



The CONFIDENCE key

We asked leading wedding experts to share their best confidence-boosting secrets for brides-to-be

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Even the most outgoing among us aren't immune to a case of the jitters from time to time. And with a wedding around the corner, it's completely normal to be quaking in your boots about any number of things, from walking down the aisle with all eyes on you, to making that final, crucial colour-scheme decision.

The secret to ensuring your wedding day is a breeze? Confidence. But that's easier said than done, particularly for anyone who is of a less-than-confident disposition. We called on the best wedding industry experts, meditation gurus and life coaches to share their advice for helping even the most spotlight-shy, confrontation-avoiding bride-to-be feel like a queen of confidence on her wedding day.

The wedding worry: DRESS SHOPPING

Lots of brides see wedding dress shopping as the highlight of their planning calendar, but for others it can be a source of anxiety from the minute the appointment is booked. "Not only was I nervous about being in my underwear in front of total strangers, I also didn't feel confident in my body and was worried none of the dresses would fit me," says newlywed Fiona.

"The key is to find the right boutique. 'Lots of brides feel pressure to look a certain way,'" says bridal designer Kate Halfpenny. "In my boutique, we try our very best to make women feel comfortable and happy. The bride is looked after by an expert stylist who works with women daily, and will be supportive and not make you feel self-conscious."

It definitely feels unnatural to be dressed and undressed by a perfect stranger, but it's their job – they'll have seen it all before and won't bat an eyelid at the parts of your body you see as flaws (disclaimer: they aren't flaws).

"Boutiques tend to have a range of sizes and the staff will be experienced at working with every body shape under the sun, so there's nothing to worry about," Kate adds.

Be sure to look for a boutique where comfort is a priority. "We offer exclusive appointments so brides have the boutique to themselves, and we provide slippers for comfort, a dressing gown to wear in-between try-ons and a glass of prosecco to relax with," says Paige Pealling of Truly Bridal of Surrey.

It's common to take people along to your dress fitting with you, to provide a second opinion and moral support. Who you take is entirely up to you – don't feel you have to invite anyone just because it's the done thing. "If a person makes you feel self-conscious or insecure, I'd leave them at home!" says Kate.

The wedding worry: POSING FOR PHOTOS

Your wedding day is likely to be the first time you and your partner have been shot by a professional photographer, so it's perfectly normal to feel less than comfortable in front of the camera. Fortunately, your photographer is on hand to make sure it feels as natural as possible.

"Share any anxieties you have," advises photographer Angela Ward-Brown. "Everyone has issues, and we are used to hearing about them. It's good to know in advance any particular worries you have about the way you look.

Expert advice

"Having said that, while you will naturally feel some pressure about the way you look on your day, try your best to jettison that. You'll look amazing! You'll be in a damn fine outfit, with a giant smile on your face, and surrounded by people who love you. No one having fun ever looked anything but brilliant!"

If budget allows, booking an engagement or pre-wedding shoot with your photographer is a great way to build up a rapport and get used to having your photo taken.

"These shoots are a great opportunity for us to get to know each other as well as for you to experience how I work," says photographer Lucy Davenport.

While you want to hire a photographer whose style you adore, it's also imperative that you work well together, as photography duo Weddings by Nicola & Glen point out: "Yes, you must love the photographer's work, but if their personality also puts you at ease that will go a long way in helping you feel comfortable when being photographed."

If you're a complete novice when it comes to being photographed, look for a pro who gives some direction such as where to look or what to do with your hands. "A little direction helps you overcome the natural awkwardness and concern of not knowing how to place yourselves in the most flattering manner," say Nicola and Glen.

The wedding worry: MAKING A SPEECH

If the idea of standing up and speaking in front of a crowd of people (even your nearest and dearest), strikes fear into your heart, consider the advice of hypnotherapist Malminder Gill on how to calm your nerves ahead of making your speech.

"In the months leading up to your wedding, put yourself in situations where you are the centre of attention, for example, leading a meeting at work. Exposure to new situations like these will help improve your confidence and reduce your fear," says Malminder.

Remember, your speech won't really be about you. "It's an opportunity for you to thank your guests, bridesmaids, friends, and family," says Malminder. "Keep this in mind when preparing your speech and it will help you to focus on who you are thanking rather than your own nerves. Outward focus on others is the key to reducing nerves. In addition, remember that most of the time guests will be looking at the person you are thanking or talking about and not you."

If anxiety does threaten to get the better of you, Malminder recommends her 7/11 anti-anxiety breathing technique. "I use this with clients before delivering the speech. Breathe in counting to seven through the nose then breathe out for 11 seconds through the mouth – do this for a few minutes."

On a practical level, when it comes to the order of your day, schedule your speeches in for before the meal. We've heard countless couples say after the event that they felt so nervous about doing their speech that they weren't able to eat a bite of their carefully chosen wedding breakfast. Changing the running order allows you and any other speech-givers to relax and enjoy the food.

"You will look amazing...no one having fun ever looked anything but"

Expert advice

The wedding worry: **UNWELCOME MEDDLERS**

Chances are, along your planning journey, you will encounter some wedding meddlers – the people who insist on sharing their opinions on the details of your day, and criticising your choices. Unfortunately, these interferers are often your or your partner's parents, and if they've contributed money to the big day, they're all the more likely to want to have input in how proceedings pan out.

Unfortunately, refusing their advice can lead to offence being caused. Don't let fear of confrontation dissuade you from speaking your mind, though.

"It's inevitable that people will share their personal thoughts, hopes and disappointments about your wedding, so one way to think about these 'offerings' is to remember that it is happening because they care," says Dominique Antigio, author of best-selling stress book *The Life-Changing Power of Sophrology*.

"It helps to have a clear idea of what your dream wedding would be, as this makes it easier for you to stand your ground," she says. "Remember that the day is all about love – it's about you and your partner, so if some choices you make don't pass the approval of other family members, that's fine, you can still love your family and friends regardless."

The wedding worry: **WALKING DOWN THE AISLE**

Having all eyes on you is some people's idea of a nightmare, but it's an inevitable part of the wedding ceremony. If the thought of all your guests swiveling in their seats to see you enter fills you with dread, try to keep in mind that they're your closest friends and family, and are all here to celebrate and support you, not judge you.

"It's important to remember that you've probably already been through months or weeks of planning on top of your regular work and social life," says Yulia Kovaleva, founder of meditation studio Re:Mind. "Walking down the aisle is your victory lap and something you should be able to do in peace. On a basic level, deep and considered breaths allow your body to slow the heartbeat and therefore lower or stabilise blood pressure and reduce stress."

In the lead up to your wedding, meditation is a key way to prepare for major moments, such as walking down the aisle. "Meditation helps alleviate stress, boost confidence, reduce anxiety and promotes clearer thinking," says Yulia. "It leaves you feeling grounded and reasonable, and is a tool that will serve you not just in your marriage but the rest of your life."

"Don't keep researching your options... have confidence in your decisions"



The wedding worry: **MAKING DECISIONS**

With so many amazing ideas out there it can be tricky to make a final call on your wedding decisions, including which type of venue, cake, menu or entertainment you should choose. Second-guessing your decisions can lead to friction between you and your partner, so you need to feel confident in your choices.

"I often see couples struggling to make decisions because they haven't thought through the costs involved," says Linzi of That Black and White Cat wedding planning. "I always advise setting up a wedding budget in advance that reflects what you can afford."

Once your budget is locked in, decisions will fall in place, but if your mind is whirring with all the extras you can add on, Katie and Nancy of planning service Lily & Sage, advise asking: "Will it add to the experience for myself, my partner and my guests?"

"Try to get to the bottom of why you are struggling on a certain decision – once you know that, it's easier to find a solution," says Holly Poulter of Revelry Events.

That wedding meddler problem might have an influence here, too. "A big part of why couples lack confidence about their planning decisions is about there being too many chefs," explains Holly. "Too many conflicting opinions from family and friends can make you wonder what they will think when you make your decision. Try to ignore all that, and trust your own thoughts."

And most importantly? Don't keep researching – have confidence in your decisions. "Once you've reached a decision on something, stop looking," says Holly. "Consider the matter dealt with and don't keep looking around at what you could have had."