I would like my best friend to be my maid of honor and my sister to be my matron of honor. Is this OK? If so, how can I avoid hurting my sister's feelings when I ask her to share the spotlight with someone else?

There's nothing wrong with having both a maid and a matron of honor- in fact this is a great way to recognize two special people. Before you talk to your friend, explain your decision to your sister (she may not even be surprised to hear of your plans). Reserve certain tasks for her; perhaps she could make a toast at the reception and stand next to you for the exchange of vows. Assign your friend separate duties, such as holding your bouquet or offering a reading. Leading up to the wedding, your two well-intentioned attendants should have more than enough tasks to perform. And some responsibilities may be better suited to one of your attendants than the other, depending on their schedules and interests. For example, your friend may want to go dress-shopping with you, while your sister could host a bridal shower. In the end your sister will probably be relieved to have someone with whom to share the work.

I'm no longer as close with a friend as I was when I took part in her wedding years ago. Since then I've developed a strong tie with another person whom I'd like to have as a bridesmaid. But I'm afraid my old pal will be offended it I leave her out of my wedding party. Since I was her attendant, am I obligated to ask her to return the favor?

Contrary to what many people may believe, there is no reciprocal bridesmaid rule. Relationships change, of course, and your friend may be relieved and not a bit surprised to learn she isn't in your bridal party. When you tell her that you're engaged, be up-front about your plans. You could say, "I hope you'll be able to come to our wedding. I want to let you know that I'm only having a few bridesmaids- just my sisters and a close friend, Anne." Meanwhile, you can do your part to keep up the relationship: Include your longer-term friend in pre-wedding gatherings or ask her to perform a special function on your big day, such as overseeing the signing of the guest book.

Some of my closest friends are men, and I would like to include them in my wedding party. Would this be appropriate?

As long as your fiancé is comfortable with the idea, it is certainly acceptable these days for a man to serve as a bride's "honor attendant." (It can work the other way as well: A groom may have a female attendant.) Adapt the usual list of female-attendant duties for the men in your party. Their main roles will be to support you as you plan the wedding and help you on the day of the event. The one wedding-day duty a male attendant shouldn't perform? Helping you get dressed!

Do I have to ask my fiancé's sisters- whom I don't know very well- to be bridesmaids? Including them would mean I couldn't ask some of my girlfriends because then I would have more attendants than my fiancé.

While there's no rule that says you have to ask your future sisters-in-law, it may be a good idea. The long-term benefits of family harmony should outweigh your reservations. By including these women in the bridal party, you'll encourage a more intimate relationship with you fiancé's family. And don't exclude them for the sake of symmetry. It's fine to have more attendants on one side than the other. Some groomsmen would simply escort two bridesmaids during the recessional- and what man wouldn't want two beautiful women on his arm?

My fiancé wants me to ask his sister to be an attendant. Should I "cut" a friend in the name of family harmony?

If you've already asked your bridesmaids, it would be inappropriate to request that one of them step down. And though your concern is understandable, there's no such thing as a minimum or maximum number of attendants- or a rule that says you have to include your future sister-in-law. However, this gesture will likely win you points with your fiancé's family and present an opportunity to get to know his sister better. Should the addition result in an uneven number of attendants, simply send one groomsman down the aisle with a bridesmaid on each arm.

I'm having a small wedding, and I'm trying to pick five or six bridesmaids out of a group of 12 close girlfriends. Are there rules I can follow in making this decision? What do I tell the friends I don't choose?

When selecting your attendants, go with your heart- what feels right to you is the right choice. Choose your maid or matron of honor and bridesmaids from among your family and closest friends. These are the people who truly mean the most to you and who will be an integral part of your wedding experience and memories. Decide on your bridesmaids soon after your engagement is announced, so your friends' expectations don't get inflated. Be sensitive as you advise each non-attendant individually of your decision. Explain that you are having a small

wedding and have asked, for example, only your sisters and two best friends from school to be in the bridal party. Tell them you would love to include them in another way, perhaps by having them do readings at the ceremony. By showing and offering a logical selection- in this case, only relatives and two close friends- you'll surely soften the blow. If, however, you can't seem to find a clear-cut way to shorten the list, one fair simple method is to draw straws. Or you may decide to ask all 12 of your buddies to be in your wedding.