

## 'We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony': the rise of secret weddings

Level: Intermediate

### 1 Warmer

a. Look at the photos. What kind of event is it? What's happening in the images?



b. What words and phrases do you associate with weddings? Write them in the box.

c. Which words and phrases are exclusively used to talk about weddings? Which can be used to talk about other events and situations?

d. Which of your words are used in the article?

### 2 Key words

a. Find words in the article that match the definitions below. Then read the article and notice how the words are used in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. made something smaller in size than it used to be \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 1)

2. moved to a later date \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 1)

3. a formal public event with special traditions, actions, or words \_\_\_\_\_  
(paragraph 3)

4. a very large amount of money \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 4)

5. a worried feeling you have because you think something bad might happen  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 5)

6. usual, normal, happening frequently \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 5)

7. men who are getting married \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 5)

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8. remove yourself from a situation in which you get a lot of attention from people \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 5)
9. a holiday that two people take after they get married \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 8)
10. with a lot of details or small parts that make it difficult to understand or deal with \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 10)
11. a written or spoken request asking someone to spend time with you socially or to come to a social event \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 11)
12. make someone feel sad, worried, or angry \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 11)

**b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.**

1. Have you received an \_\_\_\_\_ to Lucie and Ben's wedding? I haven't.
2. Our family relationships are quite \_\_\_\_\_, which means holidays and birthday are often difficult times.
3. After the awards \_\_\_\_\_, guests will have dinner in the Great Hall.
4. She's enjoying life out of the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. My operation has already been \_\_\_\_\_ three times!
6. We spent a \_\_\_\_\_ on Mum's present, and she hardly looked at it.

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Leah Harper

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- 1 After two years of Covid chaos, when weddings were scaled back, postponed or cancelled, wedding season is here again.
- 2 Covid numbers are still high, and the UK's cost-of-living crisis means that many couples don't have much money. So instead of having a large wedding, many couples are choosing to have a secret wedding.
- 3 "We just wanted a really relaxed and enjoyable day," says Jess, 29, who married Gerald, 37, in Brighton in March. They only told four people – which didn't include their parents – and went to the beach for ice cream and champagne after the ceremony.
- 4 "I've been to friends' weddings where they've been mega-stressed and everything cost a fortune," she says. "We didn't have to worry about who would sit where or if people liked the food."
- 5 Reducing the anxiety and pressure of having a "big day" is one reason why many couples now marry in secret. "Secret weddings are becoming more common," says Landis Bejar, whose job is to help brides and grooms manage wedding stress. "People are looking for ways to get out of the spotlight and avoid the fuss of weddings. They just want to be married."
- 6 For Ian, 55, who married Ceri, 48, a secret wedding felt right. "We got married for practical reasons and so asking people to travel to a wedding felt wrong," he says, "but we had a lovely, romantic day."
- 7 The couple had already been together for about 20 years and only told their children in the car on the way to the ceremony. "Another reason we didn't tell anyone was that we didn't want them to think that either of us was ill or that we were hoping for presents."
- 8 The cost of a formal wedding – around £17,300 in 2021 – can add to the stress. In 2018, Mursh and Tash (both 34) travelled to San Francisco to get married without telling any of their friends. Afterwards, they had a month-long honeymoon touring the US – and still spent less than for a traditional ceremony. "I've got a really big family and Bengali people invite hundreds of guests to their weddings," he says. "It would have cost each family £30,000–35,000."
- 9 Forty-three-year-old Kerry's secret wedding to Nicky, 38, in Norfolk took less than three months to plan and cost them less than £600. "It was very relaxed and it was perfect for us."
- 10 Another stress factor is the guest list. When family relationships are complex, the guest list for a small wedding can be difficult. It can be easier to get married in secret and tell people later.
- 11 Of course, some people might have expected a wedding invitation. "It did upset some people," says Kerry. "The night before our wedding, I said to Nicky: 'We've still got time; if you don't want it to be just us, we'll phone everyone and tell them we're getting married tomorrow.' But he said, 'No, let's leave it as it is.'"
- 12 "If you have a secret wedding, some people will be hurt," says Bejar. "They will feel left out. It's good to know how to deal with that. Think about how to say, 'This was right for us.'"
- 13 For most, however, the reaction from friends and family was positive. "We called the mums about an hour after the ceremony – Gerald's mum thought he was joking!" says Jess. "But everyone was happy and supportive."

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### 3 Understanding the article

a. Are these statements True or False according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. During the two years of the covid pandemic, weddings were not allowed to take place in in the UK.
2. After Covid, couples in the UK have got a lot more money to spend on weddings and for life in general.
3. The average cost of a formal wedding in the UK is now over thirty thousand pounds.
4. More couples in the UK are getting married in secret or just with one or two friends.
5. Secret weddings are usually more stressful for the bride and groom.
6. The increase in complex family relationships often makes deciding who to invite to the wedding difficult.
7. Although the reaction from family and friends is usually positive, there's often someone who feels upset or hurt because they didn't get an invitation.
8. Anyone who isn't happy should learn to deal with their emotions and not feel upset.

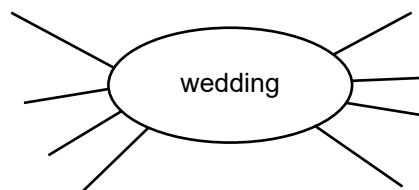
### 4 Key language

a. Choose the right form of the words to complete the sentences. Talk about the differences between the words.

marriage      marry      get married      are married

1. I can't believe that Joel and Celine \_\_\_\_\_.
2. We hope to \_\_\_\_\_ next summer.
3. John didn't have the courage to ask Alex to \_\_\_\_\_ him. Not yet, anyway.
4. They've had a long and happy \_\_\_\_\_.

b. Now find collocations from the article containing the word *wedding* and add them to the word spider.



c. Add and share any further collocations you can think of.

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### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss the questions. The prompt words in the box might help you.

ceremony	honeymoon	bride	groom	family	guests	presents
religious	invitations	reception	traditional	theme	venue	cost
(in)formal	food	music	entertainment	flowers	cake	dress

- How many weddings have you been invited to in the past ten years. Describe them.
- Which was the most memorable wedding you ever attended and why?
- How has the way people get married changed since your parents' or grandparents' "big day"?

### 6 In your own words

a. Write an email to your friends and family telling them about your recent secret wedding. In your email, explain:

- where and when you got married
- who attended
- what happened
- what it was like
- how you felt
- why you chose to get married in secret

Give information about photos and presents. How do you hope they will react and respond?