

# The Bridesmaid's Complete Guide

Everything You Need to Know About Being a Bridesmaid (Without Losing Your Mind or Your Friendship)

By Tony Winyard | Wedding Host & MC | 2,500+ Weddings

## The 2 AM Group Chat Panic

It's 2 AM. Your phone won't stop buzzing.

The bridesmaid group chat has exploded again. Someone's dropped out. The hen do budget has doubled. Two bridesmaids haven't paid their deposits. And the bride just sent seventeen dress options she found at midnight, asking which one she should have chosen three months ago.

You're lying in bed, thumb scrolling through increasingly frantic messages, wondering how something meant to be an honour became a second job.

*How did I become the unofficial project manager for someone else's wedding?*

*Why does everyone expect me to fix this?*

*What if I'm the reason her day falls apart?*

Here's what nobody told you when you said yes: being a bridesmaid isn't just wearing a nice dress and holding a bouquet. It's diplomacy. Logistics. Emotional support at strange hours. And somehow keeping your own life together while doing all of it.

I've watched over 2,500 weddings. I've seen bridesmaid squads that operated like well-oiled machines. I've seen ones that imploded spectacularly. And I've seen the bride left crying in the toilets because her best friend since primary school ghosted the hen do.

The difference between the groups that thrive and the ones that fracture? It's not money. It's not time. It's not even how close you all are.

**It's communication and planning.**

This guide gives you everything. The timeline. The hen do survival tactics. The day-of duties. The scripts for difficult conversations. And the permission to set boundaries without guilt.

Let's turn that 2 AM panic into quiet confidence.

# Part 1: What Being a Bridesmaid Actually Means

## The Official Duties

Your responsibilities break into five areas:

1. Pre-wedding support for the bride
2. Hen do contribution (planning, attending, or both)
3. Dress and accessories coordination
4. Day-of assistance (getting ready, ceremony, photos)
5. Emergency backup for anything that goes wrong

## The Unofficial Duties

What nobody mentions:

- Being the person she vents to when her mother-in-law has opinions
- Mediating between bridesmaids who don't get along
- Tracking down supplies at the last minute
- Keeping her calm when she spirals
- Pretending you love the dress colour when you really, really don't
- Managing your own feelings when she's not being her best self

## What You're NOT Responsible For

Clear boundaries:

- You don't have to pay for everything
- You don't have to attend every single event
- You don't have to be available 24/7
- You don't have to fix problems that aren't yours
- You don't have to pretend everything is fine when it's not

Your job is to show up. Support her. And maintain your own sanity while doing it.

## Part 2: The Timeline

### 12+ Months Before

The initial conversation:

When she asks you, it's fine to ask questions:

- What does she envision for bridesmaids?
- Are there events she definitely wants you at?
- What's her rough budget expectation for your outfit?
- Is there a hen do, and who's organising it?

Write these answers down. They'll prevent misunderstandings later.

Join or create the group chat:

If one exists, join. If not, the maid of honour usually creates one. Establish early:

- How often you'll check it
- Whether decisions need unanimous agreement
- Who's point person for what

### 6-12 Months Before

Dress shopping:

She might want everyone there. She might want just her mum. Ask her preference rather than assuming.

If she wants opinions, give honest but kind feedback. "That style is stunning on you" lands better than "That one's a bit...meh."

Hen do planning begins:

If you're organising: get budget comfort zones from everyone privately before proposing ideas.

If someone else is organising: respond promptly to messages. Pay deposits on time. Silence kills hen do planning.

Your outfit:

Once bridesmaid dresses are chosen, get measured promptly. Order with time for alterations. Don't wait until six weeks before.

## 3-6 Months Before

### Hen do logistics finalised:

- Confirm dates, accommodation, transport
- Chase anyone who hasn't paid
- Finalise the itinerary
- Send details to everyone clearly

### Check in with the bride:

Not about wedding logistics. About her. How is she actually doing? Sometimes she needs a friend, not a wedding assistant.

### Accessory coordination:

Shoes, jewellery, hair accessories. Confirm what's expected versus what's your choice.

## 6-8 Weeks Before

### Final hen do preparations:

- Confirm numbers
- Handle any last-minute dropouts gracefully
- Prepare any games, surprises, or decorations

### Dress fitting:

Final alterations. Bring the exact shoes and underwear you'll wear on the day.

### Confirm day-of details:

- When and where you're getting ready
- What time you need to arrive
- What you're expected to bring

## 2-4 Weeks Before

### Hen do:

Execute. Stay present. Keep your phone away except for emergencies. This is about her.

### Prepare your day-of kit:

(See Part 5 for the full checklist)

### Run through the schedule:

Know when photos are, when the ceremony starts, where you need to be and when.

## Week Before

Light coordination:

- Confirm any final details with other bridesmaids
- Touch base with the bride one last time
- Get a good night's sleep before the hen do recovery and wedding prep

## Day Before

Rehearsal (if there is one):

Show up on time. Pay attention. Ask questions if unsure about positioning or timing.

Support the bride:

She might be calm. She might be frantic. Match her energy and help where needed.

## Wedding Day

See Part 5 for the full checklist.

## Part 3: The Hen Do

### If You're Organising

Start with budget:

Before suggesting destinations or activities, privately message every attendee:

*"Hey! Starting to plan [Bride's] hen. Before I look at options, what's your comfortable budget for the whole thing? No judgement, just want to make sure we plan something everyone can enjoy."*

Collect responses. Plan to the lowest comfortable amount, with optional add-ons for those who want them.

Cater to the bride, not yourself:

Her idea of fun might be different from yours. A spa weekend, a city break, an adventure day, a quiet dinner. Ask her:

- What she definitely wants
- What she definitely doesn't want

- Whether she wants surprises or prefers to know the plan

Respect her answers completely.

#### **Manage different personalities:**

The hen party might include her colleagues, school friends, university mates, cousins. They don't all know each other.

Build in:

- Icebreaker activities early on
- Natural exit points for those who want to leave earlier
- A mix of group and optional activities
- Clear communication about what's happening when

#### **Games and activities:**

Only if the bride would enjoy them. If she's said "no games," believe her.

If she likes games:

- Mr & Mrs (questions from the partner)
- Wedding trivia about the couple
- Photo challenges
- Memory sharing (each person tells a favourite story)

Avoid anything that would embarrass her or make guests uncomfortable.

### **If Someone Else Is Organising**

Respond promptly:

The organiser is doing unpaid project management. Make their life easier by:

- Answering messages within 24-48 hours
- Paying deposits by the deadline
- Sharing your dietary requirements or accessibility needs early
- Not adding last-minute requests

**Don't backseat organise:**

If you disagree with choices, raise it privately and gently. Public criticism in the group chat helps no one.

**Show up fully:**

When you're there, be present. Put your phone away. Engage with people you don't know. Make the bride feel celebrated.

## Part 4: Managing the Difficult Bits

### When Money Becomes a Problem

Weddings are expensive for everyone involved. If costs are stretching beyond your comfort:

#### Be honest early:

*"I'm so excited to be part of your day. I want to be upfront that I'm working with a tight budget right now. Can we chat about expectations so I can plan properly?"*

Most brides would rather know than have you stressed in silence.

#### Suggest alternatives:

If the hen do is too expensive, you might attend part of it. If the dress is beyond budget, ask if there's flexibility.

#### Know your limits:

You can decline optional events. You can set spending caps. Being a bridesmaid shouldn't put you into debt.

### When Other Bridesmaids Are Difficult

#### The one who won't pay:

Private message first: *"Hey, just a heads up that [Organiser] needs deposits by Friday. Let me know if there's an issue."*

If it continues, it's not your problem to chase. That falls to whoever's organising.

#### The one who criticises everything:

Don't engage in group chat debates. If needed, speak privately: *"I've noticed you seem unhappy with the plans. What's going on?"*

Sometimes people need to vent. Sometimes there's a real issue. Private conversations reveal which.

#### The one who's making it about herself:

Weddings bring out strange behaviour. Focus on your own contribution. You can't control others; you can only manage your response.

## When the Bride Is Being Difficult

It happens. Stress transforms people. But there's a difference between stressed and unreasonable.

For general stress:

- Listen without trying to fix
- Offer practical help: "What would make today easier?"
- Remind her gently that this is meant to be enjoyable

For unreasonable demands:

*"I want to support you, and I'm struggling with [specific thing]. Can we find a middle ground?"*

You can love someone and still set limits.

For genuinely bad behaviour:

If she's being cruel, dismissive, or bullying, you're allowed to step back. Friendship works both ways.

## Part 5: The Wedding Day Checklist

### Your Emergency Kit

Pack a small bag with:

- Tissues
- Safety pins (multiple sizes)
- Mini sewing kit
- Plasters (various sizes)
- Painkillers (paracetamol, ibuprofen)
- Mints or breath spray
- Clear nail polish (stops tights laddering)
- Stain remover pen
- Bobby pins and hair grips
- Mini hairspray
- Lipstick or gloss for touch-ups
- Blotting papers
- Phone charger (portable)
- Cash

- Snacks (granola bars, mints)
- Tampons or pads (even if you don't need them, someone might)

## Morning

- Wake up with time to spare
- Eat breakfast (you won't get another chance for hours)
- Arrive at getting-ready location on time
- Check your dress, shoes, and accessories are all there
- Help the bride stay calm and on schedule
- Ensure she eats and drinks water
- Take photos (the professional might not be there for getting ready)
- Help with last-minute tasks: steaming dresses, running errands

## Pre-Ceremony

- Double-check you have everything you need: phone, lipstick, tissues
- Help arrange the bride's dress and train
- Confirm bouquet handoff logistics with florist or venue
- Know where to stand and when to walk
- Support any nervous flower girls or page boys

## During Ceremony

- Walk when cued, smile, don't rush
- Stand where directed
- Hold the bride's bouquet when she exchanges vows
- Have tissues ready (for her and for yourself)
- Watch for the bride's signals if she needs anything

## After Ceremony

- Help arrange the dress for photos
- Be available for group photos
- Keep the bride company during the couple's photos if she wants
- Help wrangle guests for group shots if asked

## Reception

- Know the timeline: when speeches are, when the first dance is
- Check the bride has everything she needs
- Bustle the dress if required (learn how to do this beforehand)
- Be present for key moments
- Dance when the dance floor needs bodies
- Enjoy yourself—you've earned it

## Part 6: The Speeches Question

### Do Bridesmaids Give Speeches?

Traditionally, no. But increasingly, yes.

If the bride wants you to speak, she'll ask. If she hasn't asked, don't assume you should.

### If You Are Asked to Speak

Keep it short: 3-5 minutes maximum.

#### Structure:

1. Introduce yourself and your relationship with the bride
2. One or two specific stories that show who she is
3. What you noticed about her since meeting her partner
4. A genuine wish for their future
5. Toast

#### What to include:

- Warmth and sincerity
- Specific memories (not vague compliments)
- Kind words about the partner (you're welcoming them, not interrogating them)

#### What to avoid:

- Ex-partners
- Embarrassing stories she'd hate publicly shared
- Inside jokes only two people understand
- Anything you'd be mortified for her grandmother to hear

## If You're Not Speaking

Enjoy the speeches without pressure. Laugh at the jokes. Cry at the emotional bits. That's your only job.

## Part 7: After the Wedding

### The Week After

- Send any good photos you took
- Write her a card if you didn't already give one
- Give her space to recover and enjoy being married

### If You Need to Process

Weddings can bring up unexpected feelings. Comparison. Loneliness. Grief for friendships that might shift now she's married.

All of this is normal. Talk to someone if you need to.

### The Friendship After

Some friendships deepen after weddings. Some shift. Both are normal.

What matters: you showed up for her during one of the biggest days of her life. That means something, whatever happens next.

## Quick Reference Card

Print this. Keep it with you.

### Week Before

- Outfit ready and pressed
- Shoes broken in
- Emergency kit packed
- Day-of timeline confirmed
- Transport arranged

## Morning Of

- Eat breakfast
- Arrive on time
- Phone charged
- Emergency kit in bag
- Dress, shoes, accessories checked

## Key Moments

- Help bride get dressed
- Hold bouquet during vows
- Assist with photos
- Bustle dress for reception
- Dance and celebrate

## If Something Goes Wrong

- Stay calm
- Solve quietly if possible
- Don't burden the bride unless essential
- Use your emergency kit
- Ask other bridesmaids for backup

## About Tony Winyard

2,500+ weddings. Thousands of bridal parties supported.

I've watched bridesmaid squads navigate every possible challenge: last-minute dropouts, dress disasters, family feuds, and speeches that brought the room to tears.

The groups that succeed share one thing: they prepare.

If you want guidance on any aspect of the wedding day—from managing group dynamics to supporting a stressed bride—I'm happy to help.

Book a free 15-minute consultation: <https://www.winyard.com/contact>

You don't have to be perfect. You just have to be present.

