

Cold Feet or Wedding Jitters—How Can I know?

By Claire Hatch

“I know everyone gets stressed before the wedding,” said Sarah. “But we’re arguing so much that I can’t help wonder, Are we really right for each other? How can I know if this is just the stress of wedding planning or a glimpse of life to come?”

No bride wants to be having these thoughts as her wedding draws near. But even though they don’t always talk about it, sooner or later most brides do ask themselves THE BIG QUESTION: Am I doing the right thing?

Whoever comes up with a foolproof method for knowing whether you’re marrying the right person will make a mint! It’s such an important decision and it can be so confusing when the doubts arise. Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules. No one can give you the answer. But I can give you some guidance on how to look for the answer. Here are some ideas to try if you’re wondering you have cold feet or wedding jitters.

First of all, you’ve got to get quiet. The buildup to a wedding can be one of the ‘noisiest’ times of life, one of the hardest times to sit quietly and listen to our inner wisdom. The psychological momentum of a wedding is very powerful. You may feel like you’re on a freight train going full speed ahead and that you’re powerless to jump off. But you’ve absolutely got to carve out some time just to think—and even more importantly—to feel.

Many divorced women—and unhappily married women--will say, “There was a little voice inside telling me I was making a mistake. But I was too caught up with the dress and everything else to really listen to it.”

Don’t be one of them. Far better that your menu or your favors aren’t perfect than that you find yourself a year from now—or 5 or 10—saying, “I think I married the wrong man.” Make a commitment to spend regular periods of time alone.

Choose a time when you’ve got at least 30 minutes of time to yourself. Imagine it’s month after you’ve come back from your honeymoon. You and your fiancé are sitting alone together in your living room. There is no more wedding planning frenzy. There is no one to make a fuss over the two of you. There are no more fittings. No more presents. No more events. Just the two of you, in the quiet of your home. How does that feel?

Wonderful or disappointing? Comforting or scary? Intimate or boring?

I’m not suggesting you have to be homebodies for the rest of your lives. Just that the essence of your relationship is the two of you alone. If that picture makes you uncomfortable in any way, you need to be very honest with yourself and explore why.

Now that you’ve imagined being alone with your fiancé, really do it! Go to a park, take a walk, do something with minimal distractions. Strange as it may seem, at some point in the wedding planning process, some couples feel like they’ve got to get reacquainted. This is particularly true if you have different perspectives on the wedding. You may feel like you’ve started to live in different worlds. (See the May 2003 article, *Your Wedding, His Wedding*, for a discussion of this issue.)

You need to really experience each other away from the hubbub to know how you feel.

Ask yourself if you really, truly, honestly accept your fiancé as he is right now. Many brides are unconsciously (or consciously!) on a campaign to change their fiancés. **THIS DOES NOT WORK. I REPEAT, THIS DOES NOT WORK.** Yes, you will adjust to each other as time goes on. You’ll

get more skilled at compromising. You'll learn how to resolve arguments more quickly and with less pain. But there are two truths that anyone embarking on marriage must understand: 1) People don't change very much or very fast. 2) People only change if THEY want to.

Janet had been a sports aficionado since she was in her teens. Team sports, water sports, you name it, she loved it. She especially loved tennis. Her idea of the ideal vacation was—no surprise here—going to a resort with a tennis program. She ran up against reality when she started planning her honeymoon with her fiancé Gil. Gil did not want to play tennis on his honeymoon. Gil did not want to play very much tennis anytime. Gil wanted to go lie on a beach in Mexico.

Janet was crushed. She finally had to face the fact that life with Gil was not going to be filled with sports. He was just a very sweet laid back guy who was not into exercise. Looking back over their dating life, it was clear that while he was sometimes in the mood for an active weekend and she sometimes felt like just hanging out, their pictures of the ideal weekend rarely coincided. Janet needs to stop trying to turn Gil into a jock and ask herself: Can I live with this? Do all his other wonderful qualities, of which there are many, offset this one? Can I be happy doing sports with my friends? Can I sincerely let go of my drive to change him? No one can answer these questions but Janet. And she can answer them only if she takes some time and gets quiet and is very honest with herself.

All couples have "landmines," those disagreements that are particularly intense and difficult to resolve. They often feel like they have the same argument over and over without getting ahead. Ask yourself if any of your landmines are in critical areas: money, sex, in-laws, children, or career. If so, this doesn't necessarily mean you shouldn't get married. What it does mean is that you need to address the issue head-on and start making a plan for dealing with it. Some pre-marital counseling is probably in order.

When you find yourself asking THE BIG QUESTION, very likely your first impulse will be to push it out of your mind. Do yourself a favor and face it head on. If there are good reasons for your doubts, you really will be glad you knew sooner rather than later. And even if, like most brides, you're just feeling normal wedding jitters, the best gift you can give yourself is to explore them thoroughly. Then you'll feel sure, you'll feel calm, and you can put your jitters aside and give yourself over to having a wonderful engagement and wedding.

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