

# Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**My fiancée and I are planning our wedding for next spring. This should be a happy time and we want a beautiful traditional wedding, but our families are complicated. Dan’s mother and father were divorced more than twenty years ago, both have remarried, but they still can’t stand each other. My parents are divorced, too but my father wasn’t even around much while I was growing up. I call my stepfather “Dad” and I really think of him as my father. My father says he wants to “give me away,” but I really want my stepfather to do this. My father told me he doesn’t want to come if that’s the way it will be. We’re trying to have a nice wedding but the thought of all these people in the same room with all their issues is making us crazy. What can we do?**

**-- Allison, the worried bride-to-be**

Dear Allison,

Have you and Dan considered eloping? How about getting hitched in front of an Elvis impersonator in Las Vegas? Hey, I’m only kidding. You deserve to have exactly the kind of wedding you both want, to celebrate your new life together.

In these days of skyrocketing divorce and blended families, things are not as simple as they used to be when the bride’s father walked her down the aisle, while mother sat in the front row, tissue at the ready. Now, mom’s more likely to be sharing the pew with dad’s new wife.

Your wedding is an important ritual – both a secular and spiritual celebration – of the love and commitment that you and Dan have for each other. It is also important to have this occasion witnessed by your friends and family, so the two of you will have to make decisions about what matters most to you.

Ask yourselves what will make this day special and meaningful for you. For example, are you bound to the tradition of the father walking the bride down the aisle? Why not have both your mother and your stepfather escort you down the aisle? They both raised you. Perhaps you would be happiest walking down the aisle by yourself, with Dan, or with Dan meeting you halfway. You get the idea. The point is to do this your way. You don’t have to accept every single traditional “rule” in order to have a beautiful ceremony.

Over time, couples have become more creative and adventuresome about just how they want to tie the knot. I’ve heard about skydivers getting married at 10,000 feet while soaring through the air, scuba divers saying “I do” through masks and snorkels, and one in which a pet Golden Retriever was the best man. Arf!

The problems with blended families are most apparent in traditional weddings where customary etiquette and more strictly defined expectations rule the day. But there is no reason to think that you can’t keep some traditions and use your imagination to replace the ones that don’t work for you. Be bound first by the wishes and ideals you and Dan share for the ceremony; then let tradition and other people’s wishes (and issues!) conform to your vision.

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Kathleen Brehony

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I think you should go with your heart, and it sounds to me like your heart wants your stepfather – the man who raised you – to walk you down the aisle. Let your biological father know that you want him there, but that you won't be bullied. If he chooses not to come, you will be disappointed of course, but that he is free to make his own choice. Perhaps he would feel good about some other important role (as long as you and Dan both want it, and not just to placate him). Perhaps, he could serve as an usher, or read a blessing at the ceremony.

Dan should talk with his parents and ask them to be on their best behavior. They need to understand that this is an important day in his life – a rite of passage – and he will not tolerate any dissension, negativity, or fisticuffs. I suggest carefully looking at seating arrangements for the reception, and personally, I'd make sure Dan's parents and their spouses aren't all placed at the same table.

Sometimes, it's a good idea to enlist friends or favorite family members to act as buffers and "baby-sit" potentially difficult family members. You can make it up to them later by inviting them for a nice dinner made with all those small appliances you're sure to get as wedding presents!

There are some good resources for you as you plan your wedding, and especially good ones about dealing with the kinds of issues you bring up in your letter. Check out Margorie Engel's *Weddings: A Family Affair*. Engel is the current President of the Stepfamily Association of America and she offers some good advice for your situation.

By the way, congratulations to you and Dan! I'll offer an ancient Chinese blessing for your marriage: "May the best day of your past, be the worst day of your future."

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949 *Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D. is a writer, personal coach, motivational speaker, clinical psychologist and producer/host of the "HeartWaves" radio program (WVOD-FM, 99.1 at 12:40 weekdays).*

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