

Relationship Experts' Advice on Overcoming Engagement Anxiety

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Of the countless emotions that accompany a proposal (you should expect to feel everything from shock to excitement), one that takes so many brides- and grooms-to-be by surprise is anxiety. Let's face it: Out of all the changes we make in life, becoming legally bound to another human being is a pretty big one! Even if you wanted this (and have even been waiting for it), preparing for such a big life change often involves settling into several emotional phases. The important thing to know is that engagement anxiety is normal. "The decision to marry someone does not happen in a bubble and can trigger our friends and family's emotions as well," says [Rhonda Richards-Smith](#), LCSW, psychotherapist and relationship expert. "When

paired with the societal pressure to have a perfectly blissful engagement and marriage, your anxiety can go through the roof."

The good news is that your anxiety over your nuptials is likely temporary. What's more, there are plenty of steps you can take to reduce it over time and focus on what's important. Here are relationship experts' top tips for overcoming engagement anxiety.

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Have realistic expectations.

Given the life-changing commitment you're about to make, it's no surprise that you're nervous and anxious. But experts urge the importance of remembering that, although your life together will be beautiful, it will not always be sunshine and roses. The same goes for your wedding day. "It might not be possible to create the childhood wedding fantasy exactly as you have imagined it since you were 8 years old," says Angela Thompson, a sociology professor at Texas Christian University. "Choose the aspects of the wedding you are most concerned about and strive to make those the best they can be."

Work on understanding your anxiety.

Even though engagement anxiety is common, it's still not a good idea to shake it off and ignore its presence in your life. Instead, experts recommend that brides-to-be work on understanding their feelings. "Since a lot of engagement anxiety is based in fear, it can be helpful to write down these fears and evaluate how realistic they are," suggests Rachel Needle, Psy.D., licensed psychologist and certified sex therapist. "Challenging and restructuring your thoughts can help you replace these fear-based thoughts with more realistic ones."

Talk to the right people.

If you have a trusted friend or family member whom you know will not judge you or criticize you for your feelings of anxiety, talk to them. "Family and friends may not realize how anxious you are about your wedding or the 'for life' commitment and genuinely want to help when they discover the truth," says Thompson. "In addition, there is a good chance that married family or friends experienced engagement anxiety while planning their own wedding, and have ideas about how to address your areas of concern."

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Communicate with your fiancé.

Keeping the lines of communicate with open your fiancé is important—you are planning on entering a lifetime of both happy and difficult times together, after all. Kevin Gilliland, Psy.D., clinical psychologist, executive director of Innovation360 and author of Struggle Well Live Well,

recommends starting such difficult conversation slowly, meaning don't start with high emotions, blaming language, and global statements. "Start by being curious, making sure you fully understand the situation before you get too emotional," he says. "Your odds of it going well increase dramatically."

Up your self-care.

Sleeping, eating well, and exercising are all important, even more so when you're in an anxious state. "When we don't sleep, we don't think well—and when we don't think well, we can start to make up some really crazy stories," says Dr. Gilliland. "Eat slowly and thoughtfully and practice good eating habits. That means being mindful of snacks and 'grazing' in the refrigerator or the pantry."

Breathe.

Literally. "The relaxing kind of breathing where you push your stomach muscles out to active those deep breath muscles," says Dr. Gilliland. "It is insanely calming to your mind." If you need a little help, consider downloading a de-stressing or meditation app such as Headspace.

Consider premarital counseling.

If nothing else seems to help reduce your engagement anxiety, it might be a good idea to seek out the assistance of a professional. "Premarital counseling can help ensure that you and your fiancé are on the same page and that you are entering this commitment in the right frame of mind," says Thompson. "If the engagement anxiety is leading to things like panic attacks, please seek professional help from your doctor or someone in the medical community."