



Do **KIDS** and **WEDDINGS** mix?

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CHILDREN ATTENDING WEDDINGS CAN CREATE SOME BEAUTIFUL MEMORIES, BUT THEY CAN ALSO WREAK HAVOC. HERE ARE SOME CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO KEEP THEM (AND YOU) HAPPY AND ENTERTAINED.

By Ann Evankovich

You've heard the tales: Temper tantrums, crying babies, licked cakes, red punch, bodily fluids. While little lacey flower girls and tiny tuxedoed ring bearers can add charm to a wedding ceremony, they are the source of many memorable gaffes. Adding to their antics are the children attending the wedding as guests. Because children are unpredictable by nature, and their parents are often as unreliable, many bridal couples choose to celebrate without them.

"Be sure you focus on what you want," advises the Reverend Sara Holben, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of



Consider hiring a sitter. Many churches and reception halls have areas set aside for children.

Chestertown. “Children have a habit of stealing the show and our hearts. I urge wedding planners and participants to ask, *why do I want the children to participate.*”

Reasonable expectations and a little creative planning can help everyone enjoy the celebration.

Young Guests at the Ceremony

Most bridal couples have a budget and simply cannot invite everyone they know and their children too. If you want to limit your young guests, be clear on the invitation by listing only the names of the family members invited on the interior envelope. Some guests, however, may bring their children anyway. Your best plan is to have a nursery attendant on standby. Instruct the ushers to point out the nursery to parents. Advertise the attended nursery with a sign by the guest book.

Even children who are well-behaved will appreciate an interactive children’s wedding program, distributed by the ushers. Include wedding related puzzles. Have a drawing contest to be displayed on a bulletin board at the reception. Compile an “I Spy” list: how many windows, candles, colors of flowers, guests with their eyes closed. Be sure to distribute crayons or colored pencils—no markers.



With the right mindset and some planning, having children in attendance can magnify your own joy.

Ceremony Participants

Although every child is different, children over the age of four are generally up to the task of flower girl and ring bearer. A few concessions to the limits of their attention

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span and ability to stand still and quiet will increase the odds that their participation will become a pleasant memory.

“One sure fire way to get a child to cooperate during a wedding ceremony is to have a treat waiting for them at the end of the aisle, or someone they know well waiting in that aisle seat” advises event designer Sara England-Cunningham, owner of Connect-the-Dots event hosting services on the Eastern Shore. Cunningham suggests coloring books and quiet snacks like Cheerios.

“Never, and I do mean never, force a small child down the aisle, no matter what the bride or mother-of-the-bride says,” cautions Cunningham. “They will not be okay. They will not buck up because a parent has sternly warned or bribed them. If a child feels uncomfortable, then it is not a good idea, period.”



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Younger children may be bored; create an activity area. Crayons, paper, sticker sets, beads and string for making necklaces and blocks – nothing messy, loud, or moving.

BEYOND FLOWER GIRLS & RING BEARERS Ways to include children in weddings

- Guest book attendants
- Program distribution
- Candle lighters
- Special reading
- Song, especially in a group
- Nursery assistants
- Jr. bridesmaids/groomsmen
- Giving away the bride
- Maid of honor or best man
- Lighting unity candle
- Participants in family vow
- Distribution of bird seed
- Assistant fun coordinator at reception
- Introduction of newlyweds at reception
- Special Dance

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“Sometimes the best answer is finding the right ways for them to be a part of the worship service,” Rev. Holben suggests. Children can be recruited to invite guests to sign the guest book or hand out programs. Older children can be ushers, light candles, or present a special reading. They can stand up as maids of honor and best men, or even walk their mother down the aisle and light unity candles. At the reception, a child could introduce the newlyweds or have a special dance with the couple. Children can distribute bird seed pouches to shower the newlyweds as they leave.

“I have seen children included in several ways,” shares Clerk of the Kent County Circuit Court, Mark Mumford, who has presided over thousands of civil ceremonies in his 20-year career. “Today, as we have many families that have children from previous marriages, I will, as requested, make a statement about the fact that even though Mom and or Dad are beginning their new lives together as husband and wife, that they want the children to know that they are also a special part of this new beginning. Sometimes the bride and groom have purchased a special family medallion or piece of jewelry to present to the children as a keepsake.”

The Reception

“Receptions can embrace the little people at the ceremony by thinking about the types of things that would make them feel comfortable,” suggests Cunningham. Kid-

DO'S & DON'TS WITH WEE ONES

DO

- Include children who are significant to the bridal couple
- Choose children age four or older
- Allow attending children to sit down during ceremony
- Provide a reward or quiet activity during ceremony
- Create a kids area
- Hire a childcare provider
- Be flexible
- Hire a Kid's Fun Coordinator for the reception
- Ask caterer for children's menu and furniture
- Arrange for your own children to leave at bedtime

DON'T

- Invite children without providing accommodations
- Force a child down the aisle
- Serve red punch
- Let tired, cranky children spoil your fun

sized tables and chairs can be helpful. A soft serve ice cream bar is fun for youngsters. And for heaven's sake, don't tempt fate with red punch.

"A kids' fun coordinator can take the gang to a designated area and offer crafts or games," Cunningham adds. Because children are natural born dancers, be sure to include a few dance numbers for them, such as the Hokey-Pokey and the Macarena. If the party is running late, a room with cushions and an age appropriate movie are a welcome alternative.

As with many adults, children's behavior deteriorates as the evening gets late. If the little ones are the children of the bridal party, arrange in advance for a gracious family member to take them home when they get tired. You may want to move some events, like cake cutting, up earlier in the evening to accommodate little ones leaving early for bedtime.

As with other aspects of wedding preparations, arranging for ceremony and reception babysitters in advance will eliminate stress later. To be safe, hire two sitters for each event, possibly more if you are including many children. With an accommodating attitude and a relaxed spirit, your wedding can be a beautiful memory and the joy of the children in attendance can magnify your own. ~

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