**Wedding Rehearsal Guide**

**Who Should Be in Charge?**

At the rehearsal, you are not practicing the ceremony itself – you are only practicing walking in and walking out, and making sure everyone knows where to stand. Since the officiant is one of the first people to enter at the beginning of the ceremony, it’s not possible for the officiant to “cue” each group and tell them when to start walking. This is normally the responsibility of the coordinator at your ceremony site, or your wedding planner if you have one. Many of our couples will also ask a friend or family member to help run the rehearsal and cue everyone for their entrance to the ceremony, which is a great option. You want the same person who is running the rehearsal to be in charge of the ceremony on your wedding day as well – that continuity will really help ensure that there isn’t any confusion on your big day.

Your wedding rehearsal should be a quick, easy, and straightforward process. If your ceremony venue doesn’t provide a coordinator, you should choose a friend or family member to help you. The best person for this job is, quite frankly, someone who is a little bossy. They will need to be assertive enough to get your group to pay attention, but not be so overbearing that it’s off-putting to your families and wedding party. Teachers are almost always the perfect choice for this because they are used to corralling large groups of unruly children. Give them this guide before you arrive, and also give them a copy of your ceremony draft that you have finalized with your officiant. They’ll have all the information they need to run your rehearsal quickly and efficiently.

**Running the Rehearsal**

Follow these easy steps to rehearse the wedding ceremony quickly and easily, your friends and families will thank you and you can get on to your rehearsal dinner!

Start in the middle. Instead of starting with the processional (entrance), start by getting everyone into place where they will be standing during the ceremony. Remember that you are practicing walking in and out, so knowing where to stand is the first step. See the diagram below for the standard positions for your officiant, parents, and attendants. It’s important to have your wedding party evenly spaced and standing at a slight angle in relation to your wedding guests, with the attendants at each end a little more forward than the Maid of Honor and Best Man. This looks better for pictures, and helps the guests see each person in your wedding party better. Bridesmaids should hold their bouquets in front of them with both hands, and groomsmen should decide on clasping their hands in the front or the back of their body. It’s important that everyone do the same thing, if everyone is doing something different it looks awful in your wedding photos.

Speak through the ceremony headings. Take a look at the ceremony outline and read through the headings aloud, so everyone knows roughly the order of the ceremony. There’s no need to read through the entire ceremony or say the vows, save that excitement for your big day! Make a note of any wedding ceremony readings, candle lighting or other parts, and when the rings will need to be presented. Double check that any items needed during the ceremony like candles or a table will be there that day. No matter what, make sure that everyone (including the couple) knows that they shouldn’t stand with their backs to the wedding guests at any point in the ceremony. Even if people need to move around during the ceremony, for example to do a candle lighting ceremony, make sure that they always end up standing in a position where they still face the guests (and the photographer).

**Practice walking out (the recessional).** Since you have everyone in place already, practice the recessional as if the ceremony has just ended and you are walking out. The Bride will take her bouquet from the Maid of Honor and exit with the Groom. Typically, the wedding party will exit in pairs even if they enter separately, followed by the Flower Girl and Ring Bearer and then the parents and grandparents. It’s important to make sure that each couple that exits the ceremony leaves enough room between themselves and the couple in front of them. To do this, everyone should agree on a set distance they will wait for before walking. Most people choose to start walking when the couple in front of them is halfway back up the aisle. In general, it’s best to leave at least 20 feet between each couple for the sake of pictures, but not much more than that. Once everyone has successfully exited the ceremony, it’s finally time to practice walking in.

**Practice the processional last.** Now that everyone knows where to stand when they enter the ceremony, practicing the entrance should be a piece of cake. Line everyone up in the order they will enter, for our clients this information is at the top of the ceremony draft. The Officiant, Groom, Best Man, and Groomsmen enter first, typically from the side of the ceremony site but sometimes up the aisle depending on preference. Following them are the grandparents, the parents of the Groom, and the Mother of the Bride. Finally, the Bridesmaids, Maid of Honor, and Flower Girl enter. While the Officiant, Groom, and Groomsmen normally enter together as a group in a straight line, everyone else needs to be spaced evenly. As with the recessional, it’s important to agree upon how much space to leave between people entering the ceremony – normally about 20-30 feet. The Bride and her escort (typically the Father of the Bride) should not enter until the entire wedding party has entered and is in place. Normally there is a separate piece of music for the Bride’s processional, and the officiant will usually say “If everyone will please rise,” in order to invite your guests to stand.

The hand-off. The last item to practice is what happens when the Bride and her escort make it to the front of the ceremony and are standing in front of the Officiant and the Groom. If the escort is a parent of the Bride they should give her a kiss and congratulate her. The escort then typically shakes the Groom’s hand, the Bride hands her bouquet to the Maid of Honor and steps forward next to the groom, and the escort moves to where they will be seated. The Bride and Groom should then be standing facing one another, holding hands in front of the officiant. At this point, the Maid of Honor can hand off both sets of flowers to one of the Bridesmaids and fix the Bride’s train, if necessary.

**Do it again.** Now that everyone is in place, practice walking back out and back in one more time to make sure everyone knows what to do, then you’re done! The rehearsal should not last more than **20-30 minutes at most**.

Following these steps will ensure that everyone knows exactly what to do on the wedding day, and that you aren’t wasting a lot of time practicing unnecessary parts of the ceremony itself. Below is a helpful diagram of where everyone should be standing:

