



# Casually Elegant Weddings

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## INVOLVING CHILDREN IN WEDDINGS

The age range and preparedness of children, as well as the aims of parents, will likely require customization in this area. So it's better for us to discuss options over Skype or the phone rather than try to cover all possibilities in a document such as this. But we can discuss some basics.

Before looking at how you might include your own children, let's begin with siblings, nieces, nephews, cousins and all those adorable, unpredictable offspring of friends. You may, or may not, want to include "Wedding Kids". This is written to help you sort through the possibilities.

Please remember that this is *your* wedding. You may involve as many or as few supporting roles as you want – but they must be supportive. Your wedding is a celebration, not a stage. It's not a checklist of responsibilities – though it is an opportunity to ask, "Who do we want to involve and how can we do it?"

When children are first asked to participate in your wedding they are often excited. Then their attitude may begin to fluctuate between delight and discouragement, with a little embarrassment thrown in. One key to successful inclusion is to keep their role simple. Lay out plainly what you expect and why you appreciate their part in your wedding.

A few basic principles:

- 1) You are not obliged to include kids, or to include *all* the kids who may attend.
- 2) Some kids may not want to be involved, which is fine.
- 3) Be realistic about what each child can do and what you expect.
- 4) It's not necessary to treat all children alike (after all, they're not!).
- 5) Just because kids are close in age doesn't mean they need to have similar roles.
- 6) Ask kids for their ideas about how they want to be involved (if it's reasonable).
- 7) Reframe roles to fit each kid's liking. You *can* make *every* task seem awesome.
- 8) Don't you (or let parents) pressure kids to "perform" or to "do a good job".
- 9) Let the kids enjoy themselves and be child-like. It's the nicest thing you can do.
- 10) Let guests enjoy the result; don't compare it to your preparation and rehearsal.
- 11) Try not to project too much of yourself (bride/groom/marriage) onto little kids.
- 12) It's not necessary to be rigid over gender roles.
- 13) Don't be surprised, or dependent on children, when they change their mind. They may become shy after saying "yes" or sad after saying "no" to your plans.
- 14) Have backup plans for kids who may stop mid-aisle or shout things out in the middle of the ceremony or predictably or unpredictably create difficulties.



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- 15) Make sure you're communicating with the parents about what you expect; ask them to not over-coach their children or change your choreographed plans.
- 16) Then... just roll with whatever happens!

### Involving Children who are Not Your Own

#### **In Your Wedding Ceremony**

You may feel that flower girls and ring bearers are adorable. Children can be involved in other ways too. If you plan to involve them as a group, consider asking them all to wear white tops or shirts – or you can supply commemorative tee shirts. Have them show up 15 minutes early to the wedding. That's enough time to give a willing group of children simple instructions and to boost their enthusiasm.

*Before the Start of Your Ceremony...* our Las Vegas outdoor weddings are perfect for lemonade stands; kids can pass out lemonade [or bottled water] to the guests... children ushers can escort featured guests, or everyone, to their seats... kids can pass out programs, etc.... monitor the guest book... or be your "security team" with badges and fake ear pieces, your own presidential secret service detail...

*Excitedly Up the Aisle...* form a wedding brigade or kids parade... give each child a flower to walk up the aisle with and put in a vase... or have them blow bubbles... or ring (not clang) wedding bells... or have each run up the aisle waving a flag, streamer, pinwheel or balloon... carrying a banner or throwing confetti (check with your venue first!)... or playing kazoos and blowing horns... or pounding drums while shouting "The Wedding's Starting!"

*Carrying Stuff* (is not just for ring bearers!)... children can carry something crucial to the ceremony (Bible, unity candle, roses, arras/lazzo/velo, etc.)...

*Standing With You...* makes them more than an audience at your wedding and can be for a portion of the ceremony rather than the whole length of it... or sitting on quilts in a "kid's zone" at the front of the wedding arena...

Ask them! When it comes down to it, the best way to figure out how to make someone feel important is to ask them for their ideas. Maybe children will need some hints (or boundaries!) but you'll never know what they have in mind until you ask.

#### **At the Reception**

It's fine when parents leave their kids with a sitter but if you are expecting to involve children in your wedding you should plan for them in your reception.



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Will they sit scattered among adults or given their own tables – a teenager table and another for the 5-12-year-olds (younger children should sit with their parents)? Serve “kid friendly” food and drink at kids’ tables. Cover the 5-12-year-old table with paper and supply crayons... or Legos, or board games. Give coloring books and crayons to children seated with their parents. Check out this free DIY [activity book](#). Or get creative at the Dollar store: pack an age-appropriate activity kit (swag bag) for your “Wedding Kids” – maybe wrapping a few hourly handouts to keep them engaged.

Get children out on the dance floor. Most love to dance, so announce a “Kids Only Dance.” Call for applause afterwards. Announce their names as often as possible throughout the evening.

Assign children disposable cameras (the first picture on each should be a selfie); announce that a “kid’s album” will contain their best candid shots of guests dancing and eating and kissing. Keep kids moving between the adults. Reward them with a piñata. Or a bounce house.

Throw a candy bouquet for the kids before the ‘real’ bouquet for adults. Or throw tee shirts commemorating your wedding.

### Involving Your Own Children

Marriage brings change – even if you’ve treated one another as family over a long time in wonderful relationship. Children sense this change. They are often confused or conflicted over - or proud of - what your marriage will mean for them and their extended family. Involving them in your wedding plans provides opportunities for parenting: gently discussing their feelings and yours; conveying life lessons; encouraging their future. Your marriage, and what this means to them as part of the new family, is so intimate and infused with assumptions that your children may need time to explore the idea. You’ll not regret involving them throughout the process.

Of course, children may not understand or be happy about your decision to marry. In addition to adding a stepparent, your children may be finalizing their realization of stepsiblings. These can be difficult adjustments. Children may grieve – or cause you grief. We gladly offer our listening ear. We’ve counseled families for a long time and have developed practical encouragement along the way.

Involving your (and his) children in your wedding is one of the best ways to help them transition to this new relationship they’ll be a part of. Start early. Maintain an understanding throughout – you are not asking for their permission but are instead making an unconditional pledge to an ongoing unity that will always include them.



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Don't put children in a position where they have to protect their biological relatives. Assure them that they are gaining, not losing, family.

Keep your kids an important part of the process throughout your preparation. Talk with them about the details of your wedding. Ask them to help you craft favors, stuff envelopes or choose your family's registry items. If you think it beneficial, ask them to contribute artwork to your wedding invitations or programs. Any 'hands on' ideas you have will help them feel a part of it all. Shop with them. Listen to them, they may have thoughts that will surprise you. Be patient with them. Whatever you do, don't leave this irreplaceable family blending until the last moment.

Ideally your (and his) children will become so much a part of the preparations that they will view themselves as getting married too, and begin to speak of "our wedding" just as you'll all increasingly say "our family".

Be sure that sons have a special ride in the limo on your wedding day. As much as is reasonable, involve them hanging with the "big boys," running errands and arranging details. Treat them as groom-like as possible.

Daughters can be an intimate part of the wedding preparation. Share your enthusiasm and frustration with them. They can attend the bridal shower, helping open the gifts and laughing along with the bridal party. Daughters often feel like little brides.

Be sure photographs are taken often of each of you together throughout the process. Begin your wedding album, picking out favorite soon-to-be-memories together. Remind the kids that you are creating a memories of your new family. And don't forget to give inexpensive well-chosen gifts of discovery throughout the adventure.

Remember, too, that your wedding will be an "all day" event. Children won't see your preparation, ceremony and reception as separate from one another. You'll encounter opportunities as well as potential hazards in each. It's during the "big people's time" that children most often need extra attention. They can contribute throughout (they may even be led to "surprise" their parent!). Set aside moments to deliberately hug them, thank them, and explain meaningful things in meaningful ways. Putting them first when everyone else wants your attention turns precious moments into quality time. Be creative. Keep your wedding day a happy whole family affair.

A popular way of including children of all ages is to have them be part of a Unity Ceremony (for example: Candle, Sand, Water, Roses) or release butterflies [see our Planning Document: *Ceremonies Within Your Ceremony*].

Kids can say, "We do, too!" Family vows will be outlined at the end of this document.

Are you ready to consider more ways to include your children in your wedding ceremony? Let's start with:



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### **Younger than Three Years of Age**

Very young children can be included in wedding ceremonies. But expect the unexpected; they may briefly steal the show! It isn't unusual for them to suffer a bit of stage fright – or make funny faces!

They may also cry and demand to be held. So long as parents and relatives (plus maybe your officiant and photographer) are ready for this, you'll have wonderful memories of your little ones in the wedding.

Because you'll be busy on the day of your wedding, it's good to assign your youngest and maybe other children a helper – ideally a member of your family who is familiar with them – to keep them feeling important and settled. Their helper may also have to take them from the ceremony if they start to cry or misbehave too boldly.

Bring a change of clothes for these children too. If they are dressed nice for your wedding, you may prefer them to be relaxed and washable during the reception.

Consider having very young children pulled up the aisle in a decorated wagon. You may also want to tie artificial rings to their teddy bears instead of a pillow. They'll forever be referred to as the ring bear.

### **Between Three and Seven Years of Age**

This is the ideal age for traditional ring bearers and for flower girls, children swinging an incense crucifer, and escorts for these. We've witnessed really awkward petal tossing (and dumping) *but* every time guests laughed with heartfelt joy. For the youngest children of this group, dressing up and simple tasks are often enough to give them a sense of being needed and important; and result in great pictures!

A popular idea is to have one child carry a sign, or two carry a banner, announcing "Here comes the bride." If your children are good at art, consider letting them make this sign or banner, or decorate a purchased one by adding stickers.

Regarding ring bearers, consider having them carry artificial rings. We recall the loss of one groom's ring at an outdoor wedding – and on several occasions untying the rings created delay or embarrassment during the ceremony. We're aware that some ring bearers feel strongly that they should carry the real treasures; maybe this can be resolved by having them wear the rings on a ribbon around their neck. Consider your venue as well as the child. And if the child is shy or easily embarrassed, they can carry a "treasure chest" and sit in the front row until your officiant calls for them.

Children can escort the bride (or the bride and groom) up the aisle. They can also be great junior brides (with appropriate gowns, veils, tiaras, bouquets), grooms, and



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attendants (bridesmaids and groomsmen – though they don't have to be lined up by gender but can stand with their biological parent). Older children can shepherd younger kids. The bride's children may "give" her into marriage.

### **Between Eight and Eighteen Years of Age**

Ideas for young children can be adapted to older children as well. Some roles, however, require more maturity. Signing (witnessing) the marriage license is an example. We prefer to have the legal (Recorder of Deeds) document witnessed by adults but you can allow your children to sign the commemorative certificate with you as a family – or ask your officiant to supply a family certificate for framing.

Older children can be Readers (you can find Bible Readings and Non-Religious Readings among our Planning Resources). In place of formal readings, older children may say a few words welcoming new family members (similar to a brief toast but without the drinking). Your children may also have musical or other talents that can be tastefully incorporated into your wedding. Of course, don't assign teenagers responsibilities they believe to be silly or embarrassing. "Behind the scene" roles such as controlling the fade of your wedding music, or being your official family photographer, may be preferred.

### **Adult Children**

Adult children will ultimately have a less interactive relationship with their new stepparent and stepsiblings but they shouldn't be overlooked. Your marriage changes their world – and every holiday gathering that is to come. You may ask them to be groomsmen or bridesmaids. Or you may want to take a few moments before or after the wedding ceremony to gather in a private room to express mutual appreciation.

### **Acknowledging Your Children**

Neither of you would be the gift to one another that you are without the experiences and emotions you've gained through parenting. Your children's years with you have been formative – for them *and* you! It's good to state in your wedding that you've become the woman or man that you are, in part, through your children's love and adventures.

As newlyweds, you can give your children and stepchildren a gift right after you give one another wedding rings. These gifts are most often necklaces, bracelets, rings or medallions – accompanied with some "off-mic" words of love. Stepparents may then make a public commitment to their stepchildren, similar to the family vows printed below. Your officiant can then speak briefly to the children such words as: "You are



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now sisters. Love each other, care for each other and know that you will always have each other's back. At some point you will fight, as all sisters do, but at the end of each day, you have a home and a family that is very special, and no one can take this from you."

Your marriage forms a new family without erasing the one that's been. This is especially important to young ones. By mentioning your and his children by name, as often as possible within your ceremony, you increase their confidence that nothing is being lost. They have a special importance and place in your heart. If you plan to have a prayer included, each child's name can invoke a blessing.

### Your Children can say, "We do, too!"

*Usually inserted into the ceremony after the INTENTIONS and before the WEDDING VOWS. Often this customization also has THE REINTRODUCTION state "I present to you the \_\_\_\_\_ family!" rather than "Mr. and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_". Then, just as the bride and groom kissed before being pronounced husband and wife, the whole family may hug or all give a 'thumbs up' sign before going down the aisle.*

*You may choose to have an oldest child place the wedding ring on his or her parent's partner, or hand it to you for you to place on the finger of your partner. We will supply you with wording for both the parent and child if you choose to do this.*

*Obviously all the wording shown here has to be adjusted to the age and understanding of the children who will be participating, whether only one or both of the bridal couple is bringing children into the marriage, and the prior relationships that may still or may not exist.*

A very significant inclusion of your children may involve what we call "Family Vows." These may be inserted into your ceremony before or after your marriage vows. Your officiant will call for your children to come and stand with you. Sample family vows are printed below but must be tailored to your children's age and understanding.

If you choose to include family vows you'll need to discuss these with your children often during the preparation phase, because they need time to absorb the meaning. It's important, too, that you listen to their fears and work with your officiant to moderate the wording. The story is told of the bride who said, "I hope that you'll accept my promise to be the best mom I can be to you" and received this answer from her new 12 year old stepson: "You'll never be our mom! We already have a mom!"

Regardless of their age (or attitude, illustrated above) it's best to keep your children's answers short: either 'Yes' or 'I do' or 'We do'. The purpose of a family vow in your wedding ceremony is to assure the children, not the parents. Children's vows are not "I will" contracts. And we don't want to force words said just to make mom or dad



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happy. If family vows aren't understood or agreed upon in advance, at best they are meaningless words that will be quickly forgotten; at worst they are cruel. But if family vows are valued and sincere, they will strengthen your new relationships.

### Family Vows

#### *The pastor will say*

What we are witnessing today cannot be separated from the blessings that have preceded this marriage. [Names of Children] by presenting your mother [and/or by presenting your father] you are saying that you are endorsing [Groom's name and/or Bride's name] as the very best choice for your mother's [and/or your father's] future.

At the same time you are accepting [Groom's name and/or Bride's name] as your own; and you are telling [him/her] that you are presenting [him/her] with a most treasured gift — the [mother/father] through whom you received life. You are saying that, as the two of them marry, that you are giving [Groom's name and/or Bride's name] the same respect, appreciation, and obedience you give have for [Name of birth father/mother].

[Names of Children], are you sincerely and publicly declaring that you are giving your full blessing to the marriage of your [mother/father] to this [man/woman] and that you are welcoming [him/her] into your family; and also that you are promising to respond to [him/her] as to a loving [father/mother]?

*The children of the bride and/or groom each answer: "I am."*

[Bride's name] and [Groom's name], on this day of your wedding, do you acknowledge and honor [Names of Children of the bride and/or groom], as entrusted to you [optional: by God], and therefore forever your family, all presented each as a gift to the other, for a lifetime of care and protection.

*The groom and the bride shall say: "We do."*

\*\*\* end of vow #1 \*\*\*

### Stepfather to Bride's Children

#### *The groom says*

[Names of Children], I love your mother. We have become very good friends and want to be a family for the rest of our lives. Just as she loves you, I love you too. The family we are becoming today will always include you. I promise:

- to be fair and honest,
- to be value you as much as I value your Mom,
- to help you learn right from wrong, and
- to always encourage you with patience and respect.





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I will not attempt to replace anyone, but want a place in your hearts that you give specially to me. I will treat you as a father should, always working with your mother to be the best man I can be – to see you grow up to be the best [young man/woman] you can be. On this day, when I marry your mom, I promise to love and support you as my own.

*The officiant will say*

[Names of Children], [Groom's name] has promised to love you always. Will you:

love him as your mother's new husband?

be helpful in making her marriage and your new family the best it can be?

accept the responsibility of treating your mother and [Groom's name] the way a mother and father should be treated?

*The children respond "I will" to each of these questions*

\*\*\* end of vow #2 \*\*\*

### **Stepmother to Groom's Children**

*The bride says*

[Names of Children], thank you for sharing your Daddy with me, loving me and allowing me to love you with all of my heart. I did not yet know you when you were born, but I promise that now I will love and encourage you for as long as I live. These necklaces are a reminder of your Daddy's and my love for you.

As your Daddy and I make promises to each other today, we are making these same promises to you. We will always be a family. We be a part of each other, sharing our feelings and hopes and happiness. And when you grow up and get married, our promises today will be then shared with your partner and your children. We will all be family. We will love, respect, and help one another – today and forever!

\*\*\* end of vow #3 \*\*\*

### **Blending Vows**

*The pastor will say*

[Names of children], [Groom's name and Bride's name] are making a new family today. You are very much a part of it. Because they are proud of you and because they want, with you, to share love together – they are taking this moment to tell everyone how important you are; and to remind you that *their* parents and brothers and sisters are now *your* relatives too. [Groom's name and Bride's name] want you to be a part of every holiday, every celebration, because the [four?] of you will always be part of this great big family.



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[Groom's name and Bride's name], are you saying today for everyone to hear that you and [Names of children] will always be a part of one another? Are you asking your parents and brothers and sisters and cousins and all your relatives – and all your friends too – to treat [Names of children] as your very own children? Are you asking all these people to respect your home, and to encourage your family? And are you willing to respect and appreciate [Names of children 's] past, in order that the best of it will not be lost? Are you going to do whatever you can to work for their future, so that can be even better than today?

*The groom and the bride shall say: "Yes."*

[Groom's name and Bride's name], today you have made a new beginning. You are not alone. [Names of children] are with you. You have each promised to husband and wife towards one another and be responsible parents towards them – valuing the past and encouraging the future you will share as family. I'm sure that you'll each support and inspire your togetherness. I'm sure that you'll each be rewarded with happiness in the home you now share. As part of your love for each other, I commend your love for [Names of children] and gladly proclaim you a family for as long as you each shall live!

\*\*\* end of vow #4 \*\*\*

### **Spoken to Overcome Grief**

*The pastor will say*

[Groom's name and Bride's name], today you are beginning and renewing marriage. The gift that each of you are to the other has been shaped by the past and, in the goodness of this, prepared for your future. Your decision to marry has also brought the past and presents the future of [Names of Children of the bride and/or groom]. Today you are becoming and renewing family. Each of you bring individual qualities and are combining your past and present into the future you will share as family.

[Names of children], you began life as much wanted children. Tragedy and sadness interrupted that wonderful beginning. Nothing can change the past. Nothing can replace it. But things can become new. We can begin again. [Groom's name and/or Bride's name] loves you and wants to give you a new life and future. It will be a safe life. You will have a home and family to count on; a strong foundation as you grow. Your hopes will turn into adventure, your adventures into discovery, your discoveries into wisdom and your wisdom into maturity. Your wonderful beginning will take up where it left off and achieve the success [your birth father or mother] always wanted for you. [Groom's name and/or Bride's name] is a partner with your past and a promise for your future.

\*\*\* end of vow #5 \*\*\*



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### As Part of the Marriage Vow

#### *The pastor will say*

[Groom's name and Bride's name], as you make your vows to each other, will you also today make sincere promises to love [Names of Children of the bride and/or groom]? Will you forever appreciate and respect [Names of Children of the bride and/or groom]? Will you carefully guide [him/her/them] to maturity? Will you encourage [Names of Children of the bride and/or groom] not only with words but also examples – making your home a place of trust and optimism? Will you be patient with [Names of Children of the bride and/or groom] when [his/her/their] mistakes can lead [him/her/them] to wisdom and success? Will you demonstrate to [Names of Children of the bride and/or groom] the unselfishness of love? Will you make these promises as parents who want the best opportunities possible for the future happiness of [Names of Children of the bride and/or groom]?

*The groom and the bride shall say: "We will."*

And for your children who have grown or cannot be with you always, will you love them and keep yourself open to them – and be there for them as much as you can?

*The groom and the bride shall say: "Yes."*

Your marriage vows are made stronger by your love for family, and your love for family will be made stronger by your marriage.

*Because you have declared your love here for all the world to know,  
it is my great pleasure to declare that you are husband and wife...*

\*\*\* end of vow #6 \*\*\*

### A Circle of Love

#### *The officiant will say*

[Groom's name, Bride's name, names of children] would you please join hands to show us your family circle? I am going to ask all of you 3 questions. If you sincerely intend for these to be true, please answer each of them with, "I Promise!"

Do you promise to love, respect and protect each other from this day forward?

Do you promise to always try to be the best person you can be?

Do you promise to accept the responsibility of being a family, and encourage, and support each other in your new life together?

\*\*\* end of vow #7 \*\*\*



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### NEW SIBLING VOWS

*The pastor will say*

[Names of Bride's Daughter and of Groom's Daughter], you have always been the most important part of your dad and mom's life, and they are so proud of you both. Today they are marrying one another. Marriage is intended to be a promise that whatever may happen, good or bad, they will always be there for one another.

Their promise is also a promise to you. They love you with all their hearts and no matter how big you get or what happens in life, they want you to know that they will love you forever – and that they will always be there for you.

I'm going to ask you some very important questions now.....

[Name of daughter of the bride], do you accept [Name of daughter of the groom] to be your sister, and will you share your mother with her?

[Name of daughter of the groom], do you accept [Name of daughter of the bride] to be your sister, and will you share your father with her?

[Names of daughters], will you love [Groom's name and Bride's name] just as much now that they have married one another, and accept [Bride's name and Groom's name], in your home, as the mother and father you now live with?

*The children respond "I do" to each of these questions*

*The pastor will say*

From today on you are officially sisters.

Grow together, play together, share your mom and dad with one another, and may God bless your family always.

\*\*\* end of vow #8 \*\*\*

**Additional Vows** and blessings can be written for you following consultation.