

Engaged (in a \$72B industry)



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The Christmas and holiday season is the most frequent time for couples to become engaged.

The magic and excitement of the holidays lend themselves to this special event. With the families naturally coming together, it gives opportunity for sharing this important announcement. For those of us who are married, a new engagement allows us a chance to reminisce about our own stories. Although the marriage proposal tales are romantically different,

the surprises and declarations of love continue to touch our hearts.

Becoming engaged is a new passage for the couple and the family. The family is gaining a new member. How do people feel about this new person? For some families, it is easy to envision how this person will fit in the group and participate. For other families, an opening needs to be created allowing acceptance of an eventual in-law.

The average American engage-

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SOURCES

- Association of Bridal Consultants
- Condé Nast Bridal Group
- Mediapost.com National Bridal Service
- National Center for Health Statistics
- National Association of Wedding Ministers

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ment is 16 months. Nowadays, couples are waiting longer to get married. Sixty-nine percent of engaged couples have known each other longer than three years. The average age for a first-time bride is 25 and for the groom 27.5 years old. So, the question of "was the proposal expected?" is often met with the answer "yes" or "yes, but not quite yet."

Whatever the expectation, family and friends are invited to join in this new journey. For parents it means another emotional step of letting their child go. Letting go in essence means separating more from your son/daughter, and grieving once again the lost youth of the child. It means accepting the adult they have become. It sounds simple, yet families who resist this process may find themselves in unfinished territory; resulting in power struggles. For the couple the engagement

enables them to continue to define who they are becoming, with even greater clarity and commitment. Family and friends in joining the process, get to enjoy their emotional bond.

The word engaged is defined by the Webster Dictionary as meaning "busy or occupied." The time leading up to the wedding day is filled with excitement, chores and choices. Historically, parents of the bride planned the wedding. Currently, it is less clear. Recently, I learned of two unrelated instances in which the bride-to-be's mother did most of the organizing because of the bride living so far away from the wedding site.

In another situation, the parents of the bride gave the couple a budget and stepped back while they took charge. Contemporary couples have become increasingly involved in the wedding planning, including the groom. There are also the families who wish to work together, weaving many wedding dreams together and co-creating. To ease the busyness, one-third of engaged couples retain a wedding consultant.

Many brides possess an

image or dream of what their wedding day will be like. Does this dream mesh with the parents' fantasies or the grooms? Often spiritual/religious beliefs and cultural traditions are part of the planning. Eighty percent of traditional weddings are performed in churches or synagogue and about 15 percent of weddings include ethnic customs.

A total of \$72 billion is spent on weddings annually in the United States. Twenty-two thousand dollars is the average amount spent on a traditional wedding. At times, it seems that the materialistic component can run amok. It is not unusual to experience brides competing for the most beautiful, luxurious wedding.

It is important that the families and couple set a positive tone and make major decisions in the beginning. Avoid ultimatums. Listen to each person's dream and negotiate. Recently, I observed power struggles between the couple and the bride's parents. The more the parents imposed decisions, the more the bride-to-be pushed her parents out of the process. The parents then asserted their control by mentioning their financial contribution.

Negotiate and be mindful of the purpose of the day. The wedding needs to reflect the couple and the love they share. For many the focus of the day is on the couples commitment to each other, as well as a day of celebration.

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