate long enough for the photographer to even get one shot."

Bigel-Casher: You have to accept the reality that your family is configured differently—that's just part of life. It would be great if everyone could play nice long enough to take one giant photo, but it probably won't happen on your wedding day.

Our plan of action: Don't force anyone to pose for a photograph when they clearly have no interest in doing so—you won't get happy smiles and you'll never want to display this doomsday moment. Instead, speak to your photographer ahead of time about the situation and work with him to arrange more congenial groupings. ○

LEAN ON ME

Resources and reads when you need some hand-holding:

acod.net: With columns and message boards, the Adult Children of Divorce site provides a forum to discuss tricky family situations.

mytherapy.net This national counseling network has cost-effective therapy sessions that you can visit online or in person.

yourstepfamily.com The site offers a mixture of articles, book recommendations, and therapist support for blended families.

Weddings, a Family Affair: The New Etiquette for Second Marriages and Couples with Divorced Parents, by Margorie Engel (Wilshire Publications, 1997) is a guide to handling difficult, family-related issues.