

The SOCIAL Solution

Day 7 – The Social Solution

How to Survive and Thrive SOBER in Any Social Situation

*I'm a recovering alcoholic...I've never hid it,
but I've been sober the whole time I've been famous.*

KRISTIN DAVIS¹

Star of the HBO hit show *Sex in the City*

Throughout life you are bombarded with images linking socializing to drinking. Television shows, movies, commercials, and most likely many of your childhood memories at adult get-togethers reinforce the notion that having fun and connecting with others includes drinking beer, wine or liquor. So it should come as no surprise that social events that include alcohol, such as work events, parties with friends, happy hour, family vacations, or live events (concerts, sports, weddings), can be scary to attend in early sobriety, especially if you are used to drinking at them. The Social Solution will teach you how to *not* drink in *any* situation, while not feeling judged or embarrassed.

Are “They” Drinking as Much as You Think?

Take a minute and think about some of the various social situations you have attended that included alcohol. Specifically remember the other people that attended, and how much you recall them drinking. When Dave first considered this, he believed that not only were most people drinking a lot at the social events he attended, but also he believed that the people not drinking much, or at all, were probably designated drivers.

In his early sobriety, Dave started questioning this belief by observing others when he went to parties where people were drinking. What surprised him was how often he noticed that people he previously believed were big drinkers were only having one or two drinks. Dave realized that

he was unconsciously creating the false reality that everyone was either a big drinker, or didn't drink at all in his mind to rationalize his own drinking. And more importantly, he realized that his excessive drinking was far more obvious to many others than he previously thought.

Once Dave had this awareness, he started using the power of gratitude to attract positive role models and relationships in his life. When he noticed people that embodied characteristics that he wanted more of in his life, such as those that were thriving in sobriety, he would internally congratulate and appreciate them. As Dave focused on what he wanted and appreciated the people he respected and looked up to, he realized he started having more fun at social events, found his desire to drink reduce significantly, and he started creating lasting healthy relationships with some of those exact same people he internally acknowledged.

We recommend you start practicing this in your life by internally acknowledging others, but not just at social events and not just related to drinking. Anytime you meet or spend time with someone that has a quality or trait you respect or want in your life, internally acknowledge them. And, depending on the situation, you might even externally acknowledge them by giving them a verbal compliment. For example, if you are with a friend or family member that has always maintained a healthy weight and physical fitness routine, you can tell them how impressed you are with their ability to do that. And better yet, ask them questions about what they do to create that success in their life and if they have any recommendations for you.

When you get in the habit of appreciating others for their positive qualities, either internally or externally, you naturally attract those same qualities to you. And you also start to create more authentic and meaningful relationships without alcohol.

Parties and Sobriety Anxiety

When you cut back or quit drinking, you are almost certainly going to experience fear. And one of the most prevalent fears is being “found out,” or identified by friends or family as a problem drinker. One of the most likely places this can happen is at parties, where people might notice you are no longer drinking. This fear of being “found out” is actually directly related to two of the greatest human fears: the fear of not being loved and the fear not being “enough” (good enough, smart enough, pretty enough, etc.).

And being “found out” as a problem drinker taps into both of these fears. For example, you might have only felt “loved” when you started drinking with friends. Or you may have felt smart, attractive, funny, strong, sexy, or confident when you were buzzed or drunk. In early sobriety, the fears of not being loved and not being “enough” are the underlying fears that create such high levels of anxiety when you attend parties and other events that include drinking.

The truth is no one cares nowhere *near* as much about your drinking as you think about your drinking. Most people are way too wrapped up in their own lives to spend time being concerned with how much or how little you drink, let alone judging or ridiculing you. And the people that *do* care usually fall into one of two categories. Either they care because they also have a drinking problem and your not drinking means that they lose a drinking friend, or, even scarier for them, it means that they also need to change. In addition, these drinking friends might be your friends *because* you drink, and when this shared “activity” is removed, the relationship ends.

The other category of people that *do* care about your drinking includes the loved ones that may have been asking you for a while to cut back or quit drinking. And the irony with this group

is that the two fears of not being loved or not being “enough” only become a greater reality in your life if you keep drinking. If you continue to drink excessively, your positive role models will often start to pull away from you if you don’t change—eventually realizing that you are not the person they want to have in their life.

The bottom line is your fear and anxiety around going to social events is completely understandable, but primarily irrational. The people you *want* in your life will celebrate your change. Regardless, the risk of giving in to your desire to drink at these events is very rational. Social events and parties often represent a significant challenge for you to abstain from drinking in early sobriety. So if and when you decide to go to a holiday party, a bachelorette or bachelor party (not a good idea in early sobriety!) or a get-together with coworkers or friends, you *must* be prepared. You need to know how to respond when someone asks you if you want a drink, when someone asks you why you are not drinking, or perhaps even when someone who is used to drinking with you insists that you drink with them and shoves a drink in your hand.

The key to dealing with these uncomfortable situations is preparation, including practicing your responses out loud. We will review the Top 11 “I am Not Drinking” Excuses shortly, but first we have five key recommendations to help you make best use of this list.

- 1) **Embrace small lies.** Even though we believe honesty is a critical component of lasting sobriety, we also believe that telling a small lie in these types of situations is acceptable, especially because it serves the greater good for you and the people you love. Your choice to cut back or quit drinking is making the world a better place, and time and again you will hear that the best thing you can do to make a difference is to first become a better person yourself. So don’t worry if the best “excuse” for you to use in the list requires you to stretch the truth a little bit. It is worth it!
- 2) **Practice, practice, practice.** After picking several responses from the list, practice them out loud enough times so that your answer is succinct and your delivery is natural. If you act uncomfortable, elaborate too much, stutter or “trip” over your words, or your response opens the door to lots of follow-up questions, it can lead to an unpleasant experience, which might result in you deciding to drink again. Also be sure to adapt the response if, when you practice it, you realize it doesn’t sound like something you would say. The key is responding with confidence, ease, and clarity.
- 3) **The more true, the better.** Try to pick responses that are either true, or very close to the truth. But only if you are comfortable with it. For example, the response “I am a recovered alcoholic,” might not be something you are comfortable saying in early sobriety.
- 4) **Remember your audience.** You want to pick responses that fit a variety of situations. For example, how you respond to a good friend or family member and how you respond to someone at a business networking event are likely going to be different.
- 5) **Think about good follow-up questions.** One of the easiest ways to move on from the topic of your drinking is to answer it and then naturally change the subject by asking a follow-up question related to the event or specifically related to the person you are talking to. For instance, you could say, “I have a physical coming up with detailed blood work, so I am not drinking. By the way, have you ever been to one of these networking events before? Or while

I think of it, you told me you were looking into _____, how is that going?” We highly recommend practicing this transition with a proper pause, so it doesn’t sound too forced.

The Top 11 “I Am Not Drinking” Excuses

Your **second action step** is to review the excuses below. Then, using the recommendations we just covered to help guide your choices, write down in your journal responses that are the best fit for you. We include some variations of what you might say for each one, as well as some considerations with regard to using them.

1) Doctor’s orders.

- I just received my blood work back from a physical and the doctor had some general concerns, so I am watching what I eat and not drinking any alcohol. **Consideration:** *Most people over the age of 30 get physicals and receive some type of elevated test results. However, the downside to this response can be follow-up questions such as, “Oh, I just got some results back from my blood work that were bad. What were yours?” And, using this excuse also means that you shouldn’t proceed to eat a bunch of sweets or high-fat foods, at least around these individuals.*
- I have a history of liver problems in my family, so my doctor thought it would be a good idea to not drink, at least for now. **Consideration:** *Many people can relate to having a family history of various health concerns, and it doesn’t have to be related to your liver.*
- I am getting a physical and I don’t want any alcohol in my system. **Consideration:** *Liver enzymes can be elevated even after one drinking episode for 2-3 days, so depending on the bloodwork you are having done it can be completely logical to abstain a few days before the test.*
- I have an ulcer, so I am not drinking. **Consideration:** *This may be the best excuse, especially if you are not going to see that person again soon. Also, you may want to do some research on ulcers if you plan to use this excuse so you can answer any follow-up questions.*

2) I am under the weather.

- I don’t feel good. Or, I am fighting a cold or flu.
- I am on antibiotics and was instructed not to drink.
- My stomach is bothering me.

Considerations. The downside of saying that you are under the weather is if you say you are sick, especially with something contagious like a cold or flu, people will not be happy you are there. And if you mention antibiotics, be prepared for someone to ask what type of antibiotics you are on and why. Therefore, mentioning that your stomach is bothering you might be the easiest example here.

3) I am in training.

- I am training for a marathon, race, tournament, etc.
- I am starting training tomorrow morning.
- I am getting up early to exercise.

Considerations. This is a favorite excuse not to drink for many 30-Day graduates, but it needs to be somewhat true, since many people will naturally want to hear what you are training for and some will even want to know what your specific training regimen includes.

4) I am allergic to alcohol.

- I get a rash when I drink.
- I am trying to isolate some allergies I am having, so I am not drinking.

Considerations. Both of these can be effective responses; however, the second response might elicit some follow-up questions about what allergic reactions you are experiencing.

5) I am not in the mood.

- I don't feel like drinking tonight.

Considerations. This excuse is simple, easy, and hard to argue. This is possibly one of the safest answers, although if you are someone that always drinks at these types of events, it might be hard for others to believe.

6) I am the designated driver.

- I have to drive tonight.
- I am the designated driver, so I just prefer to not have anything to drink.
- I have to pick up my kids (friend, family member) later.

Considerations. These excuses can be great, as long as you have a car and anyone you came with is on the same page, meaning they won't contradict you and say they are driving, or that you don't have to go anywhere afterwards.

7) I am on a special diet.

- I am detoxing.
- I am doing a cleanse.
- I recently read an article talking about the health implications of drinking and decided to cut back.

Considerations. Be prepared to answer what specific diet, cleanse or detox you are doing if you use this excuse, and make sure your eating habits at this social event or party match it. Also the health implications of drinking are well documented—you can even jump ahead

briefly to Day 25, The Mind/Body Solution, and read “The Real ‘Cost’ of Alcohol and Your Health” section to become more knowledgeable on this topic.

8) I have a family history of drinking.

- I have a friend(s) or family member(s) that have struggled with alcoholism so I don’t like to drink.
- I have a bit of an addictive personality so I don’t drink too often.

Considerations. These are great excuses, but need to be used with the right audience. If you are going to a networking event where you don’t know anyone, then these excuses are fine, but would probably sound strange with people you know that have seen how much you drank in the past.

9) I don’t drink.

- I am retired from drinking.
- I drank enough in my twenties and thirties for a lifetime.
- I am a recovered alcoholic, or recovering alcoholic, or I used to overdo it with drinking so I decided to quit, or cut back.

Considerations. There are lots of variations, but these are usually the excuses you can use after some longer-term sobriety. The last example might lead to more questions since most people know someone that has struggled with alcohol, so it could pique their interest. However, the response, “I don’t drink,” if you say it casually and to the point, seems to rarely get much of a response back. You can also elaborate by mentioning you learned that one of your role models doesn’t drink (referring to the teetotaler list we shared on Day 5 in The Believe in Yourself Solution), and you were inspired by that.

10) I have work to do tonight.

- I have a report to write tonight.
- I have a home improvement project, taxes, or other paperwork that needs to be done tonight.
- I am getting up early to work, or complete some other time sensitive task, and drinking makes me too tired the next morning.

Considerations. These types of excuses can be great, especially if you don’t work with anyone attending.

11) I am quitting drinking for 30 days.

- A friend or family member challenged me to not drink for 30 days (or whatever amount of time you want).

- I read an article about the health benefits of not drinking for 30 days, or about people that take a month off every year from drinking, so I wanted to try it. I am quitting drinking for a while so I can be a better role model to my kids.

Considerations. Many people quit caffeine, quit sugar, or quit eating dairy, wheat, or gluten for various periods of time, so the idea of quitting drinking for a 30-day (or longer) period of time doesn't necessarily lead people to think you have an issue with drinking.

Some of you will find that these excuses are a fantastic resource—giving you the much needed peace of mind and confidence you have been searching for to overcome the fear of attending social activities that include drinking. And some of you may find that you have no problem attending a social event or party and not drinking. The bottom line is if you have any fear or anxiety with socializing when alcohol is present, then preparing for these questions and possible conversations will help you. Dave actually practiced his responses out loud in his car before walking into any social event or party.

If none of these excuses feel like the right fit for you, do some internet searches, or visit www.soberrecovery.com, where you can use the search box to search for “excuses to use at parties for not drinking,” and find a result that is a right fit. And remember, you can always initially choose to just not go these get-togethers—that is the easiest “excuse” of all.

Last, remember that depending on the event, it is possible you can order a nonalcoholic drink that looks like everyone else's alcoholic drinks. In these types of situations, most people assume you are drinking and the topic will never come up. But be sure to ask the bartender to use the same type of glass they use for alcoholic drinks, as sometimes nonalcoholic drinks can be served in a different type of glass.

Wrapping Up Day 7

The Social Solution is about attracting the qualities and traits you most want to embody in your life, as well embracing the power of preparation to avoid relapsing. When you prepare for likely obstacles and challenges you might face, your odds of successfully overcoming them increase dramatically. You might recall our discussion of this at the end of Day 3 in *The Pendulum Solution*. When you are able to successfully navigate parties sober and continue doing the solutions and action steps in *The 30-Day Sobriety Solution*, your temptation to drink will eventually stop.

And we want to leave you with one last reminder. If you act like not drinking *is* a big deal when talking to others, then you make it a big deal and people will be left with that impression. But if you have a matter-of-fact approach and delivery, most people won't give it a second thought. Here are some optional action steps you can take for this bonus solution.

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- 1) **Acknowledge others that have positive qualities and traits you respect.** When you encounter people that are role models in various areas of life, not just with regard to drinking, internally congratulate and appreciate them, and even consider complimenting them verbally.

- 2) **Review the Top 11 “I am Not Drinking” Excuses and write down in your journal the ones that are a good fit for you.** Make sure you refer to the five recommendations to help you make best use of this list. Then practice your excuses out loud, and prepare for any potential follow-up questions.
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¹ To read the full interview with Kristin Davis, see <http://www.health.com/health/article/0,,20410911,00.html>.