



Do you have
spotlight

Stress?

You were overjoyed when he put a ring on it, but between the planning and the parties, panic has set in. Here's how to avoid a freak-out and enjoy the festivities.

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“Will you marry me?” It’s a simple question, but the subtext – “Will you submit to laser-like scrutiny from approximately 43,783 people for the next 12 months?” – isn’t as easy to see as that sparkly rock he’s slipping on your finger. It’s well-meaning, sure, but for some the social pressures of a wedding and the sense that you’re under constant scrutiny can be a serious source of anxiety. Totally normal, says psychologist Yuliya Richard from Blue Horizon Counselling (bluehorizoncounselling.com.au). “Being in the spotlight makes you feel more self-conscious of your behaviour and the way you are perceived by others. It can be extremely uncomfortable if you are a naturally shy and reserved person to discuss your private relationship in public,” she says. “Suddenly everyone wants to know intimate details about your partner and the proposal. If you prefer not to be the centre of attention but feel obliged to act as people expect, then ‘faking it’ can cause extra stress.” Here’s how to squash spotlight stress and savour your big day.

Ring it in

Deep breaths – getting engaged is the first stop on the spotlight stress tour. “While I was so happy to be engaged and loved my ring, I often didn’t wear it because of the constant barrage of ‘Have you set a date?’ and ‘Found a dress?’ questions that made me anxious,” recalls Sarah, 32. The questions are inevitable, says etiquette expert Anna Musson (goodmanners.com.au), but there are ways to lessen their strain. The first step? Harness social media for good. “If you are daunted by telling all your friends individually, send out an email or post on social media,” she says, adding that this should only be done after your family has been advised. “When it comes to the plans, it’s perfectly acceptable to be coy. Try a sweet smile with a vague, ‘We’re not sure of the details yet, just happy to take our time and enjoy being engaged, thank you.’”

When you can’t get out of telling the proposal story, think like a politician, says psychologist Erin Bowe (drerinbowe.com). “Chat to your partner about what your ‘sound bite’ is going to be. Rehearse a small anecdote that you’re happy to share, and then just get used to rehashing it whenever someone asks about how it all happened.” Alternatively, psychologist Lana Hall (lanahallpsychology.com) says to shift the spotlight back to the person asking those 25 billion questions. “Sometimes, people are excited by weddings because it reminds them of theirs. Ask them how they were proposed to or what season they got married in.”

The devil’s in the details

Wedding planning can be stressful enough without your next-door neighbour interrogating you on your choice of poppies over peonies. “If it’s too overwhelming getting into all the details of things you’re not sure of yet, then focus on a few small things you’re happy to discuss,” says Erin. “It might be that you pick three details and keep the conversation focused on those. If you vaguely give

an open-ended answer (say, you’re thinking pinks for colours, roses for the flowers and a vintage-y theme) then you can keep the conversation to just these three details.”

Now’s also the time to consider what you can do on the day to lessen your anxiety – starting with your guests. “I had a lot of anxiety about having the ceremony in front of such a large audience,” says Zoe, 31. “We had about 125 guests, most of them from my husband’s side. I hardly knew most of these people and seeing so many new faces on the day certainly added to my nerves. My preference was for an intimate ceremony with only the closest of family and friends. I’m sure I would’ve been fine with the attention in this scenario.” Getting the guest list right is key, says Yuliya. “If there are people who make you feel uncomfortable, who you don’t fully trust, or who have a tendency to make you feel uneasy, don’t invite them.”

Finally, says Erin, don’t spend all your time thinking about off-white versus ivory. “Have a regular date with

“Have a regular date with your partner and time out for yourself where there’s no wedding talk”

your partner and time out for yourself where there’s no wedding talk. It can be useful to spend time with people who, in the nicest possible way, don’t care about weddings. Go fishing with your dad, spend time with toddlers, or join a class where the focus is on something else.”

The big (scary) day

You want to keep things low-key? No problem, says Anna. “Traditionally, the bride doesn’t make a speech, so you can skip that. The first dance can be for 10 seconds before others join in, cutting the cake can be done by the kitchen, and hen’s parties and kitchen teas aren’t necessary. Removing additional events is often a relief for others, too.” Give yourself permission to do things differently – walk down the aisle with your bridesmaids, instead of after them; do away with the bridal party announcement at the reception – if it lessens your stress.

Psychologically preparing for the spotlight can also help. “Think of positive ways to deal with semi-strangers or unknown guests. If you have to invite some people you don’t know, think about short and pleasant conversations you might have with them and rely on your bridesmaids to help you move on to other guests,” suggests Yuliya. “And focus on your groom. Talk to him prior to the day and reveal what you are worried about so he can support you.” Keeping your focus on smaller details can help if you’re feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the day, says Lana. “Walking down the aisle, you might focus on your footsteps or the celebrant, rather than looking at all the people watching. During the ceremony, focus on the words being spoken and your fiancé’s face. This can help draw your focus away from your thoughts about what everyone is thinking.” It is about you and him, after all! 🧠