

The Social Situations Playbook

Scripts and Strategies for Drinking Less in Social Settings

From ClearDays — Drink Less. Live Better.

Introduction

One of the biggest challenges of drinking less isn't the alcohol itself—it's navigating social situations where drinking is expected. This playbook gives you practical scripts, strategies, and alternatives for every common scenario.

Remember: You don't owe anyone an explanation for your choices. These scripts are tools to help you feel confident, not justifications you need to provide.

Part 1: What to Say When Offered a Drink

The Simple Declines

Use these when you don't want to explain yourself:

- “I’m good, thanks.”
- “Not right now, thanks.”
- “I’m all set.”
- “Maybe later.” (You don’t have to follow through)

The Soft Explanations

Use these when a simple “no” feels awkward:

- “I’m pacing myself tonight.”
- “I’m taking it easy.”
- “I’m the driver tonight.”
- “I’m on an early morning tomorrow.”
- “I’m doing a health thing.” (Vague but effective)

The Health-Related Responses

Use these when you want to reference health without details:

- “Alcohol doesn’t agree with me like it used to.”
- “I’m on medication that doesn’t mix well with alcohol.”
- “My doctor suggested I cut back.”
- “I’m trying to sleep better, and alcohol wrecks my sleep.”

The Confident Statements

Use these when you want to own your choice:

- “I’ve decided to drink less. It’s working great for me.”
- “I feel so much better when I don’t drink during the week.”
- “I’m being more intentional about when I drink.”

When Someone Pushes Back

Them: “Come on, just one drink!” **You:** “I appreciate it, but I’m really good. Can I get you something?”

Them: “Are you pregnant?” / “Are you an alcoholic?” **You:** “No, just making different choices these days.” (Then change the subject)

Them: “You’re no fun anymore.” **You:** “I’m plenty fun—watch me on the dance floor later.”

Part 2: Situation-Specific Strategies

Work Events

The Challenge: Professional pressure, networking expectations, open bars

Strategies:

1. Arrive with a plan: “I’ll have one drink during the first hour, then switch to sparkling water”
2. Always have a drink in hand (non-alcoholic is fine) to avoid being offered one
3. Position yourself away from the bar
4. Focus on the networking, not the drinking
5. Leave at a reasonable time—you don’t have to close out the event

What to Order:

- Club soda with lime (looks like a vodka soda)
- Tonic water with a twist
- “Virgin” cocktails if available
- Non-alcoholic beer (increasingly common at events)

Dinner Parties

The Challenge: Intimate settings, wine pairings, hosts who keep refilling glasses

Strategies:

1. Offer to bring a nice non-alcoholic option to share
2. Keep your glass partially full so it doesn’t get refilled
3. Alternate: one alcoholic drink, then water or NA option
4. Compliment the food enthusiastically (redirects attention from drinking)
5. Offer to help in the kitchen (keeps you busy and away from constant refills)

What to Say to the Host:

- “I’m pacing myself, but this wine is lovely.”
- “I’d love some sparkling water—I’m alternating tonight.”
- “I’m taking a break from alcohol, but please don’t let that stop anyone else.”

Family Gatherings

The Challenge: Family dynamics, traditions, potential judgment, stress

Strategies:

1. Have a response ready for nosy relatives
2. Bring your own NA beverages so you have options
3. Identify an ally (someone who supports your choice)
4. Have an exit strategy if things get uncomfortable
5. Focus on connecting with family members you enjoy

Handling Family Comments:

Them: “Since when don’t you drink?” **You:** “I’m just taking a break. How are the grandkids?”

Them: “Your father/mother always enjoyed a drink...” **You:** “Times change. Tell me about [redirect to another topic].”

Happy Hours and After-Work Drinks

The Challenge: Peer pressure, unwinding ritual, networking

Strategies:

1. Show up, have one drink (or none), leave after 45 minutes
2. Suggest alternative activities: “Anyone want to grab dinner instead?”
3. Order food to slow down drinking and have something to focus on
4. Be the person who suggests non-drinking activities for future gatherings

Exit Lines:

- “I’ve got an early morning, but this was fun.”
- “I promised my partner I’d be home for dinner.”
- “I’m going to head out, but let’s do this again.”

Weddings and Celebrations

The Challenge: Open bars, toasts, long events, emotional occasions

Strategies:

1. For toasts, you can raise any glass—it doesn’t have to be champagne
2. Pace yourself: one drink per hour maximum
3. Dance! It’s a great way to enjoy the event without drinking
4. Stay hydrated—ask for water alongside any alcoholic drinks
5. Focus on celebrating the couple, not the bar

What to Order:

- Champagne for the toast, then switch to sparkling water
- Ask the bartender for a “mocktail” or virgin cocktail
- Ginger ale in a champagne flute looks festive

Vacations and Travel

The Challenge: “Vacation mode,” all-inclusive resorts, wine regions

Strategies:

1. Set a daily limit before you go
2. Designate some alcohol-free days even on vacation
3. Focus on other vacation pleasures: food, activities, relaxation
4. Remember: hangovers ruin vacation days too
5. Explore local non-alcoholic options (many cultures have interesting NA drinks)

Reframe: Instead of “vacation means drinking,” try “vacation means feeling great every day.”

Part 3: Non-Alcoholic Alternatives That Feel “Adult”

At Bars and Restaurants

Instead of...	Order...
Wine	Non-alcoholic wine, sparkling grape juice
Beer	Non-alcoholic beer (Heineken 0.0, Athletic Brewing, etc.)
Cocktails	Mocktails, virgin mojito, Shirley Temple
Whiskey neat	Ginger beer, apple cider, espresso

At Home

Evening Wind-Down Drinks:

- Herbal tea (chamomile, lavender)
- Sparkling water with bitters and citrus
- Non-alcoholic spirits (Seedlip, Lyre's, Monday)
- Fancy tonic water with lime
- Hot apple cider

Making It Feel Special:

- Use nice glassware
- Add garnishes (citrus, herbs, berries)
- Create a ritual around preparation
- Keep interesting NA options stocked

Part 4: Mindset Shifts

From Deprivation to Choice

- Old mindset: “I can’t drink.”
- New mindset: “I’m choosing not to drink right now.”

From Missing Out to Gaining

- Old mindset: “Everyone else is having fun drinking.”
- New mindset: “I’ll remember this conversation. I’ll feel great tomorrow. I’m fully present.”

From Explaining to Owning

- Old mindset: “I need to justify why I’m not drinking.”
- New mindset: “My choices are my own. I don’t owe explanations.”

From All-or-Nothing to Flexibility

- Old mindset: “If I can’t drink freely, I shouldn’t go out.”
- New mindset: “I can enjoy social events and drink less. These aren’t mutually exclusive.”

Part 5: Building Social Confidence

Before the Event

1. Decide in advance how much (if any) you’ll drink
2. Eat a good meal beforehand
3. Have your responses ready
4. Identify your “out” if you need to leave early

During the Event

1. Focus on conversations, not drinks
2. Be genuinely interested in others (people love talking about themselves)
3. Suggest activities: games, dancing, going outside
4. Check in with yourself: “Am I having fun? Do I need to leave?”

After the Event

1. Notice how you feel the next morning
2. Reflect on what worked and what didn’t
3. Celebrate your wins, however small
4. Adjust your strategy for next time

Quick Reference Card

Simple Declines:

- “I’m good, thanks.”
- “Not right now.”
- “Maybe later.”

Soft Explanations:

- “I’m pacing myself.”
- “I’m the driver.”
- “Early morning tomorrow.”

Stealth Drinks:

- Club soda with lime
- Tonic with a twist
- Non-alcoholic beer
- Virgin cocktails

Exit Lines:

- “Early morning—gotta run!”
- “This was fun, let’s do it again.”
- “I promised I’d be home.”

You can enjoy social events and drink less. These aren’t mutually exclusive.

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