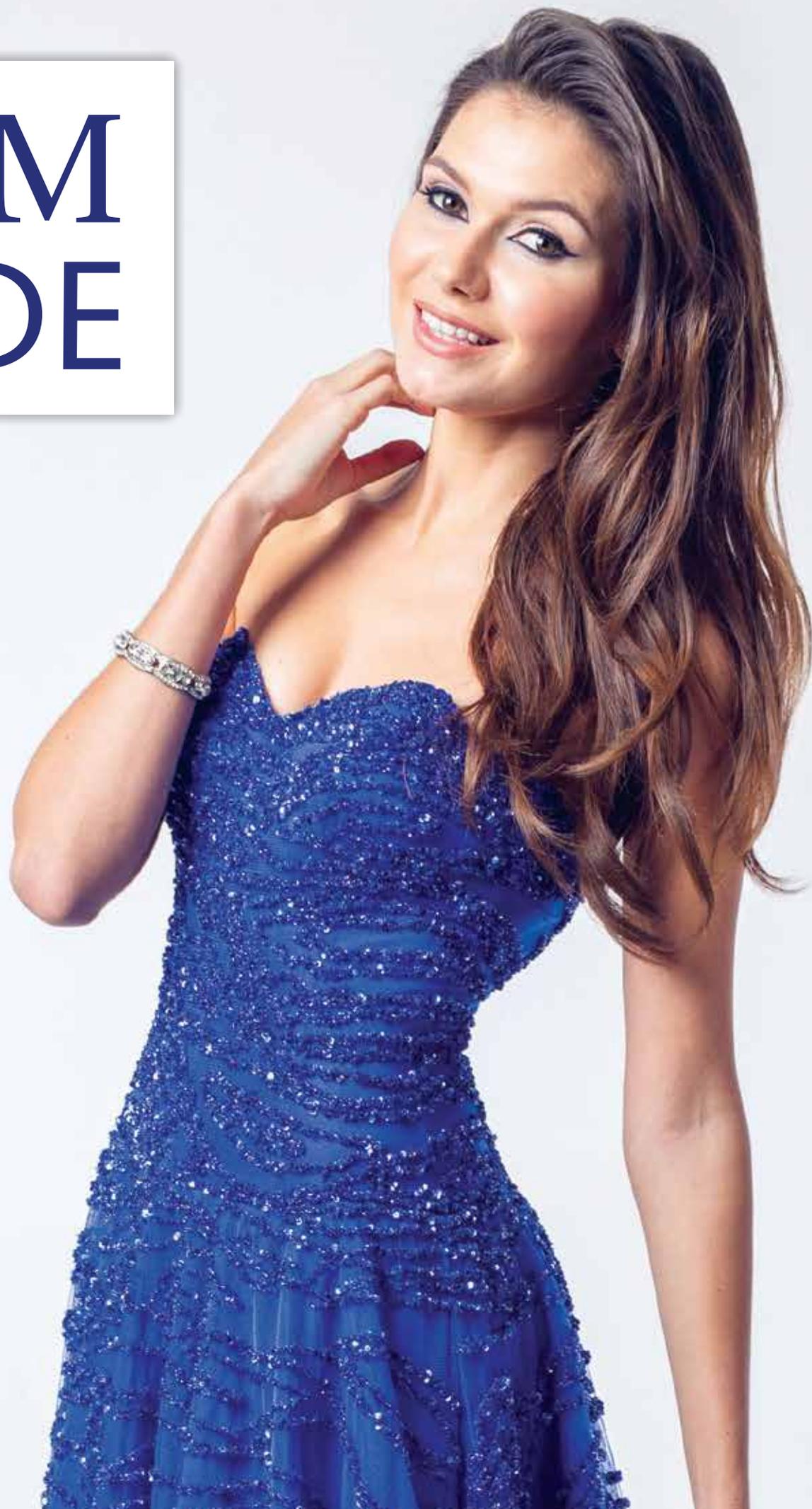


PROM GUIDE



Short or Long Dress?

When it comes to the perfect prom dress, you may already have a preferred color in mind. But color is just the beginning.

One of the biggest questions prom-goers ask themselves this time of year is: Short or long?

For the traditionalists helping their daughters get ready for prom this year, this may seem like a no-brainer. Prom wear has in the past been synonymous with ball gowns and floor-length dresses. But as time has passed, a shorter length dress has become a more popular option.

Short or long, the key to selecting your dress for the evening comes down to comfort. Are you more comfortable in a flowing gown that evokes a traditional, formal feel? Or are you looking to shake things up with a shorter option more representative of a contemporary event?

No matter your decision, it's important to always try on your gown before purchasing. Internet dress sales have become popular for their convenience, but shopping at your local dress shop comes with the benefits of working with an expert and having an opportunity to try on as many dresses as you want.

SHORT DRESSES

Maybe you have always worn shorter dresses to events such as weddings or dances. You may be more comfortable in this type of dress, so why change that for prom? Here are a couple questions to ask yourself before settling on a shorter prom dress:

- What is my body type? Shorter prom dresses can work with any

shape or stature but are most flattering on a shorter girl who may otherwise have trouble finding a longer gown that fits well. Ask your prom dress consultant what kinds of options their store has in shorter dresses.

- What will the weather be like? Short equals cold. If your spring season is notoriously chilly, it may be an unwise choice to opt for a shorter dress — especially if parts of the event are outside. Think this through before making your purchase.

LONG DRESSES

Long dresses have never really waned in popularity. There is something elegant and timeless about slipping on a flowing gown that touches the ankle or the floor.

Here are a couple of questions to ask yourself when considering a long gown:

- Can I dance comfortably? The slow dance songs at proms past are slowing being phased out by tracks of a faster pace. You want your dress to accommodate. Break out a few moves when trying on longer dresses. Don't be shy. You want to know what to expect on the dance floor if you choose a longer gown.

- Does it fit my budget? Long dresses naturally will demand a higher price simply because there is more material that goes into creating one. Make sure a longer dress works with your budget.



Handling Prom Costs

Have a great time, kids, because prom comes with a hefty price tag for Mom and Dad.

According to the most recent data put together by Visa in 2014, the average household spends \$978 on prom.

That figure is slightly lower than years past, including 2013 when families spent more than \$1,100 on clothes, limousine, rentals, tickets and dinner. It is the first decrease in a few years. The average prom price in 2011 was only \$807.

Here are a couple of interesting stats from the study:

- The high end of prom spending came in California, Washington and Oregon, with families footing a bill of more than \$1,100 for prom.
- Midwestern and Southern families spend the least at \$835 and \$926, respectively.

Even while trending downward on the price scale, the cost of prom doesn't look to dramatically drop any time soon. Dresses and tuxedos are only becoming more expensive as the cost of materials to make them continues to climb. Schools are paying less to host and coordinate proms, as their budgets are becoming tighter.

All of these factors lead to more spending at home to make sure your high-schoolers have the time of their life. There are some steps you can take to make sure your son or daughter doesn't dance away with your wallet.

SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY

Especially if your high-schooler has

a part-time job, prom can be a great way to teach him about money management. Ask him to foot a chunk of the bill to show them that money for entertainment and leisurely activities comes from savings outside of daily bills and emergency funds.

The Visa study reported that parents annually plan to cover about 60 percent of prom costs, leaving the remaining portion to their kids or school. This number shows that many parents are on board with sharing the load of responsibility with their kids.

START PLANNING FOR NEXT YEAR NOW

You know when prom is coming. This allows parents and children to set realistic expectations months in advance.

For example, if your child plans on attending prom her junior year, set a budget and start saving every month when she's a sophomore. You'll have the prom expense squared away in no time. If your child is still too young to work a part-time job, have him help around the house with mowing, car detailing or organizing to earn prom money. This strategy can help teens learn to value money and the effort required to save it.



Accessories

The dress and the shoes are important to prom, sure. But what about the fun accessories you get to work into your personal style for one night?

From handbags and purses to hair clips and jewelry, the options are endless when it comes to accessorizing your prom dress.

Even the most understated dresses can convey pure glamour with the right accessories. Local boutiques and bridal shops carry these items for affordable prices. Stop by to check out your options and choose the accessories that complement your dress perfectly.

EVENING BAG OR PURSE

One of the must-have accessories for girls is the evening bag or purse. A small handbag with a wrist strap can be just the thing to hold your cash, wallet and keys, giving you a practical solution to one of the biggest challenges on prom night: storing your valuables.

Choose an evening bag that works with the colors of your dress and other accessories. If your dress is shimmery and sparkly, find a bag with the same aesthetic. If it's a simple flat color, either find one that matches or choose a more glam bag to take

your outfit to the next level.

PROM JEWELRY

The type of dress you choose can impact the amount and style of jewelry you select. If your gown is already embellished with stones and jewels, then a simple collection of jewelry will work well.

Pairing dresses with bold statement bracelets, necklaces or earrings is a great strategy. An understated dress and color scheme opens the door for these types of jewelry options.

DRESS OPTIONS

Many of today's prom dress styles have elaborate design elements, giving you a sense of individuality. These can include low-cut backs or decorative rhinestones that give the dress extra personality.

Talk to your local formal wear professional about the various options available for each dress, including add-on accessories that can be worked into the gown you choose.



Talk About Safety

While every prom-goer anticipates a night of fun with their closest friends, prom night for parents can be one of high anxiety and worry.

For far too long, prom night has gone hand in hand with teen alcohol-related car fatalities, sexual assaults and crime. It doesn't have to be this way. Prom is a night that everyone can enjoy without mixing in the dangerous consequences related to drinking, doing drugs or engaging in sexual activity.

For the most part, prom participants return home safely with stories of fun and laughter. Some of the keys to making this happen are family communication and common sense.

HAVING THE TALK

Before sending away your child on their first prom, it's time to lay down some ground rules. Let them know what is expected of them in terms of behavior and curfew. Clearly draw the line with specific consequences if your expectations aren't met.

Educate them on how the occurrences of deadly inebriated driving spike around prom season and avoid putting themselves in any situations that involve an impaired driver.

Try not to sound like a dictator when having the talk, instead choosing to emphasize your desire for them to have a positive, memorable prom night. Be sure to gather your child's complete itinerary for the evening. This includes locations for dinner, the dance and post-prom activities.

Have an idea of the people she will be around and any plans apart from the school's prom activities. Get phone numbers for friends who will be in the prom party if you don't already have them.



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STAYING CONNECTED

If your children are partaking in post-prom activities, it is crucial that you understand where they will be and for how long. Let them know that you plan to check in a couple of times

throughout the night and to keep their cell phones handy.

Also make sure you are reachable and ready to leave the house if needed. Make a rule for check-ins at certain points of the night, say 9 p.m.

and 11 p.m. Let your child know that failing to meet these check-in times will result in some kind of discipline.

Stay committed to your rules and make them clear without putting a damper on this special celebration.

The Perfect Photograph

Whether you opt to hire a professional or take on the project DIY style, capturing the perfect prom photograph of your son or daughter can create one of the most wonderful memories of their lives.

The photo will live on long after they leave the house, serving as a memory of their high school years.

Sure, you can pay the school's contracted photographer for prom photos, but those shots are guaranteed to look just like the rest of your child's classmates' photos, with the same background and straightforward shot.

You likely want a photo that not only shows your child, her date and her friends, but also your home and family members, as well. While taking a photo sounds simple enough, there are many factors to consider when trying to come up with a high-quality image that will stand the test of time.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT POSE

The perfect prom shot is all about the pose. If you're taking a photo of a couple, skip the awkward pose that puts his hands around her waist. Instead encourage them to link arms or hold hands.

Ask the happy couple to simply talk to one another while you're taking the shot instead of engaging in a pose. These kinds of natural moments make for the best photos.

Don't be shy about getting photos with your teenager and the entire family. Photos with a proud mom and dad can make for special treasures.

LIGHTING IS KEY

Springtime comes with unpredictable weather that can result in either dark, rainy skies or ultra-bright sunshine — neither of which are ideal for taking outdoor photos. Play the weather by ear to decide if you're taking photos inside or outside.

Inside, you can practice some photos ahead of time to find out which room offers the best light. Have a plan in place so the process is streamlined and time-efficient. Your child and her friends will appreciate you planning to accommodate their time and schedule.

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Renting a Limo

For prom night, who doesn't like to ride in style? Renting a limousine with friends can be one of the best decisions you make this season, especially if you can find a deal that doesn't break your bank (or your parents' bank).

Using a credible limo service for prom night can be one of the safest ways to travel, helping you get around easily while easing the minds of mom and dad. Still, there is homework to be done to make sure you're finding the best service for your money.

Many states require limo companies to be registered and licensed before they can accept passengers. Check with your state's department of transportation or secretary of state's office to find out details on these requirements.

The more research you put in on the front end, the better you will feel about your investment and overall safety. Here are a few more tips to consider when finding the best limo service for prom night.

SAFETY FIRST

According to the USA Limo Guide, "The law requires all limousine rental companies to arrange for proper private hire insurance." Be sure to check in with prospective companies on where they obtain insurance and what their level of coverage means for passengers.

Their owners should be able to provide you with the documentation or decals that



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show they have been inspected annually for safety and driving records. If this information isn't offered up front, make sure you ask to see proof before signing a contract for services.

GET REFERENCES

Do you know families who have used certain limo services in the past? Check in with them to find out more about their experiences and satisfaction levels with what

they received for their money.

Were they happy with the quality of the vehicle? Was the driver courteous and timely? Did the final cost match up with the quote? These are all questions to ask your friends

when trying to decide on a company. Word of mouth can be the most important form of marketing, especially for local limo services, so any negative review should serve as a red flag for you and your family.

Going Solo

Solo is trending in the world of high school proms. From the benefits of cost savings to reduced pressure to entertain a date all night, it is becoming more popular to instead go to prom with a group of friends.

As a high-schooler, you have your whole life in front of you, including marriage and starting a family. What's wrong with devoting your prom to your friends? Many teenagers across the country are doing just that, and they're proud of it.

A quick search of "going to prom solo" on YouTube or social media platforms reveals an assortment of teens happily proclaiming their pledges to go to prom with friends instead of a date. And their reasons for doing so are diverse.

LESS PRESSURE

In a world of oversharing and competition for viral Internet success, being a high-schooler is tough. Going to prom alone or with a group of friends takes away the pressure of finding and bringing a date to prom. And every stressor you can remove when you're in high school is a positive.

FOCUS ON YOUR FRIENDS

Going dateless allows you to focus on your friends. You will feel less obligated to dance with your date and instead can move freely from table to table to hang out with those closest to you in your school.

SAVE MONEY

Prom is expensive. Going solo means you don't have to pay for someone else's dinner, gift or flowers. This can lead to big savings for you or your parents, depending on who is footing the bill for prom.

