

Here Comes the Bill

Your kid's wedding is expensive. Experts share what you can do to keep costs under control



THE AVERAGE cost of a wedding and reception today rivals that of a new car, at a record-high \$36,000, according to Zola, a wedding planning platform.

And much of the price tag is being driven by social media imagery of happy couples showing off their dream nuptials. It's "the rise of inspiration," says Sammi Kobrin, director of brand at Zola.

If you have a recently engaged child, here are some ways to manage the money.

- **Need to have or nice to have?** Make time for an early and frank conversation with the soon-to-be-weds over what they can live without, says Esther Lee, editorial director for the Knot, an online wedding marketplace. Have them choose priorities. Book the core vendors first: venue, catering, entertainment and photographer. Then add in extras if the budget allows.

- **Consult a professional.** "A wedding planner definitely can save you money," says Melisa Imberman of the Event of a Lifetime, an event planning company in the New York City area. The average fee is around \$3,600, says the Knot—but a planner can secure vendor discounts.

- **Turn up the music.** Instead of a band for the reception, hire a DJ. It's only one person to pay. But you can still offer guests a live music experience with a solo pianist or guitarist at the ceremony or cocktail hour.

- **E-invite.** Digital invitations, RSVP cards and thank-you notes are getting more popular. Search for online providers that will let you share details faster—and cheaper!

- **Timing is everything.** Weddings in November to April can cost less, as demand is lower. If you're stuck on in-season, look to save by booking on off-days and times, such as Sunday afternoon. —*Claire Leibowitz*