

Tips to Remain Sober for the Holiday Season

These tips should help your clients remain sober. In addition to family holiday events, work and social holiday parties are a constant reminder to the sober alcoholic that they must live and socialize in a different manner than those who can drink in safety. There are holiday functions that require an appearance and it is important to have tactics in place that can help to prevent relapse and to minimize triggers. Here is a holiday “survival guide” for the sober alcoholic:

- **Have an escape plan.** That probably means having or arranging your own transportation. It could also mean letting the host or some key people know that you may need to leave and to ask that they please support you if you do. It may mean fashioning a story that gives you an honorable way to exit (“So sorry, everyone. Wish I could stay but I promised someone who is alone today that I would drop by.”) Such stories are not lies. They are not intended to manipulate or harm others. They are a way for you to stay safe.
- **Navigating family events** that include alcohol and that may well also include people who are problem drinkers can feel like a setup. How can you handle the situation and, yes, even relax and enjoy your family’s efforts to celebrate the season? Ask another sober alcoholic to be “on call” for you to check in with during the event for added support. People in recovery know what this is like.
- **Make sure you have something non-alcoholic in your glass** is to bring it yourself. Bring a non-alcoholic bottle or a festive and interesting punch that even the children can enjoy and you may find yourself the hero for other adults who would just as soon limit their consumption of alcohol. Find a tasty non-alcoholic beverage you can drink that will give you something to hold and may prevent people from offering you an alcoholic drink.
- **Come up with a standard response** as to why you are not drinking that may vary depending on the type of holiday event and if you want those in attendance to know you are sober: “I don’t drink anymore”, “I am not drinking tonight”, “I am on medication and cannot have alcohol”, “I am the designated driver tonight,” etc.
- **Be choosy about the holiday events that you attend** and avoid “people pleasing” by saying “yes” to events that you don’t need to nor don’t want to be at. Learn to say “no” if you do not want to attend an event.

- **Take care of yourself prior to these events:** get enough sleep, eat regularly, exercise, relax, etc.
- **Find new holiday activities** and traditions that you may never have tried in the past which do not involve drinking alcohol (volunteer at a soup kitchen, go ice skating, have a sober get-together and gift exchange, see a movie, take a trip, etc.
- **Put your sobriety first** and realize that others may not understand what this entails, but that it is your number one priority.
- **Beware** if there are others in the family who see your abstinence as a negative comment on their choice to get hammered. It's not at all unusual for such people to try to get you to join them. Often, they will say things like, "Come on. It's the holiday. You can have just one." They don't get it. They don't want to get it. If you can stop drinking, it means that just maybe they could (and should) too. And they're not ready to try. Be honest with loved ones if you are having a hard time and let them know how to support you.
- **Remember that "this too shall pass"** and there is life after the holidays.
- **Preparation is the key to success.** What are other ways to enjoy the day without drinking? Maybe you'd like to get to know some of the children better by hanging out with them for a while. Maybe you can occupy at least some of the family in taking a walk or throwing a football around.
- If you are at the home of an older relative, perhaps you can **recruit other family members** in doing a chore that needs to be done. Stacking wood, raking leaves, or finally fixing that back door that has always creaked will focus attention on something positive. A bonus is the boost to self-esteem that comes from doing something for someone else.

- **“HALT”**: avoid being too Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired before attending a social event
- **For “mandatory” work events** : show up early, leave early, make the rounds to all the key people (ie, staff, co-workers, boss, etc.) and once the room has filled, you can easily leave early
- **“Book End” the party**: go to a mutual help group meeting (A.A., SMART Recovery) before and/or after
- **Try not to hang out at or near the bar**, better to locate yourself near the food
- **Dance and be active**: you’ll have fun and get your mind off the notion of “not drinking.