

Top Ten Tips for Coping with Pre-Wedding Stress

The excitement that comes with an engagement can sometimes be accompanied by pre-wedding stress, where the planning of the wedding may overshadow the joy of the engagement and the wedding day.

Psychologists often work with people who are experiencing symptoms of stress and anxiety. Vivamus Psychologists have shared their top tips to help with pre-wedding stress

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1. Don't avoid

Avoidance of a stressful activity, whether it be the planning, the awkward discussions with friends or family about where they are sitting, or the choosing of vows, only makes the stress increase. Avoidance means that we never learn that the event we fear is something we can overcome. The anticipatory anxiety is often worse than the anxiety experienced during the task itself.

2. Communicate effectively

Communication can be divided into three categories: submissive, assertive, and aggressive. The most effective style is assertive communication, where you are confident in communicating your needs and wishes to someone else in a manner that is clear and respectful of the other person. During the pre-wedding period, where emotions can often run high it is important to keep in mind how we communicate, making sure we are not saying yes to things we do not want (being submissive) but also making sure we are not being dominant and not listening to others views, wishes, perspective in our conversations (aggressive).

3. Plan

Good planning will help reduce the stress. Think about budgeting, timetabling, and goal setting. Good goal setting, where the big long-term goal is broken down into smaller achievable goals, provides a sense of achievement and satisfaction. It also allows you to take control, which helps to combat feelings of helplessness and anxiety.

4. Delegate

To reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed by it all, ask others to do some of the tasks for you. For example, writing the name places, picking up the

suits, ordering babysitters etc. It is important that when you delegate you trust others to make the right decision and to do the job on time. Try not to feel guilty about delegating - other people often like to be involved and to feel that they are helping with the special day.



5. Relax

Basic relaxation techniques can really help reduce stress and tension. Relaxation techniques, such as abdominal breathing or visual imagery, can also help prevent the build-up of stress. These techniques need to be practiced regularly to be most effective. Relaxation exercises in CD or MP3 form are readily available.

6. Challenge negative thoughts

A central strategy to combat stress is to identify the thoughts that lead to the feeling of stress. This strategy is used in a type of therapy called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which has been found to be effective in dealing with anxiety. Identifying thoughts can be done by using a diary, or thought record, where situations that cause stress are recorded and our thoughts about the situation documented. Once we identify our thoughts, it helps to challenge those that are unhealthy. Unhealthy thoughts are negative in some way. For example, catastrophising, black and white thinking ("the

flowers are awful and the whole day is going to be a disaster”), should statements (“I should be happy now”), jumping to conclusions (“my friend hates me because I didn’t invite her to the hen”) and fortune telling (“no-one is going to get on”). By challenging the negative thoughts, we aim to have more balanced thoughts (e.g. “the flowers are one part of the day, there are many things that are going well”). Challenging negative thoughts takes practice. There are self-help books that guide people through the process of challenging thoughts and introduce people to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.



7. Try not to seek reassurance

Seeking reassurance from others can actually cause more anxiety in the long-term. Research shows that seeking reassurance results in short-term alleviation of stress but in the longer term we don’t learn that we could have coped without asking others to reassure us. As a result people need more and more reassurance, which is not always possible for people to provide, and this causes more stress.

8. Normalise

It is important to recognise that nearly everyone feels stressed by planning a wedding. Talk to other friends who have got married, and you will soon realise

how normal it is to get stressed or anxious at times about a wedding. By normalising our stress, it stops us criticising ourselves, which often leads to further stress and low mood.

9. Experiment

By doing behavioural experiments we can learn what makes stress worse and what makes it better. Rate your level of stress out of ten pre and post a ‘stress busting’, relaxing activity to find out what works for you. Does going for a run make you feel better? Does going for a coffee with a friend make your stress go down? By doing experiments and recording what happens to our stress levels, we get actual evidence of what helps. The more we believe in the activity that helps us, the more we are likely to do it, which leads to further reduction in stress.

10. Getting support

Support from a valued friend is irreplaceable. Sharing your feelings and worries really does help to put things into perspective and provides another viewpoint. If the symptoms of anxiety or stress begin to impact significantly on your well being, you could consider getting professional help from a psychologist.

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