

The Bride's Emotional Cocktail

"I feel like I'm on an emotional roller coaster," said Julie, four months before her wedding. "I've never been so happy, but then suddenly I'll find myself in tears. Sometimes it feels like I'm about to go away and say goodbye to everyone. But we're not going anywhere!"

What's going on with Julie? The most natural reaction in the world. In the excitement of the wedding, we often lose track of one simple fact. A wedding is a major life transition, like going to college or having a baby. The essence of a life transition is saying goodbye to the old and hello to the new. It is inevitable that you will have feelings of sadness and loss along with the joy and excitement. This is the bride's "emotional cocktail." Too often brides compare their ups and downs to the pictures of pure ecstasy they see in the magazines and conclude there's something wrong with them. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The emotional cocktail can be confusing, even though you have probably experienced it many times before. If you ever have moved or changed jobs, you are familiar with the wide range of feelings that accompany any major transition. This is because all transitions create gains and losses.

Think back to how you felt when you went off to college or left home. What an adventure! You were going to live on your own, meet new people, step into a whole new world of choices and experiences! At the same time you were saying goodbye to childhood and the protection of your family. You also may have loosened ties with friends who were going in different directions. There's no way around it—we can't move ahead without leaving something behind.

"I felt so done with being single," said Jan. "I was tired of the dating game and wanted a deeper relationship. I was ready for the next stage of my life, creating a family of my own. So when Max proposed, it felt absolutely right. But a few weeks later, I found myself daydreaming about the freedoms of being single, like it was some unattainable life I could never have. It was like the grass was greener on the other side of the fence, except that I had already been on the other side of the fence!"

What it comes down to is that we want change and at the same time we don't want it. We know what we have to give up, but we can't know exactly what we are getting in return. We are torn between embracing growth and adventure and holding onto the familiar.

All of this is perfectly natural, but it doesn't seem natural when you're a bride and getting the message that you're supposed to be blissed out 24 hours a day. Natural feelings can start to feel like "forbidden feelings."

Linda always has been a very independent woman. "As the wedding drew closer, I started to feel guarded and grouchy, not like a happy bride at all! I started to worry about how much control John was going to have over my life. How much free time would I have? Privacy? What if I couldn't spend my money the way I liked? Can I even call it my money?"

Chances are you are looking forward to the acceptance and growth that you find only in a permanent commitment. And yet at the same time you feel nervous about losing privacy, sole control over your money, being one of the (single) gang, or freedom to travel whenever you want. If you refuse to acknowledge these "forbidden feelings," you will be a candidate for "bridal meltdown."

What you need most right now is to open yourself up to your contradictory feelings and accept them. It is not having feelings such as sadness that causes pain; it is fighting with yourself and your natural impulses. When you accept your feelings, you find out they are not so terrible or frightening. It's really the taboo about having mixed feelings that is frightening. When you accept your feelings, they become part of the richness of life's major turning points.

Right now you're probably thinking: How can I accept feeling angry? I'm supposed to be deliriously happy! I've got 18 days (or 30 or 120) to get to that pinnacle of joy I'm supposed to be on! You don't have to work so hard to make yourself feel joy. The joy will come naturally—as long as you're not fighting yourself. If you are clamping down on your forbidden feelings, you will find yourself clamping down on your joy as well. The more you accept ALL your feelings, the more happiness you will feel—naturally.

Tips for Dealing with the emotional cocktail:

1. Name your feelings. Do you feel sad, nostalgic, scared, guilty, curious, or excited? Or all of them put together?
2. Connect with your feelings in a physical way. Sit quietly by yourself. Take a few deep breaths. What feeling comes up? Resist the urge to push it away.

Where in your body does this feeling exist? If the feeling is so big that you feel like you're inside it, realize that your feelings are always inside you. They are a part of you, not all of you. How much space does it take up? How does it feel, physically? Breathe into that feeling.

Say: "I feel _____ and I accept it."

3. Write your feelings. Cover one or two pages with your feelings. Do not think of this as "journaling." That is far too formal. Think of this as free associating on the page. This is what Natalie Goldberg means by "writing down the bones" or Julia Cameron means by "morning pages." Just write. You will feel relief and new clarity.
4. Devote 5 minutes each day to accepting your feelings. You may do either exercise above, talk to a friend, or anything else you choose. Even this much quiet time with yourself will calm you.

The more you accept—even embrace—the emotional cocktail, the more you will enjoy this rich time in your life.

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