



Guest Seating Options for Buffets & Action Stations

An important part of reception planning is guest seating. As buffets and action stations have evolved to sophisticated options, the tone of the party can be controlled to a great extent by seating decisions.

The first question is whether you want to even have enough seating for everyone. Some couples choose to prompt their guests to circulate throughout the entire reception by deliberately offering too few seats. This allows the elderly and infirmed to sit throughout while others sit only while eating or resting. This is unconventional, but can be very successful provided the food stations are customized for the desired effect.

For those desiring a more traditional reception dinner, the key question is whether you wish to assign tables and/or seats or allow guests to choose their own. Seat assignments create order and comfort for many guests, but some brides prefer allowing guests the freedom to make their own choice. Buffets and action stations provide a bride with flexibility to make a choice.

Common Questions

- Q: You are planning a children's table, but you are not sure if certain young children will feel comfortable away from their parents.
- A: Good friends of mine once had an otherwise lovely reception ruined by a bride's choice to seat her nieces and nephews at a children's table without first conferring with their parents. Their two toddlers became scared, threw a fit and there was no room at the parents table to accommodate them. It was avoidable. Have a conversation with the parents of children before the seating decision are finalized. If possible involve a friend or family member who has children as they will know the right questions and be able to appreciate the children's issue.
- Q: Where to place friends who may not know others at the reception?
- A: Consider grouping together people who don't know each other but would get along, which is typically preferable to one stranger with seven old friends.

Q: You wish to foster conversation and avoid conflicts with your parents' friends and distant relatives, but lack all the background to manage that.

A: Ask your mother and mother-in-law to help in arranging those tables. They'll commonly relish the task of taking care of their peers, and be eager to help you.

When in doubt remember that your reception venue has dealt with seating issues hundreds of times, which the bride is dealing with it for the first time. Your reception venue wants you to have a terrific celebration and can provide many more helpful tips.

Aisle Dish is written by Meredith Thomas, Stoneleigh's in-house Event Consultant. If you would like assistance planning your special day, Meredith offers a complimentary one-hour consultation to all brides hosting their wedding at the Club and is available for further planning services at an additional fee. Contact Meredith at mthomas@stoneleighgolf.com or 540.338.4653 ext. 303.