

# Best Men Speeches

*First Published in 'You Magazine' - written by Colin Dunne*

A best man's speech can make or break a wedding.  
Our expert's ten-point plan will ensure your big day isn't ruined

It's the most important day of your life - you're the bride. Still glowing from the vows, with the cake uncut and the champagne still bubbling in every glass, you stand by as your new husband's closest friend stands up ... and immediately you sense disaster.

First of all, to quieten his nerves, he's been at the champagne. Secondly, you've just remembered that amusing little incident involving you and two rugby players in Stockton seven years ago. Thirdly ... he's just remembered it too ... "Jennifer's been a bit of a girl in her time", he begins, with ghastly inevitability, "and one night in Stockton..."

Several old aunties at the back of the room faint, your parents blanch and your husband is mentally calculating the cost of an early divorce.

Really, choosing a best man is almost more important than choosing a husband. The combination of champagne, nerves, inexperience and indiscretion makes the best man's speech into a ten minute minefield in which many marriages have been, if not destroyed, severely maimed.

As best man to some friends in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Hugh Grant dredges up the speech from hell. "Apparently Paula new that Piers had slept with her younger sister before I mentioned it", he explains cheerily "but the fact that he had slept with her mother came as a surprise".

But such disasters also occur in real life. England captain David Platt put his name in lights among the worlds best men when he jollied things along at a friends wedding by listing the groom's previous girlfriends - along with his choice of contraceptives - and claiming he had a sexual disease...

When he hears these stories, Graham Davies groans and nods. As one of Britain's wittiest after dinner speakers, paid up to £2,500 a turn, he also offers coaching lessons to best men, at the slightly lesser rate of £400 to £1000.

A 32 year old barrister, who's baby face conceals a stiletto wit ("see what happens when cousins marry" he retorted to one heckler at a men-only dinner), Graham will stop at nothing to ensure his clients shine. He even suggested beta blockers to calm on nervous best man. They worked, but made the poor chap impotent for a week. "Just as well it wasn't the bridegroom", says Graham.

Fortunately, Grahams golden rules for speechmaking are a lot less dramatic:

1. Structure the speech around a biography of the bridegroom from the first time you met him. Quirks of character make acceptable jokes. If he has a reputation for being careful with money , for instance, it's perfectly fair to say: "When old John goes on holiday he takes a pair of underpants and a £5 note - and never changes either of them"

2. A risqué joke is acceptable if it's about the best man himself - "I never speak longer in public for longer than I can make love in private ... so in conclusion" - and even about the groom, as long as the audience is youngish and the joke is about his lack of success with women: "John's been so unlucky with women that we used to call him bedspread because he's turned down so often." But never make jokes about the bride. A wedding day is a day of romance - and a few crass words can shatter it.

3. Research the audience weeks beforehand. How many of them are of your generation and how many of an older generation? Remember, they will have a different outlook and a different sense of humour. Don't just play to your own age group.

4. No direct references at all to the sexual act and certainly none about bodily parts.

5. No reference at all to previous sex lives of the bride and groom.

6. Rehearse and practice, over and over again. And don't drink until after the speech.

7. Avoid slightly sour quotes, like: "Marriage isn't a word, it's a sentence". And: "The first part of our marriage was very happy, but on our way back from the ceremony things began to deteriorate". They may be funny, but they shatter the illusion of romance.

8. Forget those weak spoof telegrams ("from your bank manager - keep up the interest rate"). To work, spoof telegrams have to be brilliant and usually they aren't.

9. Never, however well it's going, talk for more than ten minutes. All those brilliant ad-libs you see on television are all very well rehearsed.

10. ... and enjoy yourself.