Strategies for preventing drunk driving

Dear Alice,

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

Thank you.

Answer

Dear Reader,

When planning a party, plenty of attention is often paid to playlists, decorations, the invite list, and party activities, but one aspect that might be overlooked is what happens when the music stops and it's time to go home. Concerned friends, family members, and colleagues all over the world are often faced with your very question. Whether the host or a guest, it might be enlightening to know that there's more to assuring the safety of those you care about than 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 hungover crowd.

Depending on the type of social situation, the people involved, and the setting, certain strategies may be more effective than others as parties can range from small gatherings to large-scale events. Instead of waiting until the party is over to try and prevent drunk driving, here are some ideas that you might consider prior to and throughout the course of the party:

Before a party:

- Plan activities such as party games, dancing, or watching a movie. Activities help to engage party-goers and ensure the focus of the party isn't just alcohol.
- Talk with your friends about your concerns and develop a plan beforehand about how everyone might get home. If you're the host, you might even advise your guests that they're required to take a cab or rideshare app to and from the party if they're planning on drinking.
- Set up the room so that the area where alcohol is served isn't what catches their attention first. This avoids having the bar as the social hub in the room. Provide non-alcoholic drinks — enough for both drinking and non-drinking attendees, and display these just as
prominently as the alcoholic beverages.

- Prepare some snacks for people to pick at during the party. Food may help keep people's attention and support efforts toward moderate and responsible alcohol consumption, as eating can help to slow down the rate of absorption of alcohol in the body. Avoid serving too many salty snacks though, as these tend to make people thirsty.
- Measure the amount of alcohol put into punches and mixed drinks to ensure proper ratios, or that the amount of alcohol mixed in would be equivalent to a standard drink size.
- Use smaller cups to help 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 a mixed drink with one and a half ounces of liquor.
- 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 a rideshare, taxi, limousine, or shuttle-bus service both to and from the party. Advertise this service in party invitations.

During a party:

- Consider collecting keys or encourage people to designate sober drivers who won't drink any alcohol. Remember that even one drink can impair motor skills and judgment, both of which are needed to drive safely.
- Respect party attendees who choose not to drink alcohol.
- If you're 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.
- Try to 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 also help prevent hangovers).
- Have a reliable friend, 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 they still want to stay and drink something, offer them 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've consumed before they leave.

After a party:

- Forego the coffee or energy drink nightcap; caffeinated drinks won't sober people up — only time can do that.
- If it's feasible, make 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, request a rideshare or cab, arrange a ride with a friend, drive them home yourself (assuming you're sober), or encourage them to stay over.
- Many towns and college campuses offer free escort services, providing free shuttle buses or safe rides. Contact your police or security department, or college health office for more information. Then, make this information available before and during the party for those who may need it.
• 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 you’re comfortable, offer the option of crashing at your place.
• 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.

All this to say, there are a lot of ways, before, during, and after an event to help people make lower-risk decisions about their alcohol use. Asking a friend not to drive home can be hard — maybe you're 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 that you’re questioning their choices. But in the long run, they’re likely to appreciate your concern for their well-being. Additionally, keeping these strategies in mind for yourself if you've been imbibing can help to keep you and those around you safe.

Alice!
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