

# Your P.L.A.N. for Social Events

Objective: To lower the risk of relapse by planning how to manage social events where you might be triggered.

## You Should Know

One of the hardest challenges in your recovery will be making smart choices about social events and celebrations where alcohol is likely to be served: birthday parties, office parties, anniversaries, weddings, bridal or baby showers, graduations, funerals, religious ceremonies, family holidays—you name it. Sometimes you might have to attend an office event or function, a conference or meeting, in which alcohol is readily available and many, if not most, people will be drinking.

Usually this challenge is hardest for those with a specific history of alcohol use, because alcohol is everywhere in our culture—and it’s glorified. But those with problem drug use can also be triggered by exposure and access to alcohol.

But you can’t hide in a cave the rest of your life. So what can you do about exposure to alcohol?

## Does This Sound Like You?

Mei, 50, a divorced corporate executive who has ninety days’ abstinence from alcohol, is asked by her company to give a presentation at an out-of-town conference where there will be receptions, happy hours, and working meals. She will be traveling alone and knows only one other person from her company who will be there. In the past, Mei would stay in a hotel that had a minibar in each room. She worries that the whole event will trigger her to pick up.

How are you like Mei? How are you different?

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Have you ever been confronted with a similar situation? What did you do?

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What do you think Mei can do to avoid using alcohol? Write some notes here.

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## What to Do

This exercise will teach you the P.L.A.N. strategy for relapse prevention. P.L.A.N. stands for:

*Prepare*

*Listen*

*Acknowledge*

*Say No*

Most experts agree that the safest thing to do if you are triggered by the sight, smell, and general availability of alcohol is to avoid the event altogether. This is always a choice. But sometimes you really don't want to have to miss the wedding of a loved one or dear friend. Use P.L.A.N. to do the best you can to manage these unavoidable situations.

*Prepare*

At least a few weeks before you attend this event, do some research. Find out as much as you can about what you might encounter so you won't be surprised and so you can be prepared with an "escape route" if necessary. Leave nothing to chance.

Event \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time of day \_\_\_\_\_ Expected length of event \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

List all the people you know who will be at the event:

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Of those people, does anyone know about your decision not to drink or drug? Who?

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Identify at least one person from the above list who can be your "buddy" at the event.

If no one will be available at the event itself, identify a "buddy" you can call or text (friend, spouse, sponsor, someone supportive), even if you feel you're in a good place.

Buddy's name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Arrange in advance to check in with your buddy *at least once* during the event, no matter what.

Find out if there will be an open bar: (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_ Cash bar? (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what can you order for yourself instead of alcohol? Many people choose seltzer with lime, juice, soda, and so on.

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The more you think about these things in advance, the better chance you have not to do something impulsive. Tell everyone you feel comfortable telling not to offer you alcohol!

### *Listen*

Part of the recovery process is to listen to your wise self and your addicted self, discussed earlier, in advance of an event. Is your wise self telling you that going to this event is a smart or not-so-smart choice? Is your addicted self excited about the possibility of using? Listen closely to your inner voices without judgment or criticism. Write down what your wise self and your addicted self are saying when you think about going to this event. Remember to be honest and compassionate toward yourself.

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### *Acknowledge*

Even though you really want to go or absolutely must go to this event, what are your fears and worries, hopes and expectations? Can you acknowledge what risks you might be taking and strengthen your P.L.A.N. to minimize the risk of relapse? Write down your thoughts here, being as honest as you can. There is no right answer!

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## Say No

Again, it's always an option to decline an invitation to an event. In recovery, *you get to do what's best for you*, even if other people pressure or criticize you. That's called healthy selfishness, and it's especially useful for people pleasers or those who have a hard time saying no in general.

Assess whether you have prepared enough for an event enough to be able to say no at, say, an open or cash bar, or to people passing around a joint or doing lines in the bathroom. (One client once reported that a relative was passing around Xanax at a *funeral*.) If you feel you are at risk, say no, send your regrets, and arrange to visit those people at a later time.

If you do decide to go, practice some ways to say no to an offer of alcohol and/or drugs. For example:

- *"No, thanks."* (Simple, succinct, move on.)
- *"No, thanks. I'm good."*
- *"No, thanks. I don't drink/smoke/use drugs."*
- *"No, thanks. I don't like the taste of alcohol."*
- *"No, thanks. I'm allergic."*
- *"No, thanks. I'm on a diet and avoiding alcohol."*
- *"No, thanks. I've had a problem with drinking/drugging in the past."*
- (Fill in your own) \_\_\_\_\_
- (Fill in your own) \_\_\_\_\_

After the event, write down your experience on the lines below, and make note of what you said or did to prevent yourself from picking up. If you did slip and pick up, write about that in detail so you can refer to it at a later date. Slips or relapses are not the end of the world, but the more you prepare, the higher the chance of success.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area of your recovery?

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