



PROPOSAL

So, future groom, you want to propose to your girlfriend and you're looking for some advice. You've come to the right place.

GETTING DADDY'S PERMISSION

If you and your girl have been dating for any length of time, you should have a fairly good idea of what her old man thinks of you. So you'll know in advance what his likely reaction will be if you pop the question.

But maybe you've been thinking that it's sexist or paternalist or misogynist (or whatever), now that we've made it into the 21st-century, to have to ask your girlfriend's father for her hand in marriage, and perhaps you'll just skip that bit... Sorry, buddy, that's just cowardice dressed up as progressiveness. If you're going to be a husband, you better grow some balls and man up.

Even if you're expecting flak from the old bugger, and even if the words 'Over my dead body' feature in your encounter, you'll at least have earned the respect of your girl – and some self-respect for yourself. And besides, you can still get married if he says no.

The only genuine reason why you wouldn't ask her father is if he happens to be a dead-beat dad who your girlfriend loathes and who doesn't deserve your respect. He genuinely has to be a loser though; this is not just your opinion of him... And if this is the case, you still need to ask her mother – or her father figure – for permission.

How do I do it?

Firstly, bear in mind that this isn't a job interview. The old man is highly unlikely to make a call based on how you perform on the day; he'll give (or withhold) his blessing depending on what he already knows about you and your relationship with his daughter. So try to keep things in perspective.

But getting all the basics right *is* important. If you and he don't always see eye to eye, this is a great opportunity to take a massive step up in his book – which will make life a lot easier in the long run. By the same token, if the two of you already get on well, you don't want to disappoint him by taking him for granted.

Do it in person. If you ask for his blessing by SMS, email or even phone call, he will wonder if you're too much of a weakling for his baby girl. The only exception to this rule is if the two of you live on opposite ends of the globe – but even then try to make a plan.

Where? Do you invite the old man out for a round of golf or is a quick chat over a coffee sufficient? Horses for courses. If you've got a regular golf game with him then feel free to go that route (but note that if you're the procrastinating type you've just given yourself a four-hour anxiety build-up). If it's a day-time meeting – likely if you're trying to do it without raising your girl's suspicions – then a half-hour's coffee is fine. But, ideally, you want the beverage to be alcoholic. Men talk over pints.

When? Try to ask him one to two weeks before the planned proposal – though if you live in different cities this may not be practical. Either way, give him an idea of how long he should expect to wait, and bear in mind three things:

1. Every day that he has to wait beyond the given proposal date will be a day in which he sits in judgment of your lying, callous, unpunctual cowardliness... So let him know if there is a genuinely valid reason for the change in plans.
2. He *will* tell her mother.
3. As a result, you won't want to be around her mother with your girlfriend until the deed is done because the old bat won't stop looking at the two of you and welling up with tears, which may well give the game away,

Look the part. It's not sufficient to fall out of bed (the one you've probably been sharing with his precious little princess) pull on some sweatpants and call over to the old man without even brushing your teeth. You're asking him if it is okay if you take his daughter, marry her and destroy his bloodline with your shoddy genes; you're not asking to borrow a hammer. Shave, put on a shirt, make an effort.

Show your respect. Regardless of how pally-pally you are with him, he has been dreading (or waiting expectantly for) this day since he first held his daughter in his arms. So it's not sufficient to say, 'Boychee, I'm marrying Susie, thought you should know as you're footing the bill, hardyharhar.' He needs to know that you love his daughter and that, out of respect for him, you wanted to get his permission to ask for her hand in marriage.

Be prepared for the cross-examination. Unless you've only been dating her for a couple of weeks (in which case, good luck!), it's probably crossed Daddy's mind that this day may come and he most likely isn't going to let you off the hook with a simple, 'Go for it, bugger!' Be prepared for him to ask you anything from why you love his daughter to how you will be able to provide for her, and for the dispensing of a life-lesson or two. Pay attention.

Is it too late? You've already proposed. Perhaps you were on holiday and the mood was just right to ask her... Is it too late to speak to her father? No. You don't get away with it that easily. (In fact, this isn't that uncommon – and many fathers won't assume that the deed is still to be done.) Technically, you are no longer asking for his permission; you're asking for his blessing to marry his daughter. Follow the above guidelines and apologise for not asking him initially.

POPPING THE QUESTION

It's fair to say that if the wedding is the big day for the girl, then the proposal is the big day for the guy. It's a proper man test. In truth, it's possibly not as nerve-wracking as asking her father for permission; it's just that you want everything to be perfect...

But before you ask her the question, you need to ask yourself a few. Such as:

Will she say yes?

You should be reasonably confident on this one because no proposal should happen without a few preliminary conversations about marriage. (You know, the bit that comes after the wedding when you have kids and spend the rest of your lives together, dreaming the same dreams, wanting the same things, and whatnot?)

Ring or no ring?

There *has* to be a ring. It doesn't necessarily have to be *the* ring, the engagement ring she will wear and cherish and love for the rest of her life. But if you don't have the actual engagement ring, then you've got to come up with something temporary to shove on her finger, even if it cost R10 on the side of the road or it's a twig you've fashioned into shape with your penknife.

Reasons to propose with a temporary ring:

- ◆ So that, in the weeks to come, you can go together to find the ring of her dreams and get exactly what the two of you want. Bearing in mind she'll want to be wearing this thing for the rest of her life, this can be quite the romantic adventure and itself a treasured experience.
- ◆ So you don't fuck up and get her something hideous that makes her cry. Which – because men just don't have a clue – happens unfortunately often.

Reasons to propose with **THE** ring:

- ◆ Because if you get it right it's just that much more romantic and her eyes will pop right out of her head if you propose *and* show her a big sparkly diamond at the same time.
- ◆ After the proposal everyone will want to look at the ring. It's better for her if she's got the real deal.
- ◆ So she never knows how much you spent. You can try to keep it from her if you go shopping together but she'll work it out. Maybe this is a problem for you; maybe it isn't.

In short, if you're absolutely positive you know what she wants – or if you've got a serious eye for finger jewellery made from diamonds, platinum and/or gold – then buy it beforehand. If not, then hold on and get it together. A family heirloom could be a happy compromise: you give it to her on the day and tell her you'll go together to get it re-set for her in a modern style.

PS: Don't worry if you can't afford a big, fat diamond. If she's the girl for you it really doesn't matter.

What's my plan?

Be a man and have a plan.

But what happens if you've spent weeks – nay, months – trying to figure out how to do this thing and all you've come up with is taking her for a milkshake at the local faux American diner and popping the ring in her glass when she's not looking? Look, clearly originality is not your strong point, and although she probably won't say no, don't be surprised if she alters your proposal story when she's recounting it to her friends later. But if she loves you she'll say yes and it'll all work out in the end.

We will suggest an alternative, though: try a picnic somewhere pretty with a bottle of champagne. Honestly, you can't go wrong with that. (Unless you get robbed and she gets attacked by bees. Then it'll be bloody awful. But that probably won't happen.) Some more suggestions:

Surprise her. Don't give her a heart attack by jumping out of a bush at her local park or suddenly waking her up in the middle of the night with a 'Boo! Guess what?', but it's always a winner if she doesn't know it's coming. So avoid Valentine's day, then. And do it *before* you go on your romantic island holiday where she thinks it's likely to happen because all her friends have been secretly quizzing her about whether or

not you're going to propose (those romance-sucking witches). Even if she's the least presumptuous girl in the world, it will be on her mind.

NB: she will *love* going on holiday as a fiancée. But if you do want to do it on holiday, try do it near the beginning so she can bask in the glow for the rest of the time.

Make it romantic. Of course. But remember that romance doesn't have to be 1,000 candles and a private dinner at the fanciest restaurant in town; it can be a Sunday afternoon stroll along the beach where you always walk.

Don't lose sight of the ring. Thinking of getting a mate to sneakily scout ahead and put the ring in a shell that you'll 'happen upon' on your romantic beach stroll...? Honestly, it's not worth the stress. Even if it's the cheap temporary ring, chances are if it doesn't get stolen and your mate actually follows instructions (50/50, trust us) then there'll be a couple lying on top of it when you get there or a dog will run off with it or lightning will hit it. Rather pick up the shell and sneakily drop in the ring...

Get down on that knee. Bad knee? Tough tits, buddy. Make the sacrifice.

ActuallyASKher. 'I love you so much and I want to be with you forever' and then sliding the ring on her finger is all very well but you didn't actually ask her the question! 'Will you marry me?' 'Will you be my wife?' Any permutation that has 'will', 'you', 'marry', 'me' and a question mark in it will do. The question mark is essential otherwise it sounds like an order. You *will* marry me... Bad start to a lifetime together.

Have some champagne on stand-by. You're not being presumptuous; you're preparing to celebrate with your new fiancée. Sharing a can of Schwepps Sparkling Granadilla on the beach because you didn't bring anything else doesn't quite have the same *je ne sais quoi* as a bottle of bubbly.

Have a plan B. Even the best-laid schemes can go awry, so bear that in mind when you're concocting your grand scheme to be the most romantic human being in the world... The most likely spanners are inconsiderate weather gods who send rain when you want balmy sunshine with just the hint of a gentle zephyr, and an incompetent accomplice who hides your secret picnic basket in the wrong bush.

WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT?

Once she's said yes, try to hold on to that precious moment for as long as possible without telling anyone. Half an hour, an hour... whatever you can. Because within minutes of sending out that first announcement SMS you will be inundated with well-wishers calling to get all the details of the proposal. Prepare to hear them repeated ad nauseam over the coming days and weeks. Also ready yourself for at least a couple of SMSes asking 'So when's she due?' and, if you've been going out for more than two years, several along the line of 'About time, China!' Then it's engagement drinks and people toasting you at dinners and, best of all, a rather satisfying sense of pride. (And probably an increase in sexy times...)

***A note to women intending on popping the question.**

If you are a lesbian then fire away. If you are a heterosexual female preparing to ask your long-term boyfriend, then... just don't do it. There is no better way to emasculate your husband-to-be than pre-empting his proposal. Also it makes you look desperate. Which you may well be but don't take this away from him. Also, please note that the 'tradition' of asking a man to marry you on the 29th of February was made up by a woman who was tired of waiting for her man to propose.

PROPOSAL HEROES

There are so many great proposal stories out there, but your tolerance level for corniness will dictate what kind of proposal you personally deem heroic. Generally speaking, anything that would make a Care Bear cringe won't make it into the Heroic Proposal Hall of Fame. Nor will any story that has a prospective hero showing off how wealthy he is – so that tale you heard of the guy who whisked his girlfriend and her entire family off to New York so he could propose on top of the Empire State Building is out.

To be truly heroic takes effort, enthusiasm, originality and a sense of humour.

- ◆ Our first hero is a Welsh Rugby player living in London. Every Sunday, Will and his girlfriend, Sarah, would go to the local supermarket to do the weekly shop. On this particular day, Will was lagging behind as Sarah pushed the trolley around. Eventually he bent down to tie his shoelace and after taking an inordinate amount of time to do it, Sarah turned around and told him to hurry up. He looked up and started singing the Beatles song, *All You Need Is Love* at the top of his lungs. Slowly, 20 faux shoppers (his Welsh choir) stopped what they were doing, came up behind him and joined in. Out of his pocket he produced the ring and right there in the vegetable aisle on a Sunday morning he popped the question. What a hero. More recently, a local man followed suit, choosing Sandton City as his venue of choice. There was dancing and there was singing. And there were cameras. Check it out here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzEkLz-_6fM
- ◆ If that's all a little showy for you and your fiancée is a bit of a word-nerd, then consider the story of American Corey Newman and his (then girlfriend) Marlowe Epstein. Every Sunday, Marlowe would happily snuggle up with the *Washington Post* and complete the crossword. But one particular Sunday, she began to think she was losing her mind. The Answer to 37 across? 'Marlowe'. The answer to 39 Across? 'Epstein'. As the crossword unfolded and Marlowe rushed to scribble in the answers, the secret message from Corey appeared: "Marlowe Epstein, Will You Marry Me?" Her head shot up to tell Corey that something weird was going on with the crossword to see him kneeling before her, ring in hand. She, of course, said yes and Corey Newman is inducted into the proposal hero Hall of Fame.

PROPOSAL HORRORS

- ◆ Deliberately ruining her day as much as possible so as to 'make it up' by proposing when she's in tears. You are officially an asshole. (True story.)
- ◆ Proposing at someone else's wedding. Thunder Thief of note. (Again, true story.)
- ◆ Doing it at a restaurant in the food court over burgers. Surprising? Yes, but for all the wrong reasons. (Presumably true story.)
- ◆ Going online and doing it over Facebook. This doesn't need explaining and if it does you should just set yourself on fire now. (Must be a true story.)
- ◆ Doing it via Helium balloon. Right, this may require a bit more explaining...

The (Completely True) Helium Balloon Proposal Horror Story

Lefkos Hajji, a Londoner, decided that he wanted to propose to his girlfriend, Leanne. He had a plan. He decided to put the £6,000 engagement ring in a helium balloon and then pop it. 'Popping the question' – hilarious, right? Well, as it turns out, yes... As he left the balloon shop, he (how could this *not* happen?) let go of the balloon by mistake (with the ring already inside it) and watched in despair as it floated away. Poor Lefkos chased the balloon for two hours across London before he lost track of it. And Leanne, being the understanding woman that she is, refused to speak to him until he bought her a new ring.

PARTING TIP

Go out and buy a copy of *The Irreverent A-Z Wedding Guide: South Africa* – you could call it an engagement gift to your beloved. It's got all you (and her) need to know about getting married in South Africa in manageable, man-friendly writing, and once you've done the deed it will make your life a whole lot easier.

Good luck!