

The Maid of Honour's Complete Guide

Everything You Need to Lead the Bridal Party (Without Burning Out)

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

The 3 AM Spreadsheet

It's 3 AM. You should be asleep.

Instead, you're staring at a spreadsheet that's grown into a monster. Hen do deposits. Bridesmaid dress sizes. Vendor contacts. Emergency backup plans. A timeline that keeps expanding every time you talk to the bride.

Your best friend asked you to be her maid of honour because she trusts you completely. That trust now feels like a weight pressing on your chest.

What if I miss something critical?

What if the hen do flops?

What if I let her down on the most important day of her life?

You scroll through Pinterest boards for "maid of honour duties" and feel yourself drowning in expectations. Throw a perfect hen party. Coordinate eight bridesmaids who've never met. Write a speech that makes everyone cry (the good kind). Handle every crisis. And still be her best friend through all of it.

I've watched over 2,500 maids of honour in action. The ones who cruise through it. The ones who white-knuckle it. And the one who had a full breakdown in the venue toilets twenty minutes before the ceremony because she'd been running on three hours of sleep for a fortnight.

The difference between surviving and thriving isn't superhuman capability. It's not natural talent. It's not even having loads of spare time.

It's systems. Delegation. And knowing what actually matters.

This guide gives you everything. The role clarity. The hen do formula. The speech framework. The day-of coordination that keeps you from becoming the cautionary tale.

Let's turn that 3 AM spreadsheet into something manageable.

Part 1: What Being Maid of Honour Actually Means

The Core Responsibilities

Your role has five pillars:

1. Lead bridesmaid coordinator (wrangling the bridal party)
2. Hen do chief organiser (or delegating it properly)
3. Bride's emotional support throughout the planning process
4. Day-of right-hand person (managing logistics, solving problems)
5. Speech giver (if the bride wants one)

The Hidden Responsibilities

What nobody tells you:

- Being the buffer between the bride and difficult family members
- Translating between bridesmaids who have different communication styles
- Making decisions when the bride can't face another choice
- Saying the honest thing when everyone else is nodding along
- Managing your own emotions while prioritising hers
- Knowing when to step in and when to step back

What You're NOT Responsible For

Set these boundaries early:

- You're not the wedding planner (unless she's asked and you've agreed)
- You're not responsible for other bridesmaids' personal problems
- You don't have to solve issues between the couple
- You don't have to be available at all hours
- You don't have to fund the wedding from your own pocket

Your job is to lead the bridesmaid team and support the bride. Not to do everything yourself.

Part 2: Leading the Bridesmaids

Setting Up for Success

As soon as you're appointed, take control of the coordination.

Create the group chat:

Set the tone early. A welcome message like:

"So excited for [Bride's] big day! I'll be using this chat for coordination. I'll keep updates clear and organised. If anyone has questions or concerns, feel free to message me directly. Let's make this brilliant for her."

Establish communication norms:

- How often you'll post updates
- How quickly people should respond to important messages
- Who to contact for different issues (you for wedding stuff, someone else for hen do, etc.)

Gather information early:

Create a shared document with:

- Everyone's contact details
- Dress sizes and shoe sizes
- Dietary requirements and allergies
- Availability for key dates
- Budget comfort zones (collect privately, keep private)

Managing Different Personalities

Every bridal party has a mix:

The enthusiastic one who volunteers for everything. Great, but make sure she doesn't burn out or take over.

The quiet one who doesn't respond in group chats. Check in privately. She might be overwhelmed or just not a group chat person.

The difficult one who has opinions about everything. Acknowledge her views, then move forward. Don't let one person derail progress.

The unreliable one who misses deadlines. Set earlier deadlines for her. Follow up privately before things become critical.

Your approach:

- Treat everyone as adults
- Be clear about expectations
- Handle issues privately before they become group problems
- Don't gossip about bridesmaids to the bride (unless there's a genuine concern)

Delegating Effectively

You don't have to do everything. Good leaders distribute tasks.

Match tasks to strengths:

- The organised one: tracking RSVPs, managing spreadsheets
- The creative one: decorations, hen do themes
- The practical one: transport logistics, venue research
- The diplomatic one: liaising with family members

Be specific:

Don't say: "Can someone sort the hen do games?" Say: "Sarah, can you research three game options and send them to the group by Friday?"

Follow up without micromanaging:

Check in on deadlines. Offer support if someone's struggling. But don't hover.

Part 3: The Hen Do

Planning Framework

Step 1: Gather intelligence

Ask the bride privately:

- What does she actually want? (Not what she thinks she should want)
- What would she hate? (Surprises? Drinking games? Dressing up?)
- Who must be there?
- Is there anyone she'd prefer not to invite?
- Rough budget comfort zone?

Step 2: Collect budgets

Message each attendee privately:

"Planning [Bride's] hen! Before I look at options, what's your comfortable total budget for the event? No judgement at all—just want to make sure we plan something everyone can enjoy."

Plan to the lowest amount. Add optional extras for those who want them.

Step 3: Present options

Give the group 2-3 concrete options within budget. Let them vote. Don't present twelve possibilities and wait for consensus—it never comes.

Step 4: Assign responsibilities

- One person handles accommodation booking
- One person handles transport
- One person handles activities
- One person handles decorations/games
- You oversee and troubleshoot

Step 5: Set clear deadlines

For payments, RSVPs, and tasks. Chase anyone who misses them immediately.

Common Hen Do Problems (and Solutions)

"It's too expensive."

Prevention: Collect budgets first. Reaction: Offer tiered participation (join for dinner only, skip the spa, etc.).

"Someone's not paying."

First: Private message. "Hey, just a reminder deposits are due Friday. Let me know if there's an issue." Second: If it continues, she either pays or doesn't come. Don't let one person hold up the group.

"People are complaining about the plans."

Private conversation: "I noticed you seem unhappy. What's going on?" Sometimes it's fixable. Sometimes it's not.

"The bride wants something impossible."

Honest conversation: "I love that idea, and I'm worried about [specific concern]. Can we look at alternatives?"

"Nobody's responding to messages."

Post clear deadlines with consequences: "Need final numbers by Friday or I'll book based on current responses."

The Day Itself

Your job:

- Make sure the bride has the time of her life
- Handle problems so she doesn't have to
- Take photos (she'll want them later)
- Keep to the rough schedule
- Know when to wrap things up

Not your job:

- Policing other people's behaviour
- Making everyone become best friends
- Preventing all awkwardness
- Being sober if you don't want to be (have a backup person for emergencies)

Part 4: The Speech

Do You Have to Give One?

Traditionally, maid of honour speeches aren't required. But they're increasingly common.

Ask the bride what she wants. If she says she'd love one, prepare properly. If she says no, enjoy the reception without that pressure.

The Framework That Works

Length: 4-6 minutes maximum. That's about 500-750 words.

Structure:

- 1. Opening hook (30 seconds)** Don't start with "Hi, I'm [Name], the maid of honour." Start with something that makes people want to listen.
- 2. Your relationship (1 minute)** How you met. How long you've known her. Why this friendship matters.
- 3. Stories about her (2-3 minutes)** Two or three specific moments that show who she is. Not lists of qualities—actual scenes.
- 4. About the couple (1 minute)** When you met the partner. What changed about her. Why they work.

5. Closing sentiment (30 seconds) What she means to you. A genuine wish for their future.

6. Toast (15 seconds) Clear ending. Raise your glass.

Openings That Work

A question: "Who here has been on the receiving end of [Bride's] 2 AM crisis texts? Just me? Really?"

A contrast: "When I first met [Bride], she was convinced she'd never get married. She said it was 'not her thing.' And yet, here we are."

A moment: "Three years ago, [Bride] called me from a café in Barcelona. She'd just met someone. And the way she talked about him—I knew this was different."

What Makes Stories Good

Strong: "I knew [Partner] was the one when [Bride] stopped pretending she didn't care about football. She'd always said it was boring. Three months after meeting him, she was explaining the offside rule to her mum."

Weak: "They're so in love and really perfect together."

Moments stick. Generalisations vanish.

What to Avoid

- **Ex-partners:** Never mention them. Not even hints.
- **Hen do stories:** What happens on the hen stays on the hen.
- **Inside jokes:** If only two people get it, save it for later.
- **Embarrassing stories she'd hate:** Run questionable stories past her first.
- **Reading from A4 paper:** Index cards look better and shake less visibly.

Delivery Tips

Practice aloud: Not in your head. Actually speak the words. Time yourself.

Microphone position: Directly in front of your mouth. Not at your chest.

Eye contact: Find friendly faces. The bride. Your mates. People who are smiling.

When you lose your place: Smile. Say "Right, where was I?" and continue. Being human makes you likeable.

Before you speak: Limit alcohol. You can catch up after.

Part 5: The Wedding Day

Your Timeline

Morning:

- Arrive at getting-ready location on time (or stay overnight)
- Confirm all bridesmaids are en route
- Check the bride has eaten and is drinking water
- Manage any last-minute crises (calmly, out of her sight if possible)
- Coordinate timing with photographer and transport
- Help the bride get dressed
- Take candid photos
- Keep her to the schedule

Pre-Ceremony:

- Confirm all bridesmaids have what they need
- Check order of processional
- Hold anything the bride needs (lipstick, tissues, phone)
- Calm any nervous flower girls or page boys
- Keep the bride calm (or distracted)

Ceremony:

- Walk when cued
- Stand where directed
- Take the bouquet during vows
- Hand over the ring if you're holding it
- Have tissues ready
- Try not to cry (or cry gracefully)

After Ceremony:

- Help arrange the dress for photos
- Coordinate bridesmaids for group shots
- Return the bouquet for couple photos
- Check the bride is okay

Reception:

- Know the schedule (speeches, first dance, etc.)

- Give your speech when introduced
- Bustle the dress before dancing (know how beforehand)
- Be available but not hovering
- Dance when the floor needs energy
- Handle any problems discreetly

Your Emergency Kit

Keep in a small bag:

- Tissues (lots)
- Safety pins (various sizes)
- Mini sewing kit
- Plasters
- Painkillers
- Mints/breath spray
- Clear nail polish (stops tights laddering)
- Stain remover pen
- Bobby pins and hair grips
- Mini hairspray
- Lipstick for touch-ups
- Blotting papers
- Phone charger (portable)
- Cash
- Snacks
- Tampons/pads

Problem-Solving on the Day

Dress issues: Safety pins fix most things. For bigger problems, find a quiet corner and improvise.

Running late: Communicate with the venue. Adjust the schedule. Don't panic the bride.

Crying bride: Get her somewhere private. Tissues. Water. Let her vent. Remind her this is meant to be fun.

Bridesmaid drama: Handle it away from the bride. "Let's sort this out after the ceremony."

Vendor problems: You're the point person. Deal with it yourself or escalate to whoever's in charge.

Part 6: Managing Your Own Wellbeing

Setting Boundaries

Being maid of honour doesn't mean sacrificing yourself.

Reasonable limits:

- "I can't take calls during work hours—text me and I'll respond in the evening."
- "I need to know the budget before I can commit to anything."
- "I'm not available every weekend—let's plan ahead."

How to say no:

"I'd love to help with that, and I'm already stretched with [other responsibility]. Can we find another solution?"

When It Gets Too Much

Signs you're burning out:

- Dreading messages from the group chat
- Resenting the bride
- Losing sleep over wedding logistics
- Snapping at people about minor issues

What to do:

1. Take a break from the group chat for 24 hours
2. Talk to someone outside the wedding (friend, partner, therapist)
3. Have an honest conversation with the bride: "I'm struggling with the workload. Can we redistribute some tasks?"
4. Lower your standards. Good enough is good enough.

The Friendship Factor

Your job is to support her wedding. It's not to agree with everything or pretend you're fine when you're not.

A good bride will care about your wellbeing. If she doesn't, that's information worth noting.

Quick Reference Card

Print this. Keep it with you.

Before the Day

- All bridesmaids confirmed and coordinated
- Hen do complete
- Speech written and practised
- Day-of timeline clear
- Emergency kit packed
- Dress ready and fitting perfectly

Morning Of

- Arrive on time
- Bridesmaids all present
- Bride fed and watered
- Schedule on track
- Phone charged, emergency kit ready

Key Duties

- Manage the bridesmaids
- Support the bride
- Hold the bouquet
- Give speech (if requested)
- Bustle the dress
- Solve problems quietly

If Things Go Wrong

- Stay calm
- Solve away from the bride if possible
- Use your emergency kit
- Ask for help when needed
- Remember: the wedding will happen regardless

About Tony Winyard

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

I've seen maids of honour who made everything look effortless and ones who ran themselves into the ground. The difference is always preparation and boundaries.

If you want guidance on any aspect of leading the bridal party—from wrangling difficult personalities to writing your speech—I'm here to help.

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

You don't have to be superhuman. You just have to be organised.

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