

Issue

# Autumn 2026

QUARTERLY  
JOURNAL OF  
CELEBRANTS  
AUSTRALIA INC

  
**Celebrants Australia Inc.**  
*Inspiring ceremonies for life events*

## Next Member Function

The Christmas Party

## CALENDAR

### Member Meetings

March 10<sup>th</sup> 7pm  
May 12<sup>th</sup> 7pm  
July 28<sup>th</sup> 7pm (AGM)  
Sept 8<sup>th</sup> 7pm (OPD)  
Oct 13<sup>th</sup> 7pm  
Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>  
Christmas Party

### Committee Meetings

April 14<sup>th</sup> 7pm  
June 9<sup>th</sup> 7pm  
July 7<sup>th</sup> 7pm (Budget)  
Aug 11<sup>th</sup> 7pm  
Nov 10<sup>th</sup> 7pm  
Dec 8<sup>th</sup> 7pm

### Upcoming...

What will the New Year  
bring for you ?



## In this issue

Slack and AI P.2

Celebrants Role P.3

Wedding Vows P.4

Gentle Goodbye P.6

Statistics P.13

and more from P.14

## Welcome to the Autumn edition of the CAN the newsletter for our members

### Step into the world of Celebrants Australia

Craving inspiration, fresh ideas, or  
a touch of celebration magic?  
Explore our vibrant website at  
[www.celebrantsaustralia.com.au](http://www.celebrantsaustralia.com.au),  
where stunning visuals and  
thoughtful articles keep your  
celebrant spirit shining bright.

Members—make sure your profile  
photo and details are up to date so  
we can showcase your brilliance to  
the community.

Have questions or insights to  
share? Our Slack forum is buzzing  
with conversation, support, and  
creativity.

Take a moment to dive in—your  
celebrant journey deserves to  
sparkle.

### Membership Welcome

Our membership continues  
to increase with new  
members.

A warm welcome to:

Liesbeth Long

Michelle Marinella

Isabelle Knight

Kristal Lewis

Matt Morgan

Leigh Mazzer

Kim Raatjes

Kaye Hartog

Luke Koller

Megan Martin

## Funeral Celebrants

We encourage funeral celebrants to join Celebrants Australia.

We have many members who also perform funerals.

It also allows Funeral Celebrants to be included in our Professional Indemnity and Public Liability Insurance.

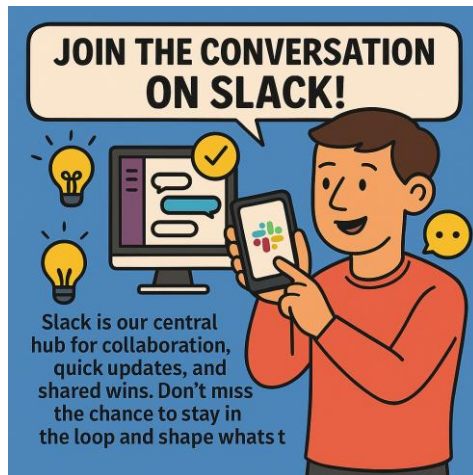
So tell all your funeral celebrant friends and colleagues about this magnificent offer.

## Student Celebrants

We did not want student celebrants to miss out.

A student membership is half price (only \$50) and access to the member forum is included.

Of course insurance will not apply and no voting rights but students will be offered upgrade to full membership upon registration.



## Using Slack

Celebrants Slack Forum is more than just our messaging app — it is our central hub for collaboration, quick updates, and shared wins.

By jumping into the conversation, you'll stay in the loop, get faster answers, and contribute to decisions as they happen.

Whether it is brainstorming ideas, sharing resources, or celebrating milestones, Slack keeps our momentum strong and our community connected.

Don't miss the chance to shape what's next — your voice belongs in the mix!



Make sure you are part of our celebrant forum community. You have a choice of Slack APP or simply use Slack in your browser.

Great to see questions from our newest members on the forum. Everyday, everyone learns

## Using AI

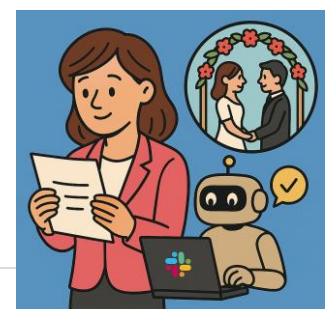
When using AI-generated content, it's important to remember that you are fully responsible for how that material is applied.

AI can be a wonderful tool for sparking ideas, shaping drafts, or helping you get started, but it doesn't replace your professional judgement, your legal obligations, or the standards expected in public-facing work.

This is especially true for ceremonies, where accuracy, appropriateness, and personalisation matter deeply.

Always take the time to review, refine, and adapt anything produced by AI so it truly reflects your voice, meets your ethical and legal responsibilities, and honours the people you're serving.

AI can assist—but the final accountability always rests with you.



## What is the Churchill Fellowship in Australia ?

*The Churchill Fellowship aims to provide these Australians with an opportunity to travel overseas and conduct research in their chosen area of study that is not readily available in Australia.*

This is an extract from Churchill Chatters, their newsletter.

If you're thinking about applying for a Churchill Fellowship in 2026, you should absolutely sit in on at least one information session. Even better, if you know someone who should apply, encourage them to attend.

These sessions are practical, welcoming and designed to remove the uncertainty from the application process. You'll hear directly from Churchill Fellows about their journeys, what helped them apply with confidence, and what they learned through the experience.

Applications open **9 am, 27 February**, so now is the time to explore your project, ask questions and get the clarity you need to determine whether this is your year to apply.

A Churchill Fellowship is open to people from all backgrounds and all fields of endeavour. What matters is curiosity, purpose and a commitment to bringing knowledge back to benefit others.

"Remember, be bold, have courage and back yourself."

Find a session and register here: <https://luma.com/ChurchillFellowshipInfoSession> or check out one of the [recorded on-sessions on our YouTube](#).

It would be great if some of our experienced celebrants applied and were able to get one. If I could get one, anyone can.

Grant Johnson

## Are you missing out on potential wedding leads ?

Take a moment to review your profile on the CA website and ensure everything is up to date.

Is your region correct?  
Is your email accurate?  
Is your mobile number current?

Does your photo truly represent you?

When someone clicks on your image, is the detail about you still relevant?

Why this matters:

- Couples want to see the real you.
- Fresh images show you're active and staying relevant.
- It helps keep you memorable.
- Reusing the same photo repeatedly can feel stale.
- You don't want to surprise people when they meet you in person!





# Building a Celebrant Brand That Feels Like You

In an industry full of fonts, colours, packages and promises, it's easy to think branding is about how you look.

But after years in this work — and hundreds of ceremonies — I've learned this:

Your brand isn't your logo.  
It's the experience people have of you.

Couples don't book a celebrant because of a tagline alone. They book because something about you feels familiar, safe, or aligned. Branding is simply the language that communicates that feeling — consistently.

## Start With Who You Are, Not Who's Booked Out

One of the biggest traps celebrants fall into is copying what seems to be working for others. The polished scripts. The “perfect” Instagram grid. The same phrases recycled across multiple websites. It might attract attention — but it rarely builds connection. The strongest celebrant brands are built when you understand:

- How you naturally speak
- How you hold space
- How you show up under pressure
- What couples consistently thank you for

That's the foundation. Everything else is just design.

## Consistency Builds Trust — Not Perfection

Couples don't need you to be everything. They need you to be **recognisable**.

Recognisable tone.

Recognisable energy.

Recognisable approach.

When your website, emails, social media and in-person meetings all feel like the same person, trust forms quickly. If each platform sounds different, couples hesitate — even if they can't articulate why.

A strong brand feels familiar long before the wedding day.



## Your Voice Matters More Than Your Words

Two celebrants can say the same thing and land very differently. Why?

Because tone carries meaning. Are you calm and grounding? Warm and conversational? Quietly confident? Light, humorous, and relaxed? Your brand should reflect how you *sound* when you speak to couples, not how you think you should sound online. Forced language creates distance. Natural language creates ease. Couples book comfort just as much as competence.

## Branding Is What You Do Repeatedly

Branding isn't built in one photoshoot or a website launch. It's built in:

- How you respond to emails
- How you listen in meetings
- How you guide couples through nerves
- How you handle moments when things don't go to plan

Every interaction reinforces your brand — or dilutes it. The most trusted celebrants aren't the loudest. They're the most reliable.

## Your Ideal Couples Feel Seen — Not Sold To

Strong branding doesn't try to appeal to everyone. It speaks clearly to the couples who will connect with you most. It reassures them that you understand what matters to them — emotionally, practically, and personally. When couples say, *"We felt like you were speaking directly to us,"* that's branding done right.

## A Brand That Feels Like You Is Sustainable

Trends change. Algorithms shift. Platforms come and go. But a brand rooted in who you genuinely are doesn't need constant reinvention. It grows with experience, deepens with confidence, and becomes easier to maintain over time. When your brand feels like you, showing up doesn't feel like performance. It feels like alignment.

## In the End

The goal isn't to be the most visible celebrant in the room. It's to be the one couples trust to hold one of the most important moments of their lives. Build a brand that reflects your values, your presence, and your way of working — and the right couples will recognise you long before you introduce yourself.

*Thanks to Frank Servello for this article.*





## Enquiries - How do you handle them?

There's nothing quite like the buzz of an enquiry landing in your inbox, especially when they sound like *your* kind of people and you're actually free for their date.

Which is why the silence afterwards can hit harder than you would like to admit. You reply quickly, you expect to hear back and then nothing. Then overthinking kicks in.

Over the years, you may have to do some serious mindset and resilience work around not hearing back from couples (wedding celebrant life). Alongside that, you can develop a practical follow-up system that brings proper closure, both mentally and administratively to any enquiry process.

### **Here's what you could do:**

Have a simple, standard follow-up process for every enquiry.

Send your initial reply. If you haven't heard back after five days, you send a follow-up email, mainly to check they received the first one and to see if they have any questions.

Two days later, if you have their number, you can send a short text in case your emails didn't get through (it does happen!).

If you still don't hear back, you can close the enquiry, mentally and practically.

Sometimes couples do come back after that window, and that's lovely (if you are still free). But the week-long process works for some. In a busy wedding environment, often with multiple enquiries for the same date, you may not be able to hold the date indefinitely. Does your brain work well with open loops?

The key is deciding what time limit works for *you* and how many follow-ups feel aligned. Consider, three touchpoints (initial email, follow-up email, text) as enough. Beyond that feels like chasing, and you don't want anyone to feel like they're being chased.

That's the practical side.

Mentally, you can build resilience around this too. Not everyone who enquires will book you. Not everyone who seems perfect on paper will choose you. Couples/clients make the decision that feels right for them.



## Enquiries Continued

People are busy, sometimes overwhelmingly so and while a week might not be enough for some, it may be enough for you. You may want to hold that boundary for your own sanity.

Please don't take their silence personally. Even if it occasionally feels a bit rude, you can let it go. Are you happy to give an enquiry closure without ever hearing back and don't dwell on it. (Yes, this took time!)

And one last thing: please follow up.

I've heard celebrants say they never do and honestly, that's crazy to me. I've secured plenty of bookings from couples who missed my first email, forgot to reply, or only responded after a text.

Following up when done professionally, isn't desperate or pushy. It's good business.

Hope this helps,  
Judy Brooks.



## FORCED MARRIAGE IN AUSTRALIA

I attended a zoom session last October presented by one of the other celebrant organisations and it was very interesting. And it's something of which each of us, as celebrants, need to be sensitive, aware and mindful as we meet new couples. The session was presented by Elsie Cheung, from Anti-Slavery Australia and what is presented here is my own brief summary and interpretation of her presentation.

**What is slavery?** It can be:

- Coercion – force, pressure, abuse, control
- Threats for non-agreement or non-compliance
- Deception – lies and tricks

**And what is forced marriage?** It is any marriage which occurs without free and informed consent. No one can give legal consent if they are under 16 years of age, and those who are 16-17 require court approval. The key difference between an arranged marriage and a forced marriage is freedom to consent.

**Who are most at risk?**

- women and girls
- children and young people
- people with disability
- Australian citizens, permanent residents, and all visa types.
- LGBTQI+ community members
- Those from socially conservative backgrounds

**What are the drivers of marriage pressure?**

- This is in your best interests
- Marriage will strengthen your connection to your community
- You will meet your community's expectations
- You will maintain your family's reputation
- You will keep or restore honour
- Rigid gender norms and roles
- Marriage will help to ensure your safety and a better quality life
- You must keep wealth within the family

As celebrants we must now meet with each party separately prior to the marriage to satisfy ourselves that the marriage is one of free choice by them both. However, consent is not always clear and consistent, and it can change over time. It can be particularly difficult to withdraw from a planned marriage as the wedding date gets closer. If we as celebrants have doubts over time we should arrange additional one-on-one conversations if deemed necessary, or outside professional guidance or referral. And all conversations must be notated.



## Forced Marriage (continued)

### Specific indicators

- Siblings or family members have been forced to marry
- An engagement or marriage is sudden or unexpected
- If parties don't know each other, or not know much about each other
- Being young and wearing expensive jewellery
- Feeling helpless, anxious, or that they have no choice
- An upcoming overseas trip after the wedding from which a vulnerable person may be kept in a foreign country

### Other general indicators

- Unexplained absence from school, uni, work
- Mental health or mood changes
- Early or unwanted pregnancy or abortion
- Social withdrawal
- Activities being chaperoned by family
- Phone or internet use being monitored by family
- Pressure to adhere to behaviour, expectations, traditions, cultural norms
- Family or community members have control over someone's life choices
- Feeling hopeless and helpless about their future

### Meetings with each party

- Meet separately
- Listen to each person's preferences
- Conduct meeting in a culturally appropriate way
- If needed, use a professional accredited interpreter
- Do not contact 3<sup>rd</sup> parties
- Document each meeting

### Tips for success

- Build trust and show that you are safe to talk to
- Don't be judgemental
- Respect values, choices, strengths
- Maintain confidentiality

Be culturally sensitive and aware of unconscious biases.

## Forced Marriage (continued)

### Questions to explore

- What does a usual day look like for you?
- How is marriage talked about in your family?
- How are decisions made in your family?
- What options do you have if you are not happy with a family decision?
- What would be the consequences of not accepting a family decision?
- Would you feel safe or at risk if you did not go ahead with marriage?

### Safety and assessing risk

- Does the person feel safe now?
- Timing – is the pressure for the marriage to occur soon?
- What is the age of the person? Are they quite young? Appear vulnerable or under pressure?
- Is couple planning to travel soon? Would it be at a risky place?

### How to provide support

- Reassurance of support, availability to talk, meet as and where required.
- Inform them of their rights
- With their consent, make referrals to other support **agencies**

### Referral options

#### **1. Anti-Slavery Australia / My Blue Sky**

Tel. 02 9514 8115

Email: [asalegal@uts.edu.au](mailto:asalegal@uts.edu.au)

Mybluesky.org.au

#### **2. Australian Federal Police**

Tel. 131237

#### **3. Forced Marriage Specialist Support Programme:**

##### ***Life Without Barriers***

1800 403 213

#### **4. Emergency Services**

If person is in immediate danger call 000.

Thanks to Grant Johnson for this article

## Welcome to our special series, this time on AI scams



### Scam Alert: AI Phishing & QR Code Fraud Are on the Rise

As we step into 2026, cybercriminals are getting more sophisticated — and unfortunately, more convincing. Two scams are making headlines right now: AI-generated phishing emails and fake QR codes. Both are designed to trick even the most tech-savvy among us.

#### AI-Powered Phishing

Scammers are now using artificial intelligence to craft emails that look eerily real. These messages might impersonate colleagues, government agencies, or trusted brands — complete with polished grammar, logos, and urgent calls to action. One click could lead to malware, stolen credentials, or financial loss.

#### QR Code Scams

QR codes are everywhere — menus, posters, parking meters. But scammers are placing fake codes over real ones, redirecting users to malicious websites that harvest personal data or payment info. Because QR codes look harmless, they're easy to overlook.

#### How to Stay Safe

- **Slow down.** Don't click or scan anything without checking the source.
- **Verify senders.** Look closely at email addresses and URLs before responding.
- **Inspect QR codes.** If it's a sticker or looks tampered with, don't scan it.
- **Use two-factor authentication.** It adds a layer of protection even if your password is compromised.
- **Report suspicious activity.** Help others stay safe by flagging scams to Scamwatch or your local cybercrime unit.

#### Final Thought

Scams are evolving fast — but awareness is our best defence. Share this with your family and friends to help keep our community informed and protected.

compiled by Mario M Anders

# What's New for Celebrants in 2026



**A fresh year brings fresh energy — and the celebrant world is evolving in beautiful ways.** Couples are seeking deeper meaning, calmer experiences, and ceremonies that feel unmistakably personal. Here's what's shaping the landscape for 2026.

## **Personalisation Takes Centre Stage**

Couples are moving further away from “template ceremonies” and leaning into storytelling, symbolism, and rituals that reflect who they are. Celebrants who can weave narrative, humour, emotion, and cultural nuance into their ceremonies will be in high demand.

## **Intimate Gatherings With Big Heart**

Micro-weddings and elopements continue to grow — not as a compromise, but as a conscious choice. Couples want connection, presence, and a ceremony where every moment feels intentional. This shift gives celebrants more space to craft meaningful, bespoke experiences.

## **Calm, Grounded Ceremonies**

One of the strongest emotional trends is the desire for calm. Couples want a ceremony that feels steady, warm, and unhurried. Celebrants are increasingly valued not just for their words, but for the sense of reassurance and grounded leadership they bring to the day.

## **Creative Venues & Flexible Formats**

From backyards to boutique hotels, cliff tops, gardens, and private homes, couples are choosing spaces that feel personal rather than traditional. Celebrants who are adaptable — and confident in a wide range of environments — will thrive.

## **Sustainability With Soul**

Eco-conscious choices continue to influence ceremony design. Couples are opting for low-waste rituals, local florals, digital communication, and meaningful simplicity. Celebrants may see more requests for environmentally mindful wording and symbolic acts.

## **Blended Cultures & Modern Traditions**

More couples are blending cultural elements, reinventing rituals, or creating entirely new traditions. Celebrants who embrace diversity and inclusivity will play a key role in helping couples honour their identities with authenticity and respect.

## What's New for Celebrants in 2026 continued

### Tech Behind the Scenes — Heart at the Front

AI tools and digital planning platforms are becoming normal in the background, helping couples stay organised. But the ceremony itself remains deeply human. Celebrants who use tech to streamline admin — while keeping the ceremony warm and personal — will stand out.

### What This Means for Celebrants

2026 is shaping up to be a year where **connection, creativity, and calm leadership** define the celebrant role. Couples are looking for someone who can:

- Tell their story with heart
- Create a ceremony that feels like *them*
- Bring steadiness to an emotional moment
- Honour culture, identity, and individuality
- Craft an experience that feels intentional, not performative

It's a beautiful time to be a celebrant — and an exciting year ahead.

### Looking Ahead

The year 2026 presents significant opportunities for celebrants who prioritise professionalism, adaptability, and personalised service. Couples are seeking ceremonies that are authentic, intentional, and reflective of their unique identities. Celebrants who respond to these expectations with clarity, care, and creativity will continue to play a vital role in shaping meaningful life events.

! source from *LinkedIn, Nectarcc, Blackthorn*

compiled by Mario M Anders

# Consent and the Celebrant

Did you know that the origin of the Best Man stems actually from non-consensual marriage?

In days of old, when a small village was short of maidens, a prospective groom would find the strongest & best fighter in the village, that's the Best Man, and together they would head off over the hill to the next village where a prospective 'Bride' would be selected from a distance. Kidnapping her, they would return to their own village and rush to the church for a quick marriage ceremony. The 'Bride' would be held by the groom's left hand so that she could not escape, thus freeing the Groom's sword (right) arm. Hence, brides traditionally stand to the left. Meanwhile, the Best Man, that best fighter, would stand nearby to fend off the bride's father should he come to rescue the poor lass.

Jump now to around the 1950's or so when it was still considered shameful for an unmarried person to have a child, and so teenage pregnancies were either hidden, or young couples might have been forced to marry by their parents to conceal the perceived terrible family 'shame'. Marriages of this type, especially in the USA, where guns are rife, were sometimes referred to as 'shotgun weddings'.

When the Marriage Act 1961 came into law in Australia, there was a focus on consent, and so, fortunately, we have come a long way, or at least we all like to believe so. Subsequent amendments to the Act and the addition of other supporting legislation have given a greater emphasis to ensure real, informed and active consent of both parties is established before a marriage can be solemnised.

In March 1978, The Hague Convention on Celebration and Recognition of the Validity of Marriages implemented, the provision of Article 23 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which places the right of marriage of men and women of marriageable age in the foreground, and bases marriage on the free and full consent of the intending spouses facilitating the celebration of marriages and ensuring the recognition of the validity of marriages across national borders.

Arranged marriages are, of course, different in that family or community members may play a leading role in introducing or choosing someone's spouse, with both parties freely consenting to the marriage. Arranged marriages are legal in Australia if there is active and real consent. However, undue pressure may be placed on a party to the marriage if there is a change of mind after a large dowry has been paid, and so consent should always be verified. There is an example later on in this article, where we will look at the absence of consent.



## Consent and the Celebrant cont'd

Forced marriage is when a person enters a marriage without freely and fully consenting to the marriage because they have been coerced through manipulation, control or violence, threatened, deceived by trickery or told lies, or because a party is incapable of understanding the nature and effect of a marriage ceremony for reasons that may include mental incapacity, tender age, or perhaps intoxication. Be aware that intoxication via drugs or alcohol results in a reduced capacity and so falls into the same category, in that the absence of consent or inability to consent is no consent at all.

Everyone in Australia has the right to choose who, when and if they marry. Making someone get married, marrying someone who is being forced into a marriage, or helping to make this happen, is never acceptable and is a crime in Australia with penalties ranging from 7 to 25 years gaol. Forced marriage is a slavery-like practice and an abuse of human rights.

Children under the age of 16 cannot marry in Australia because they cannot legally agree. It is also illegal to take or send someone to another country to force them to get married.

Young women and girls are most at risk, but people of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, cultures or religions could fall victim to forced marriage.

It was in July 2024, that **Sakina Muhammad Jan** became the first person in Australia to be gaoled for breaking forced marriage laws after she ordered her 21 year old daughter **Ruqia Haidari**, to marry West Australian Mohammad Ali Halimi in November 2019. Halimi subsequently murdered **Ruqia Haidari** and he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

It should be pointed out that a Civil Celebrant was not involved in that matter.

Under Australia's [Criminal Code](#), the penalty for forced marriage includes jail for up to 7 years, or 9 years if the person forced into marriage is under the age of 18. Jan was sentenced to three years' gaol but could be out after only 1 year.

If someone being forced to marry is moved, either within Australia, or to, or from another country, for the marriage, this could be [human trafficking](#) for which the penalty includes jail for up to 20 years, or 25 years for child trafficking.

Since June 2024, Celebrants have been required to confirm real and active consent in private and separate meetings with the parties to a marriage.

The Act does not specify when that meeting is to take place other than that it occurs before the ceremony, but if you leave it to the last minute, the parties may still feel pressured into compliance.

## Consent and the Celebrant cont'd

Examples where consent is not real and active, resulting in cancellation, include:

- A man in an aged care facility lodged a NOIM when he attempted to marry a woman of wealth who was a patient in a high care section of the same facility. A visiting doctor initially wrote a letter of support, but the Celebrant and nurses questioned the patient's cognitive ability and whether there was a real relationship, and so medical approval was quickly rescinded, and the Celebrant refused to proceed.
- The Celebrant arrived at a venue to find the couple and their entire entourage had been drinking for hours, and so were intoxicated, which meant that the couple were incapable of giving real consent. The Celebrant offered a Commitment ceremony instead, but when that was declined, the Celebrant was threatened with violence because of his refusal to proceed. The Celebrant simply left to ensure his safety, retaining the full fee as per his contract. The venue then called Police and had the entire entourage evicted. The couple tried to take legal action but were entirely unsuccessful.
- A party to the marriage had presented evidence of divorce to the Celebrant but the fiancé was not informed, and the party attempted to conceal that personal history by preventing the fiancé from reading the NOIM in full, and attempted to persuade the Celebrant into a conspiracy of silence, and so was not only deceiving the fiancé but pressuring the Celebrant into an illegal collusion which had to be declined.

There is also a notorious instance where a Celebrant conducted a marriage ceremony in a hospital where a terminal patient was unconscious. Obviously, there was no active consent, and so the marriage was immediately annulled, and the Celebrant was prosecuted.

Consent can, of course, be withdrawn at any time right up until vows are exchanged, but it is a brave party to marriage that revokes consent mid-ceremony, and that is why we should continually and repeatedly reaffirm consent at every opportunity.

To avoid conflict and distress, preparation is the key.

Let couples know the steps in the process to marriage, including the NOIM, the DONLIM and at Consent meetings. Reaffirm consent at every opportunity. Let them know that consent can be withdrawn at any time, right up until the exchange of vows, so that they are imbued with the confidence of someone who is fully aware and informed. You can throw in the question before and during the ceremony: *"Do you wish to marry today?"*; and then pause for the answer.

When the law changed to require Consent meetings, there were some celebrants who were very anxious, fearing what would happen if a Ceremony was suddenly cancelled with guests and family at the ready but the obvious question to ask of those celebrants is *"What did you do before?"*, because consent has always been required.

## Consent and the Celebrant cont'd

The only thing that changed was the requirement that we have separate consent meetings. If you weren't confirming consent before, your weddings could be challenged and disallowed?

A support person can, of course, be present at consent meetings, but care should be taken to ensure that the support person is not in a position to coerce consent. If, for instance, a person is pressuring a couple to marry, obviously, the person should not be allowed to be present at the consent meeting.

### **How can you help a person at risk of forced marriage to stay safe?**

It is important that you always act in the best interests of a person at risk of a forced marriage, by being mindful of their safety as well as your own.

The [Forced Marriage Community Pack](#), is available in a range of languages on the Department of Home Affairs' website, and provides information and resources on forced marriage.

Marriage celebrants may wish to download fact sheets or the small fold-away booklets so that they can be provided to the person suspected to be at risk of forced marriage, if **it is safe to do so**. It is important to refer the person to the right place where they can get appropriate advice and assistance.

### **Care should be taken to ensure that the person suspected to be at risk is not put in danger.**

You can then help protect a person at risk of a forced marriage, and protect yourself, by:

- **dialling Triple Zero (000) if you have immediate concerns for your safety, the safety of another person, or there is an emergency**
- If there is no immediate risk of harm but there are indicators of forced marriage present, call 131 AFP (131 237) or complete the online report a crime form on the human trafficking page of the AFP website.
- ensuring you do not attempt to set up a meeting with the person and their family or community members to discuss the situation, or contact family or community members, if you do not have the express permission of the person
- remembering that other people may read your emails, text messages or other written communications
- providing the party with information about forced marriage and services that can help them
- meeting in a safe and private place, and

- if using an interpreter to communicate with a person suspected to be at risk of forced marriage, consider that the interpreter may know the person, their family or their community.
- You can also provide anonymous information about criminal activity to Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or [www.crimestoppers.com.au](http://www.crimestoppers.com.au).

The following specialist community organisations may also be able to provide help and advice:

➤ **[Anti-Slavery Australia](#)**

Tel: 02 9514 9662

Email: [antislavery@uts.edu.au](mailto:antislavery@uts.edu.au)

➤ **[Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights](#)**

Tel: 03 9481 3000

➤ **[The Freedom Partnership—Salvation Army](#)**

Tel: 02 9211 5794

Email: [endslavery@aue.salvationarmy.org.au](mailto:endslavery@aue.salvationarmy.org.au)

<https://www.modernslavery.gov.au/about-modern-slavery/types-modern-slavery/forced-marriage>

<https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/rr11.pdf>

By Lou Szymkow, Feb 2026

**Thanks very much Lou for writing that article!**

Lou has also written a consent brochure which can be found on our website in our Member Access section, filed under Wedding Resources and Consent.

## A Birthday Garden.

"When my daughter turned one, I didn't want the usual mountain of toys, clothes, or gadgets that would lose their shine after a few weeks. I wanted something that could last, something that could grow right alongside her. So instead of filling the house with plastic toys and wrapping paper, I decided to fill the yard with life.

When I sent out her first birthday invitations, I added a small note at the bottom. It said, "Instead of a gift, please bring a perennial flower or plant to help us start a birthday garden."

Some people didn't quite get it at first. My mum called and said, "You don't want toys? Not even one?" And I laughed and said, "No, Mum, I want something that doesn't need batteries and won't end up in a closet."

When the day came, the backyard turned into something magical. The fence line was dotted with pots, shovels, and bags of soil. Friends came carrying flowers wrapped in brown paper, and neighbours arrived holding tiny saplings in their arms. There were lavender and daisies, coneflowers and hostas, hydrangeas, roses, and lilies. My best friend brought a baby lilac bush, saying, "It'll smell like spring when she's older." And her grandparents brought a small Maple tree — our garden's crowning centre, the heart that would one day spread its branches wide above everything else.

That day, we planted it all. My husband dug the big hole for the Maple, and everyone else worked together, knees in the dirt, laughter floating in the air. The smell of soil and cake mixed together in the breeze. My daughter — tiny and clapping in her high chair — had no idea what was happening, but she laughed every time someone shouted, "Another one planted!" It was the kind of day that felt like sunshine even if the sky had been grey.

We called it her birthday garden.

Every year since, we've taken her picture in front of that garden. On her second birthday, she stood barefoot in the grass, clutching a flower with both hands. By her fourth, she was helping water them, her tiny watering can spilling more on her shoes than the soil. On her seventh, she picked her favourite flower — a purple coneflower that had come back faithfully every summer.

And now, she's turning eleven. The Maple tree her grandparents planted is taller than our fence, its leaves spreading wide like an umbrella. The flowers fill every corner now — colours bursting from the earth like celebration itself. Some have multiplied, some have drifted and found their own spots to grow. It's become a wild, beautiful mix of every hand that once helped create it.

This year, I took her photo in that same garden again. She stood in front of the Maple with her hair down, sunlight weaving through the branches above her, and I couldn't help but tear up a little. Not just because of how much she's grown, but because I could see, in that single frame, the kindness of everyone who once believed in this little idea.

Each flower carries a memory — her godmother's hydrangea blooms blue every summer, my dad's daffodils are the first to appear in spring, and the roses from our next-door neighbour still open in June no matter how hot the summer gets. Every single one of them came from a person who loved her enough to plant something that lasts.

## A Birthday Garden continued

And every year, when I step into that garden, I realize how special that is. These weren't just gifts; they were living promises. They remind me that beauty doesn't have to fade — not if you care for it.

Sometimes I tell friends about it when they're planning baby showers or weddings. I say, "Start a garden instead." When someone gets married, ask guests to bring one perennial each — imagine how that couple could walk through their backyard years later and say, "That one came from our wedding day." Or when a baby is born, instead of a bouquet that lasts a week, gift a flower that returns every year — a living symbol that grows with the child.

The truth is, we live in a world that's overflowing with stuff. Toys that get replaced, decorations that get tossed, clothes that go out of style before the tags come off. But we never have too many plants. You can never have too much life.

There's something healing about tending to something that grows because of love. There are days when I go out there early in the morning with my coffee and just walk through it. I brush my fingers over the petals and leaves, remembering where each one came from. There's one patch that never grew properly — a few tiny plants that didn't make it through their first winter — and even that reminds me of something tender and true: that not everything will thrive, but everything that's given in love leaves a mark.

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Every spring, my daughter helps me prune and replant, her hands a little surer each year. She tells me which flowers she thinks are "winning" this season, and she laughs when I remind her that her Maple tree will always win. She's starting to understand that the garden isn't just hers — it's a reflection of everyone who's ever loved her, all growing together in one place.

Last week, we added a new plant — a small pink rosebush that she picked herself. "It's for Grandma," she said, because her grandmother passed away last winter, and the garden felt like the right place to keep her close. We planted it together, side by side in the dirt, the same way we did when she was one — though this time her hands were steady, and she didn't need my help holding the trowel.

When we were done, she looked at me and said, "It feels like she's here now." And I nodded, because she was right. The garden had become a quiet kind of family album — one that didn't need pages or ink, only soil and sun and memory.

Sometimes, when people visit, they ask where we got all the flowers. I smile and say, "From love."

Because that's really what it is — a love that blooms over and over again. A garden built not from money, but from care. A reminder that the best gifts are the ones that don't fade away.

As my daughter grows, the garden will too. One day, when she's older and maybe has a yard of her own, I'll help her take a few clippings — some roots, a few seeds — and start her own patch of colour wherever she goes. It'll be a little piece of home, a continuation of every kindness that ever took root here.

And maybe, years from now, when she takes a photo of her own child standing under that Maple tree, she'll remember that her first birthday gift wasn't something she could hold — it was something that would hold her for the rest of her life."

**Thank you to Judy for that moving story with no apparent author**

And finally.....

## How Much Did The Average Australian Wedding Cost In 2025?

The average cost of a wedding in Australia in 2025 ranged from \$36,000 to \$51,000. This broad range reflects, of course, each couple's diverse preferences and choices for their special day.

| Wedding Expense  | Average Cost | What to Consider                                                                                                                               |
|------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Venue            | \$14,758     | Considered one of the most substantial expenses. Booking popular venues may require advance planning, potentially at least 12 months ahead.    |
| Bridal Gown      | \$2,304      | Choices include custom-made, brand new, or second-hand gowns with adjustments. Hiring a dress is also an option for budget-conscious brides.   |
| Flowers          | \$1,844      | Costs vary based on the type and quantity of flowers. Exploring fake flowers could be a cost-effective alternative to real floral decorations. |
| Catering         | \$5,429      | Typically charged per head, costs increase with a higher number of guests. Consider your guest list size when estimating catering expenses.    |
| Photography      | \$3,164      | Preferences for candid or posed photos, or a combination, affect the photographer's time commitment and, subsequently, the overall cost.       |
| Entertainment    | \$1,080      | Costs vary based on the choice of entertainment, such as hiring a DJ or a live band for the reception.                                         |
| Wedding Car Hire | \$1,137      | Cost depends on the number of vehicles needed and the duration of hire.                                                                        |

And of course it varies from state to state. And if you are interested in the details then I refer you to the webpage which has a lot of information, much more than I can reproduce here.

Please visit the website of Lauriston House in Sydney

<https://lauristonhouse.com.au/how-much-did-the-average-australian-wedding-cost-in-2025/>

Our thanks to Trudy for this information

**And a stop press last minute news as an addendum to our newsletter.**



The below document was authored by Jennifer Ryder and which was recently printed in an edition of 'Unwind' magazine - this mag is distributed to venues in the Gippsland region free.

The article was in conjunction with a 'wedding special' they were running over the summer term and I have no idea how I was asked, but I wrote the attached on 'Tips for Writing Your Own Vows'.

*Thanks to Jennifer for the copy.*

**The question –**

**Do you have any tips for newlyweds when picking a celebrant?**

### **Tips for Newlyweds When Choosing a Celebrant**

Choosing a marriage celebrant is one of the most emotional and significant decisions a couple will make together. A celebrant does far more than simply officiate legally—they become your storyteller, emotional anchor, and guide throughout the ceremony. Their responsibilities include not only assisting with the completion, lodging, and compliance of all necessary legal documents, but also helping to design the structure and flow of your ceremony. They offer support with writing vows, personalising scripts, and providing calm direction while managing the logistics on your special day.

Before you meet with potential celebrants, take some time to reflect together on what you want from your ceremony. Consider whether you prefer the occasion to be formal, relaxed, quirky, spiritual, or poetic. Think about how personal you want the ceremony to feel, and whether there are any cultural, spiritual, or family traditions you'd like to include. Clarifying these aspects ahead of time will help you find someone whose style truly matches your values and vision.

Remember, you're not just hiring a service, you're inviting someone into one of the most intimate moments of your lives. It's important to "meet and feel the energy". Most celebrants offer a free consultation, so use this opportunity to assess their warmth, presence, and communication style. Notice whether they listen deeply and ask meaningful questions. Ask them how they will personalise your ceremony and how they will support you in writing your vows. Be sure to check their availability, fees, and what's included in their service, such as a PA system or rehearsal.

An experienced celebrant will often take the lead and provide the information you need before you even have to ask. Still, it's helpful to come prepared with questions such as: Are you a fully authorised celebrant? What's included in your fee? How do you assist with ceremony and vow writing? Do you perform multiple weddings in a single day? What is your backup plan in case you're unwell or unable to attend due to an emergency?

Take some time to look at the celebrant's website and social media profiles. See if their tone resonates with you and if they present themselves in an authentic and engaging way. Check for testimonials that speak to their emotional connection and professionalism. Most importantly, trust your instincts. Beyond all credentials and styles, how you feel is what matters most. Do you feel seen, heard, and supported? The right celebrant will bring calm, joy, and meaning to your day. Sometimes, the first celebrant you meet might be the perfect fit. If someone feels right for you, trust that feeling and consider engaging them for your special day.

## Do you have any tips for newlyweds when writing their own vows?

### Tips for Newlyweds When Writing Their Own Vows

Writing your own vows is one of the most intimate and creative parts of the wedding journey. This is your opportunity to speak your truth, honour your unique love story, and share your hopes for the future together. Here's a practical guide to help you through this special process:

### Write from the Heart

Begin by setting aside time to reflect quietly on what your partner means to you. Consider questions such as: “What do I love most about my partner?”, “What moments define our relationship?”, and “What promises feel most sacred to me?”. Let your feelings lead the way before focusing on structure—emotion is the foundation of meaningful vows.

### Using a Gentle Structure

Organise your thoughts with a simple flow. You might start by affirming your love (“I love you because...”), recalling a defining moment (“I knew we were meant to be when...”), making your promises (“I promise/vow to...”), and sharing your vision for the future (“Together, I see us...”). This provides a natural progression that makes your vows easy to follow and heartfelt.

### Speak in Your Own Voice

Your vows should sound like you. Whether you’re poetic, playful, or plainspoken, authenticity is more powerful than polish. Avoid trying to sound overly formal or ‘wedding-y’. Speak as you would to your partner in everyday life, your own voice is enough.

### Draw Inspiration from Others, but Stay True to Your Story

It can help to read real vow examples, poems, or love letters for inspiration. You might borrow a rhythm or a metaphor but let your own story shine through. Some couples use classic lines like “for better or worse”, then add personal touches, such as “I vow to always make you tea when you’re tired.”

### Balance Romance with Realism

Keep your vows grounded by balancing romance with honesty about everyday life. For example: “I vow to love you even when we’re tired, stressed, or disagree,” or “I promise to keep choosing you, every day.” This honours the commitment that extends well beyond your wedding day.

### Keep It Concise

Aim for vows that take about 1–2 minutes to say aloud. This is usually enough time to be meaningful without feeling overwhelming for you or your guests.

### Practice, but Let Emotion Lead on the Day

Read your vows aloud a few times to get comfortable, but don’t over-rehearse. Allow yourself to feel the emotion in the moment, it’s perfectly okay if your voice shakes, if you ad-lib, or if you need to pause and take a breath. Let your love and sincerity shine above all else.