

Should I marry him?

► Brides-to-be ask 'Am I doing the right thing?'

By Ruth Ann Replogle
cnhi News Service ENID

There are no hard and fast rules for knowing whether you're marrying the right person. Sooner or later brides-to-be ask themselves, "Am I doing the right thing?"

The following offers a guide on how to differentiate between wedding jitters and wrong wedding.

First, spend some quiet time alone. Future brides rarely take the time to think about anything but wedding plans.

During this period, whether it's a few minutes or an entire weekend, contemplate whether you accept this man as he is.

He is unlikely to change after the wedding and your campaign to change him will not work. Ask yourself: Can you live with this? Do his other wonderful qualities offset the one or two unappealing qualities? Can you be happy without certain aspects of life enjoyed as a single person? Can you picture yourself satisfied with him for the rest of your life or does that picture make you uncomfortable?

Write down the happiest moments of your relationship — your first date, when you fell in love and your engagement. Then write down the fears about being married. Are there solutions to those problems or are they serious enough to call off the wedding? (See adjoining box about when it is time to cancel.)

Talk to couples who are happily married. Find out their secrets to success and how they overcome adversity.

Many states require or recommend premarital counseling or "marriage education." It could prevent last-minute despair and help work out any threatening issues. Another bonus about premarital counseling in Oklahoma — a certificate signed by the premarital counselor means a discount on the marriage license.

Last, but not least, communicate with your fiancé. Talking, or not talking, with your husband-to-be sets the stage for this lifelong commitment.

When it's time to cancel the wedding

Sometimes you may think what you're feeling is more than cold feet. Check your wedding jitters against this list:

- You discover he has a drug or alcohol problem and is not in recovery.
- He is violent and/or abusive.
- He has been unfaithful.
- He has repeatedly lied and been deceitful.
- You do not agree on the matter of children.
- Friends and family do not get along with him.
- You cannot accept him as he is today.
- You are uncomfortable with the idea of spending the rest of your life with him.
- You are only going through with it because you're too embarrassed to cancel it.

If any of the above applies to you, it's time to call off the wedding. Please note, the prospective groom can substitute "he" for "she" and use this list, too.

“The marriage is more important than the wedding.”

— the Rev. Kevin Ratterman

Premarital counseling is vital

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Wedding jitters can — and will — get the best of many brides-to-be. Women who are normally rational, confident and ready to marry feel an enormous pressure to be happy and be perfect as the big day approaches.

Is it possible to combat this overwhelming atmosphere?

Several pastors and priests say premarital counseling with someone other than family is vital to relieving much of that stress.

"Premarital counseling doesn't fix everything, but it allows them to see each other without the masks on," said the Rev. Paul Hass of St. Paul's Lutheran Church. Through five sessions with him, a couple will get a good look at one another without the rose-colored glasses.

"When dating, you put your best foot forward," Hass said. With premarital counseling, the prospective bride and groom will be put "in a position to answer questions that are hard to wrestle with."

They also will learn "how to resolve a conflict when you've got one," Hass said. He stressed they cover "what is universal in a relationship between and husband and wife."

Hass estimated 20 percent of the couples he has counseled have called it quits.

"Some of them saw the inevitable train wreck and jumped off," he said. In other cases, the man or the woman discovered the future spouse had baggage previously unchecked. Sometimes, Hass said, the marriage was "not in the best interest of the children they already had. As a single parent, your responsibility is your children."

"We're dealing with that reality of what it means to be married," said the Rev. Kevin Ratterman of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church.

"We start addressing the strengths and the issues, what commitment means."

As such, he said the

Catholic church requires four months of "marriage prep," to encourage the couple to slow down and step back a bit. They are being prepared for their rest of their lives, he added, not just the big day.

"The marriage is more important than the wedding," Ratterman said.

He said he has had several couples who've reconsidered and postponed the wedding so they have more time to get to know each other.

When the Rev. Wade Burleson of Emmanuel Baptist Church counsels couples, he asks them if they are truly committed to love the other person as he or she is today.

"Marriage is a covenant," Burleson said. "When you make a covenant, you say 'I choose to love this person regardless.'" He reminds them, if one can't love the other person the way he or she is now, it's time to break off the engagement.

Burleson, who officiates five or six weddings a year, said out of all the couples he's counseled, only two have called off the wedding.

"I've had it happen twice and I think it was wise," he said. In the first instance, the woman decided she was getting married for the wrong reasons. The second nixed nuptial was financially-related because the man didn't feel he could support a family at that time.

"I would say if you're having wedding jitters, get counseling," Burleson said.

Gracefully bowing out when you call off the wedding

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You've decided to abandon the wedding based on one of the aforementioned reasons to cancel. So you won't be labeled a runaway bride, take the following advice:

Make sure you've told your fiancé it's over. Then tell your parents and his.

Inform the invited guests either by formal printed announcements, by phone or by e-mail. Enlist the bridal party-that-was to help.

Return wedding gifts with a brief note saying the wedding has been nixed.

Contact vendors to cancel their services. Unfortunately, deposits on the caterer, florist and photographer are inevitably lost if the wedding is called off a week or two prior to the scheduled date.

Sell the dress. If you're inclined, donate it to charity. Some "almost brides" keep the wedding dress, have it dyed and altered as a party dress.

If you opt to cancel the honeymoon, airlines tickets are unlikely to be refundable; sometimes you can change dates for an additional fee. You might want to take the trip anyway, for fun. Cruises or other pre-paid events may be partially-refundable, depending on how soon you cancel.

Becoming the "almost bride" can be just as terrifying, yet just as relieving. You naturally will harbor feelings of guilt, anxiety and embarrassment.

So how do you recoup?

Talk with thousands of others who have broken engagements by logging onto ThereGoesTheBride.com and chat with creator and "almost bride" Rachel Safier.

And remember, you have the right to choose your destiny, even when walking down the aisle.