Strategies for preventing drunk driving [1]

Dear Alice,

Please, I would like you to tell me some ways to prevent drunk driving after a party.

Thank you.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Finding the right recipe for throwing a fun, successful event likely includes inviting compatible people, planning, entertaining (such as a theme, perhaps), and, hopefully, making and keeping partiers feeling welcome and engaged. But one thing that often gets overlooked is what happens when the music’s over and it’s time to go home. Concerned friends, family members, and colleagues all over the world are often faced with your very question. It might be enlightening to know that there’s more to assuring the safety of those you care about than just taking their keys and keeping them off the road. With some thoughtful planning, you may be able to stave off mishaps without having to pull out the sleeper sofa and serve breakfast to a hung-over crowd.

Depending on the type of social situation and setting, certain strategies may be more effective than others. Instead of waiting until the party’s over to try and prevent drunk driving, here are some ideas that you might consider throughout the course of your party:

Before a party:

- Plan activities like party games, dancing, or watching a movie. Activities help to engage party-goers, and ensure the focus of the party is not just alcohol. You might also talk with your friends about your concerns and develop a plan before anyone drinks any alcohol.
- Set up the room so that the area where alcohol is served is not the first thing people see and to avoid having the bar as the social hub in the room. Provide non-alcoholic drinks? enough for both underage and non-drinking attendees to have plenty of options, and display these as prominently as the alcoholic beverages.
- Prepare lots of yummy food. A mouth-watering buffet is sure to keep people’s attention and support efforts toward moderate and responsible alcohol consumption. Avoid serving too many salty snacks though, as these tend to make people thirsty.
- Always measure the amount of alcohol put into punches and mixed drinks.
• Using smaller cups helps people keep their alcohol servings to an appropriate size. In general, this means serving sizes of no more than twelve ounces of beer, five ounces of wine, or one mixed drink with one and a half ounces of liquor.

During a party:

• Consider collecting keys or encourage some of your guests to designate sober drivers who won’t drink any alcohol. Remember that even one drink can impair motor skills and judgment, two things needed to drive safely.
• Respect party attendees who choose not to drink alcohol.
• As the party host, keep your own consumption in-check. This way you can stay aware of what is going on at your party and people may follow your example.
• Pass on drinking games. This will help to cut down on rapid drinking and overconsumption.
• When serving drinks, encourage party-goers to have no more than one drink per hour and to alternate non-alcoholic beverages in between (this can, sometimes, help prevent hangovers [2]).
• Have a reliable friend or family member, or a hired professional, serve the drinks. This will discourage your guests from mixing their own, and help keep track of the size and number of drinks they consume.
• Don’t feel pressured to serve anyone who is acting intoxicated. If s/he still wants to stay and drink something, offer her/him a non-alcoholic libation.
• Plan to stop serving alcohol about 90 minutes before the party ends. This will give your party-goers some time to process the alcohol they have consumed before they go off into the night.

After a party:

• Forego the coffee or energy drink nightcap; caffeinated drinks won’t sober people up? only time can do that.
• Make the rounds and try to speak to each of your guests before they leave the party. Trust your instincts? if you think someone appears to be ill-equipped to drive, call her/him a cab (you could even offer to pay for it yourself), arrange a ride with a friend, drive her/him home yourself, or encourage her/him to stay over.
• Many towns and college campuses offer free escort services or provide free shuttle buses or safe rides. Contact your police or security department, or college health office for more information. Then, make this information available at the party for those who may need it.
• If you’re holding a party at a hotel or other banquet facility, ask about a reduced-rate or complimentary rooms for guests. This will encourage them to stay over, rather than drive home while intoxicated. You could also arrange for taxi, limousine, or shuttle-bus service both to and from the party. Advertise this service in party invitations.
• If someone has had too much to drink, but still wants to drive, explain that you’re concerned because you don’t want them to hurt themselves or others. You could also ask a friend to help you have this conversation for moral support and so the person in question is aware others are also concerned.
• If reasoning with her/him fails, take their keys, pretend you can’t find them but assure her/him that you can help them find them in the morning.
• If absolutely nothing else works and they insist on driving, you may want to call law enforcement? This is a better option than having someone injured or killed.
As you can see, there are a lot of ways, before, during, and after an event to help people make lower-risk decisions about their alcohol use. Helping your friends get home safely is like the buddy system many learn about when they are little – holding hands (so to speak) and looking out for one another. Asking a friend not to drive home can be hard – maybe you are afraid you'll be teased, excluded from future parties, or cause your friend to be angry with you. Sometimes, people do react this way, especially if they feel you are questioning their choices. But in the long run, they are likely to appreciate your concern for their well-being. For more information on how to help a friend who is intoxicated, check out the Go Ask Alice! Q&A How should I help my drunk friend? \cite{9}

Alice!
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