

How To Keep That Holiday Party From Becoming A Holiday Disaster

from the American Counseling Association

If the holiday season brings office parties and social events that have you feeling nervous or fearful, you're not alone. We've all heard of office parties where a few drinks led to a terrible outcome, or that family gathering where a relative decided to tell everyone just what he or she really thought of them.

But holiday parties needn't be disasters. A little planning and common sense can help ensure that an upcoming event is a good time for you, not something to feel anxious about or avoid altogether.

For starters, do go to that event, whether it's an office party, neighborhood gathering or a family get-together. It's good for your reputation to make an appearance, even if you just show up early, stay for a short time, thank your host and leave. That's better than being a no-show, and there's always the chance that you might enjoy yourself and want to stay.

The most important tip is to avoid alcoholic drinks, the major factor in most holiday party disasters. Even one or two drinks can affect your judgment and have you saying or doing something you'll later regret. Have a juice or soft drink (cola or club soda looks like a mixed drink) and stay in control.

Planning ahead can also lessen the stress of holiday parties. Instead of worrying about what you'll wear, ask others how they're dressing. If there's a gift exchange, ask what gifts or dollar values are appropriate, and avoid gag gifts that can be embarrassing.

Even the most sober of partygoers can cause problems with critical and negative comments. Inevitably, those comments will get repeated to all the wrong people. A holiday party is a time to enjoy, not vent frustrations about work or other people.

Lastly, make sure to use common sense and courtesy. Don't overdo it at the buffet table. Be sure to thank your host or hosts. And avoid problem people who might be there. If there's someone with whom you always clash, spend your time instead with people you enjoy. If someone tries to start an argument with you, simply refuse to respond and excuse yourself politely.

Holiday invitations shouldn't trigger fear or anxiety. They should be enjoyable events, even if you feel "required" to attend. Simply plan on staying sober and being sociable and polite and you may find that your "dreaded" holiday party is actually a pleasant experience.

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words: 400