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SHE SAYS:

Bride wars

How do you feel about your fiancé asking for your dad's permission before proposing – respectful tradition or just plain wrong? Here are both sides of the argument



Alexandra Shakespeare
IS A FREELANCE
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SHE SAYS:

“So many wedding traditions have been forgotten over the years, but this is one I firmly believe should stay. My husband asked my father's permission for my hand in marriage and, for me, this is the most natural way to approach a planned proposal. I come from a small family and am an only child, and I have an extremely tight, close-knit bond with both my parents. When I met my husband 11 years ago, I introduced him to them on our third date! It was really important for me that my parents knew who I was dating – and that they liked him. It also mattered to me that he understood how close I was to my parents, how much respect I had for them, and how much I valued and trusted their opinion of my partner.

Asking a father for permission to marry his daughter is about respecting the family you are about to marry into, and respecting the fact that the family are close. I believe it also shows a huge amount of appreciation for that family's traditions and values. In fact, it isn't necessarily asking 'permission', it's more about your partner involving your father in his intentions towards you. I think it shows maturity and demonstrates gentlemanly behaviour for your partner to have this important conversation.

What's more, your father has probably been your number-one hero all through your life. When you get married, he may feel his position is being shared or compromised. Your future fiancé asking for his blessing is a way of saying that his position won't ever be affected, and that he is and always will be respected as his daughter's number-one role model.

Even though the tradition is for the partner to ask for just the father's blessing, I thought it was a nice touch that my partner asked for my mother to be present as well. Both my parents were hugely excited, and I later discovered they found it near-impossible to keep it a secret from me. My father likes to joke now that he was going to say no just to make my husband sweat!”

“It's bad enough that mothers can't be named on marriage certificates, but your boyfriend asking your dad for permission to marry you? That makes me want to jump straight onto my feminist high horse. If ownership over women's lives starts with fathers and ends with husbands, we may as well just re-chain ourselves to the kitchen sink. It's shocking that many couples still go along with a tradition that, in the Western world, dates back to the dark ages – when a dowry was part of the 'transaction' and chaperones were à la mode. It is an unnecessary submission and it's not sexy.

It's the same with men going down on one knee to propose. It happened to me once, and I was silently willing him to stand up before anyone saw. This is partly because no man is my knight and I am *clearly* not a princess, and partly because I do not like surprises or patriarchal conspiracies.

My husband and I decided together to get married, neither of us proposed, and since we are grown-ups, no assessment of his suitability was needed. Call me a control freak if you like, but if pre-marriage you already pay your way, live with your future husband and have a baby, as many of us do these days, being seen as a father's possession to give away is just plain silly. My eight-year-old daughter will verify this. When I explained the permission tradition, she said, 'Shouldn't it be you and daddy's decision?' A proud moment indeed.

Conducting an audit among my wise Facebook friends, many said they'd be offended if their husbands had dared ask their dads. As more posts rolled in, it became clear the tradition was alive and kicking, yet the question had shifted to being asked *after* rather than *before* the engagement.

So, if it's no longer a mandatory rite of passage, and permission morphs into a token blessing requested with *your* permission and – radical idea alert – it involves your mum, too, then at least in a convoluted way, we are still wearing the trousers. Still utterly pointless, though.”