



Play Nice

Can you bar children from your wedding? What about the flower girl's dress? How do you tell your friend's baby isn't invited? And other kid quandaries.

TEXT BY Kristina Grish

FOR EVERY BRIDE WHO COOS OVER flower girls and toddlers in tuxes, there's another who swears that kids steal the show and eat all the cake. And though neither is wrong exactly, asking children to be part of your big day—as participants, guests, or both—can often make or break a wedding. No matter where you are on the love 'em to leave 'em spectrum, stating and executing your position requires a certain degree of decorum. And thankfully, both traditional etiquette and modern manners offer guidelines on how to stand by your intentions and avoid confusion and hurt feelings.

Unlike decisions about menus or music, those related to children should be handled quickly to avoid awkward questions from parents who need to make plans. "The bride and groom need to decide right away whether they want to invite children and, if so, how to provide for their care. There's no room to waffle, and there is a lot to consider," says Donnie Brown, a Dallas-based celebrity-wedding planner and author of *Donnie Brown Weddings: From the Couture to the Cake* (2009, Abrams). Here's how to tackle the subject with courtesy and heart.

Children can add a jolt of energy and

You'd like your wedding to be all about the grown-ups: a chic celebration where

You'd like your wedding to be all about the grown-ups: a chic celebration where guests' only agenda is to have a good time. Is it appropriate to not invite children?

Yes—especially if the wedding is in the evening or is very formal. "It may be more of a challenge to restrict children during a daytime or casual wedding without people feeling offended," says Joyce Scardina Becker, a San Francisco-based wedding designer and planner who teaches wedding and event etiquette at California State University, East Bay. And Brown adds that long stretches of silence during a ceremony, not to mention tipsy guests, loud music, and tables filled with breakable things, may create an environment in which kids don't know how to behave. The no-kids rule works best when the majority of the families are local, which means parents can leave their children with familiar babysitters for the entire day or drop them off between the ceremony and reception, adds Karen Kaforey, a wedding planner in Nashville. If you're hosting a destination wedding, it's harder to not invite kids.

feels that it's "generally not in good taste to address an envelope to 'Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Smith and Family,'" since the wording can be vague. However, Kaforey says the phrasing's okay as long as you write the names of those invited on the inside envelope.

If you're still worried, broach the subject via more casual communiqués. Jane Bliss, who was married in July 2008 in Bath, England, had a wedding with 11 children in attendance. She used her save-the-date e-mail to announce that children were invited and then followed up with a call to each parent to reinforce this. Wedding websites can also introduce the topic—and provide childcare details when needed.