

A Practical
WEDDING

COVID-19

COUPLE'S GUIDE



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
planning a wedding during a crisis

HEY THERE,

We are so sorry. If you're here, reading this ebook, you are likely planning a wedding in 2020 or early 2021. Wedding planning, in normal times, can be stressful. You've already put tons of time, money, and love into planning an event that would feel happy and whole for you, your partner, your families, and your friends. And now? You're staring down delays, postponements, cancellations, and more uncertainty than anyone could have dreamed . If we've said it once, we'll say it a million more times, we are sorry. This is a crappy hand to be dealt during what should be a happy time in life.



While we certainly can't promise to make it all better or easier (since we have no magic wand), we can offer you some tools and slivers of help that just might ease a bit of the strain. Amongst other things, we certainly recommend following along with us on apracticalwedding.com for up to date guidance, help, and a strong community support. We also have wedding planners (the pros) on deck to help out. Check out hotlineringing.com to make an appointment for 1-on-1 guidance and support.

What can you do right now? That's a great question. Depending on where in the planning process you are, what you might be envisioning for a new wedding normal, and how you'd like to proceed—we hope to be able to offer some tools, ideas, and help along the way. As we all know, this is changing moment by moment, so please know that the information and ideas we are sharing are based on when we are writing this, our own knowledge and experience, and frankly... our best guesses. But we hope it will help.

XO,

THE APW TEAM

A Practical WEDDING

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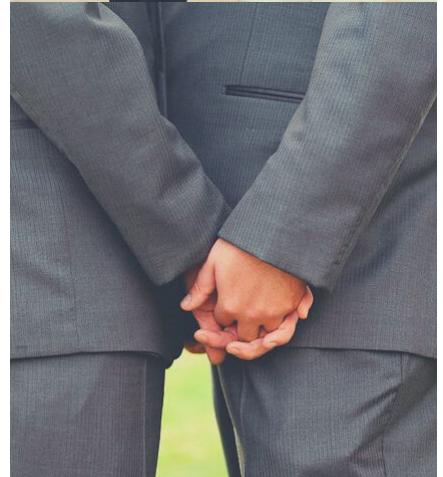
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THERE'S ALWAYS
SOMETHING TO

celebrate



It's all so emotional

Before we dive into the nitty gritty, the to-do's, and the work of it all... it must be said. **Be gentle with you.** Be gentle with your partner. Be gentle with the ones you love. And remember that **Coronavirus can't take your love.** And there will always be a way to celebrate. Be it an elopement, a commitment ceremony, a small wedding, a big wedding next year... where there is love, there is a way.

As you navigate this completely unprecedeted time in history and your life, expect that you will face the stages of grief, anxiety, stress, and so much more. Move forward in this process already knowing that it won't be easy, but that you will get through it. Try to remember that at the end of the day (or the year) the thing that matters most is that you and the person you love the most are married and happy and healthy. (That is not us saying that being healthy right now means you can't feel all the feels about delaying/cancelling the wedding you had planned.)

So, sit in the feelings, grieve the day you can't have, and then **find the joy** in the celebration you can have (or at least try to.)

CORONAVIRUS
CAN'T TAKE
YOUR
Love



Important Resources

Here are a few resources that may be helpful as you do your research. You already know about these places to look, but we wanted to save you some time and pull all these links together. Please note: These are U.S. specific (mostly), and it will be important to also look into information for your specific region/state/county/community.

- THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC)
- CDC GUIDE FOR EVENTS
- WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)
- US DEPARTMENT OF STATE
- TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (TSA)
- INTERNATIONAL AIR TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION
- MEET US OVER ON APRACTICALWEDDING.COM FOR ALL THE UP-TO-DATE INFO WE CAN SHARE

OH, AND...

If you're looking for some legitimately helpful guidance in book form... snag yourself Meg's books: A Practical Wedding and the accompanying planner: A Practical Wedding Planner TODAY.

be gentle with yourself

AND EACH OTHER



How To Postpone Or Cancel YOUR WEDDING

BY: MEG KEENE

First up, keep in mind: there is no simple step by step plan for canceling your #pandemicwedding. And that's not just because canceling weddings is never simple, but also because this COVID-19 pandemic is completely unprecedented.

This is the part where we'd like to give you a rundown of the facts on the ground, but as soon as we type them, they are obsolete. As of writing this, group gatherings are cancelled country-wide with seemingly no end in sight. Media outlets have given hints that weddings, concerts, and other gatherings could be intermittent or generally changed for a year or more to come. Restaurants and venues are being forced to close across the country.

All that means that if you were planning to get married in 2020, you may well be looking at postponing or canceling your wedding. So before we get into the nitty gritty of how to make that happen, a reminder: everyone in this equation is human, and scared. That includes your photographer, your cake baker, your vendor manager, your parents, and you. This is a good time to remember that you picked your vendors for a reason; so be understanding as they navigate this uncharted and uncertain time for small business owners. "There are no quick answers," says Renee Dalo, Owner of Moxie Bright Events, "There are no standard policies for this."

We're about to lay out steps for dealing with a coronavirus wedding cancellation, but if you only walk away remembering one thing, it should be this: communicate openly with your partner and your vendors. There are some tough choices ahead, but you can (and will) get through this. Clear communication isn't a magic wand that will make this all go away, but it will help.

STEP 1: READ YOUR CONTRACTS

It's likely wedding contracts have never gotten so much close reading—by so many people—as they have in the last few months. But suddenly every couple and every vendor is going through their contracts word by word.

(Side note: there is a reason they always say ‘get it in writing’. And this is advice that extends to every couple, not just folks getting married in the next few months. From your venue, to the caterer, to your friend who agreed to help do the flowers as a gift, every single person involved in your celebration needs a written agreement. Before March of 2020, that might have sounded like overkill, but now... well... you get why. You can read our best advice about wedding contracts [here](#).)

We talked to Braden Drake, a lawyer in San Diego, California who provides services for small businesses and wedding creatives. Here is his best advice:

Look to see if your contract has Force Majeure clause—some people call it an ‘act of god clause.’ You can read more about Force Majeure and COVID-19 [here](#). Know what is happening in your state and municipality, and realized that this is a very fluid situation. (Things are changing lighting fast, so do your research. And then do it again tomorrow.)

Communicate open and honestly with your vendors—and understand this is putting vendors in a tight spot financially.

STEP 2: REACH OUT TO YOUR VENUE FIRST, THEN THE REST OF YOUR VENDORS

Your venue is the make or break when it comes to figuring out if your wedding is happening as you planned it, or even in an altered version. If they will not allow your event to take place, then it isn't going to (or at least, not there). If that is the case, you will want to figure out what available dates your vendors have for the rest of the year. Even if you decide to ultimately cancel and not reschedule, the first step is to figure out what your options are. When reaching out to, well, anyone, remember to be as professional as possible. Everyone is under stress and navigating new territory. In life—and in weddings—the nicer you are, the more likely people are to go out of their way to help you. (Plus: we're only going to get through this together.)

That said, circumstances are changing day to day and acting fast can pay off. Anna Singer, co-owner of The Otherside Creatives, was able to move an April couple who needed to deal with a coronavirus wedding cancellation to a new date, and keep their entire vendor team. “By sacrificing their day choice (they’re now celebrating on a Friday) and choosing an off-peak month, we have found a way for them to have the wedding they wanted, without concern for their guests and vendors’ health,” she said. “We’ve been working to put together similar contingency plans for all our couples, getting married this spring—hoping we don’t need them, but being proactive in preventing any monetary losses for our couples.”

STEP 3: DETERMINE YOUR PRIORITIES AS A COUPLE

I know. You already did this! You have spent months, if not years, planning a date that worked for absolutely every single person in your life. Shifting that to a random day in September or next year seems impossible. And while the bad news is that you’ve already done this, that’s the good news too. You’ve done it once, and you can do it again.

“Having our couples determine their priorities is the first thing we do in the process,” Jessi Rutherford owner of bi-coastal planning business Sentimental Fools Events tells us. “We tell them that the number one has to be you get married, everything else competes for second place. Usually second is being surrounded by family and friends or food.”

You and your partner have definitely talked about what you need at your wedding. It is time to revisit that list and realistically talk about what you want to happen. Figure out what you are willing to sacrifice in order to save your celebration, the money you have already spent, and your own well being.

STEP 4: MAKE A BACK-UP PLAN

It’s important for you, as a couple, to determine what makes you feel comfortable during this outbreak. Everyone understands how difficult this time is for you, and it is ok to not be ok.

But once you know your priorities. It is time to jump into action. If you are getting married within the next eight weeks, make a plan now. Contact your vendors to get any available dates they have to rebook—and make sure you quote their own contract language when reaching out.

Tell your guests right away if you plan to move forward with an event despite CDC recommendations, and don’t be upset if folks choose to stay home. The next several weeks are going to be scary for a lot of folks, especially immunocompromised and older friends and family. If you do move forward, keep in mind that the situation will continue to change (and you might still have to cancel). Also, be aware that some of your vendors may be immunocompromised, or live with a vulnerable individual, and it might simply not be safe for them to shoot/ set-up/ cater your wedding. We’re all in this together, so please (please) be kind to those folks.

STEP 5: LET YOUR FAMILY AND GUESTS KNOW

Everyone on the planet is going through the same difficult time together right now. So unless your loved ones have been intentionally burying their heads in the sand, they've likely been expecting your coronavirus wedding cancellation announcement for a while. They may actually be relieved to hear it from you because they've been dreading telling you they can't attend. Also, given the circumstances, ask people you love and trust—whether it's your dad or maid-of-honor—to help send those calls/ emails/ texts out to friends and family. Eve Sturges (who canceled a wedding under very different circumstances) notes, "Also remember that stress can make us forget things; have your invitation list available so you can keep track of who needs to know." And remember, when it comes to getting the word out, "short and to the point is what is important. There is plenty of time to write individual notes or vent about details on the phone with friends and loved ones later. And please remember to BCC this mass mailer!" (No one is up for an inbox clogged with a string of random replies in these times.)

STEP 6: AMEND YOUR CONTRACTS AND PAY YOUR VENDORS

I know there are some groans and eye-rolls here. I know moving things around and accommodating events that have been planned for months or years is awful. But it's important to keep in mind that your vendors are not keeping your deposits because they're greedy, or not understanding. They're keeping them because well, they likely spent them on rent long ago, and are now trying to figure out if they have money to feed their kids this month. Renee Dalo, of Moxie Bright Events told us, "Our livelihood is gatherings and we are legally not allowed to gather." She had to tell a client that if they didn't pay their photographer's remaining payment for services, that photographer may not be in business when their new wedding date rolls around. "We are all 'Mom & Pop' businesses trying to keep them going."

STEP 7: BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Having a coronavirus wedding cancellation isn't fun. In fact, it's likely really really un-fun, and very sad. You put your heart and soul (and wallet) into planning one of the biggest emotional events of your life, and now it's suddenly not happening, and you have no control over this situation. It's ok for you to feel devastated. In fact, it's better for you to roll around in your feelings, then to try to shove them down. (There is a 100% guarantee that shoved down feelings will function like a horrible jack-in-the-box, jumping up when you least expect them or want them.) And finally: feeling your feelings isn't selfish. Yes, people are dying. Yes, that is exponentially sadder than a postponed wedding. But that doesn't mean what you're feeling isn't very real. "It is totally normal for couples to get post-wedding blues even if their events go on as planned," explained Renee. "If you have to reschedule and change your plans it is ok to not be ok. A wedding is an expenditure of energy, time and money. It is totally normal to mourn that."



A photograph of two women sitting on a white wooden porch. They are both wearing white, sleeveless, lace dresses with ruffles at the hem. The woman on the left has her arm around the woman on the right. They are looking towards each other. The background consists of dark red vertical wooden panels.

**"IF YOU HAVE
TO RESCHEDULE
AND CHANGE
YOUR PLANS IT
IS OK TO NOT
BE OK."**

—Renee Dalo

HOW TO
HAVE A

Virtual Wedding

BY: ALYSSA GRIFFITH

So you're ready to have a virtual wedding. We know, we know. It's nothing you would have picked, like... a month ago. But now we're in a brand new world.

If you've poked around the internet for even a few minutes in the past few weeks (literally what else is there to do), you've probably stumbled upon a story about a virtual wedding on Zoom, or some Facebook Live nuptials. If a wedding has been on your schedule for 2020, you are probably amongst the throngs of folx considering what the actual heck to do right now. We've been saying it for weeks, and we'll keep saying it... we are so damn sorry. But, if gathering your community, no matter the 'how', to profess your love and make a commitment to your person, is the priority... let's make it happen.

APW has been here to talk about practical, real, heart-centered weddings for years. Now, it's no different. You can dig through our archives and find heartwarming stories of weddings in the midst of health crises, couples who eloped with their families, at-home weddings, and more. 2020 has taken a lot from all of us already, and the fact is that probably won't stop anytime too soon. What it can't take, is the joy and love we choose to prioritize and hold onto. If you want to get married, right now, in the midst of a global crisis (or if you NEED to get married now), we say—go forth and say 'I do.'



WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE IT LEGAL

Weddings seem like they're all about flowers and cocktails... except they're not. There are also some very specific legal pieces required to make a marriage legit. Since we're staring down the face of a crisis, just know that it may not be easy or possible to fulfill these requirements. And exactly what the requirements are is hyper-specific to your state and county. It's pretty easy to research what is required in your state with a quick google search. However, right now, just know that things are a bit of a mess in most places. In California, and many other states, the County Clerks offices are closed—making it all but impossible to get a marriage license. However, if your wedding was coming up quickly, you may already have a marriage license in hand (check the expiration date). Congratulations. Or perhaps you live somewhere that hasn't closed down government offices yet. Hurry, go get a marriage license right now if getting married is the short-term goal! Again, depending on where you live and the laws, here are the things you may need, and some specific details to consider based on the current state of the world.

Make It Legal

A MARRIAGE LICENSE

If you have one in hand, you're set. If not, go the County Clerk's Office website for your area, or a nearby county and see if they are open and still issuing licenses. Some counties have set up emergency contact information in case getting married is an emergency for you. Folx facing medical emergencies, front line or military workers, and other specific cases may make you eligible. It's worth asking and applying.

AN OFFICIANT

While virtual weddings are all the rage at the moment, keep in mind that your marriage may not be legal if the officiant isn't physically in the same space as the couple. Do some research for your area and make sure you know that you're checking all the legal boxes. If you have to be in the same place as your officiant, consider an outdoor space where you can be at least 6 feet apart, or like this couple from New York—let your officiant stay inside and marry you through a window. Generally speaking, your officiant will need to sign the marriage license, so ask them to bring their own pen, or have some gloves at the ready for them. Even better, if you live with someone else (a roommate, parents, etc.), they can get ordained online and be your officiant—easy peasy (I've done it.) Oh, and some states have a self-uniting (or Quaker) marriage law, so you may not even need an officiant.

WITNESSES

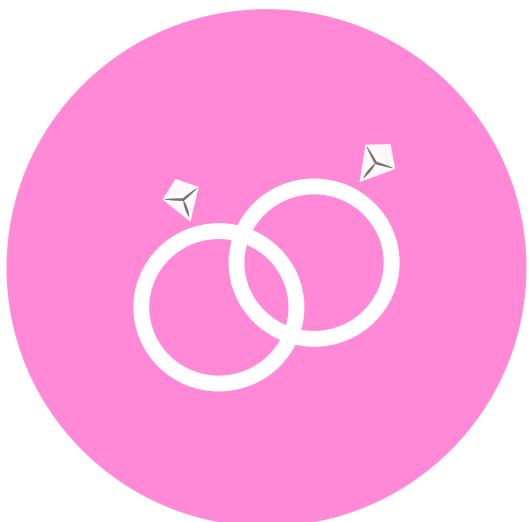
Some states also require a witness or two to be present at your ceremony and sign the marriage license. The same guidelines apply, keep a safe distance, and a safe signing process and you'll be all set.

WHAT IF YOU CAN'T MAKE YOUR VIRTUAL WEDDING LEGAL?

Unfortunately, you may not have a marriage license in hand, your County Clerk's Office may be closed, you don't qualify for an emergency marriage license, and you can't travel anywhere that has an open government office. Again, we're here to say we're sorry. So damn sorry.

Call me a diehard romantic here, but who the hell cares? If you want to get married now, do it, and make it legal later. Spend your quarantine writing the vows you want, invite your friends and family in via the internet, and commit your lives to one another—have a commitment ceremony. Your wedding date can still be your virtual wedding date. Break up your work-from-home week with a Wednesday celebration. Getting married is, in so many ways, the commitment to each other and to love, as queer couples proved to us through years of illegal marriages. What better time for love than now? You can make it legal later.

In the meantime, you could make your very own marriage contract, Ketubah (if you're Jewish), or art from your vows. Something to put in writing and remember your pandemic party by. Oh, and get your affairs in order, too (like a will and such), because if you can't have a legal wedding, you can still make sure you and your partner are legally recognized as each other's person.



Make Your Virtual Wedding Special

Just because you're having a different kind of wedding doesn't mean it can't feel special. Here are a few ideas of ways to make sure your wedding day still feels like yours.

GUESTS

Obviously, or not. Elope, or invite 1,000 of your closest friends and family via Zoom or Facebook Live. Just make sure that it's as much of what you and your partner want as possible.

INVITATIONS

Speaking of guests, you'll need a way to let them know what's going on. We're huge fans of some of the new 'change the date' products available in the world. We also love services like Paperless Post and Greenvelope where you could send your guests a digital invitation with all the links and how-to's they need to successfully log in and join in the fun. (Pro-tip: give overly detailed instructions for how to log in and join the call. Your Great Aunt Ruth will really appreciate it.)

FLOWERS

Most floral farmers are struggling these days, with canceled events and closed down flower markets. However, there are plenty of florists still up for a gig, and they'd love to do a porch drop off. Just ask. Plus, fresh flowers keep showing up in grocery stores and you can DIY some flowers for your day. I mean, what else do you have to do? Just go pick them up on your essential grocery store trip, or look into a flower delivery option!

OUTFITS

Don't hold back here. If you already have your fanciest clothes ready, wear them. If not, see about ordering something special for your (virtual) wedding day! (Many stores are not shipping, but Rent The Runway still is, and they have the best ballgowns in stock right now... because nobody but you needs a ballgown) Ask your guests to dress up, too. It'll make it all the more fun.

FOOD & DRINKS

Ask your guests to have their favorite drink ready. Mix up a batch of cocktails for you and your love. Send your guests the cocktail recipe. Get dinner delivered from a local restaurant, or champagne from a delivery service. Don't hold back. After all, this is your wedding.

CAKE

There are plenty of bakeries who would love to whip up a special cake for you and your fiancé right now. Let them! Or fancy up a grocery store cake. If none of that works out, you could spend the day before making a homemade cake together!

RINGS

Do you already have them? Awesome, don't forget them... just kidding, you're not leaving the house! But if not, order some. ASAP. Plenty of amazing smaller jewelers are having deals right now and you could have your rings shipped right to your door. Yay! Need something quick? Use whatever you've got on hand to hold the place for now, and frame it later. That twist tie will have an all-new meaning.

PHOTOS

Again, depending on where you are and the rules in place, you may be able to get a photographer to meet you outside your home with their long-range lenses for a quick celebratory photoshoot to mark the occasion. If not, some photographers have even adapted to this new world and are offering virtual photo sessions. Fun!

MUSIC

You can totally DIY some tunes for the event. Also, lots of DJ's that I've worked with in the past have been live DJing on Instagram and Facebook Live for fun lately. Reach out to someone local, or the DJ you planned to use, and ask if they'll play music for your ceremony and a dance party after!



Technology & Logistics

If you're going to have a virtual wedding that your friends and family can join in on, you'll need to figure out a few logistical things. And, please test all the elements in advance to minimize the stress as you're about to say your 'I do's.' (REMINDER: for a legal wedding ceremony, you and your officiant and witnesses may need to be physically in the same space. Do your research.)

PICK A PLATFORM

There's Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, Facebook Live, Instagram Live, etc. You have choices that are free, and ones that cost money. Some that will live stream to social media, and others you could make a recording from. You can also choose based on how you want your guests involved. My top pick would be Zoom. If you pay for a month of service (hello, cheapest venue ever), you can have tons of family and friends join the call, you'll be able to see their faces, and you can record the call to watch over and over again. Plus, everyone can hang out after the ceremony, give toasts and speeches, and even have a dance party.

GATHER YOUR SUPPLIES

Make sure you have your computer or tablet, a charger (this is key!), and a tripod or a way to prop it all up.

PICK A SPOT

Will your virtual wedding be in your living room? Your backyard? Figure out where you have the space, the wifi power, plugs, and lighting that feels best.

TEST AND TEST AGAIN

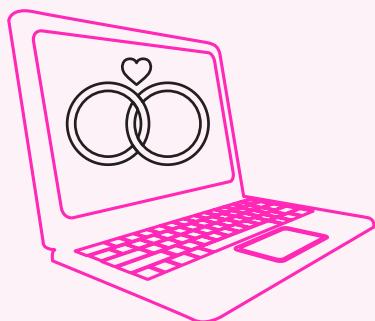
Do a trial run with a friend or two. Make sure that they can see you, hear you, etc. Zoom and other platforms sometimes require a password, make very sure that's working exactly as you'd expect. Wouldn't want grandma to miss the vows.

NOW, GET MARRIED ALREADY!

We're sorry your wedding day may not be shaking out as you expected (like, really really sorry). But we hope this can help you celebrate the love that even 2020 can't take from you. Cheers to your love. After all, love is what will see us through this.

BREAKING NEWS

As of mid-April 2020, NY Governor Andrew Cuomo has stated that he intends to sign an executive order allowing New Yorkers to get marriage licenses online and be married remotely. We hope other states follow suit as shelter-in-place orders and safety guidelines continue.



READ THIS

Photographer Kelly Przel's insight into having two weddings... a 'big, fat, illegal Jewish wedding' and a totally legal courthouse wedding.



Love
IS WHAT
WILL SEE US
through

THE FUTURE OF *Weddings* MAYBE?

When the world starts to open back up, there's no way to know what exactly it will look like, or how long it might last without another round of shutdowns. We're so hopeful that when we do get there, that we will be able to just live and move forward safely and with celebrations that feel whole. However, we are also acutely aware of the fact that that might not be the case. Our guess (and seriously, it's a guess) is that, for a while at least, weddings and gatherings will be smaller, closer to home, and require a quicker turnaround than we're all used to. But at the core, we believe you should be ready and able to celebrate your love your way, the moment you can.

APW has roots in the small/backyard/DIY wedding realm... ya know... practical weddings. So here are some tips for executing a small wedding on a small budget.

Start, as always, with a priority list with your partner. What will make your wedding feel whole, and complete—even if it's not all the things you once might have wanted.

Think budget numbers. Small weddings can, of course, be less expensive. But it's still important to dig in and create a budget that you feel good about so that you know.

Create a guest list. Is it tiny? Is it plausible and manageable? If not, cut it down. Only the most important folks will make the cut. (Keep in mind, that as time goes on, we'll learn more about how many people can gather, and what these sorts of things look like. Will getting married with 10 or less people be okay for you? Do you need to wait until 50 or less can gather? Consider the possibilities.)

Think about venue options and how they play out for your guest list, budget, and guest list wishes. Is it City Hall? Is it somewhere in nature? Is it a backyard wedding? Plan the details. Check out our spreadsheets for more guidance and checklists to get you through.

Get married. Enjoy your intimate wedding and celebration of love.





Going to the chapel....