

## Always Have an Exit Plan

**B**IG SOCIAL EVENTS OR GROUP GATHERINGS can be intimidating, no matter your age. As an adult with ADHD, the impulse, or urge, to avoid uncomfortable gatherings can be high. But some of these events in your life are important! A friend's wedding, a loved one's graduation, or even a company dinner with your partner's coworkers can be difficult to miss.

Learning how to navigate social settings, when the urge to leave early or skip the whole thing entirely is strong, is a skill that can help you throughout your life. Because there is a cost associated with missing important events.

And while being social isn't the same for everyone, most people want to find a way to tolerate events they don't want to miss. That said, social anxiety and general discomfort with being around people (even people you like) can be hard on you. Having your own way to navigate these events is kind of like having your own accommodations. Instead of someone else supporting you, however, you get to support you.

Instead of making an abrupt departure when a social event becomes intolerable for you, why not have a few pre-

planned exit strategies? Like having a wingman when you're stuck on a bad date, a thoughtful exit plan can make the difference between a social faux pas and a graceful exit, even when your insides are telling you to bolt.

Here are five exit strategies that work for events so you have a plan before you reach your limit.

### Plan ahead.

Make a list of four or five past events when you felt the need to leave early. Then ask yourself, "What do those events have in common?" Perhaps the event was too loud or too late at night. Or perhaps your partner did the "long goodbye" that felt like torture to you. As you look at another social event, ask yourself if you're walking into a situation that may require an exit plan. If you'll be with your partner or friends who like to stay longer than you, consider taking two cars so you can leave early without disrupting their fun. What do you need from the event so you can participate without compromising your mental health? When you know your patterns and what kind of situation you're walking into, you can plan wisely.



### Inform your host ahead of time.

If you know you'll be at an event that is going to cause you stress, tell the host you have another obligation and set up your departure time ahead of the event. Be sure to inform whomever you'll be with that you have to leave early as well. This will reduce your stress because your escape plan is set.

### Use code words and signals for people in your inner circle so they understand what's going on for you.

Little phrases like "I'm taking the kids to the car, it's late for them" or "I have an early morning" or "I have to get home to walk my dog" are all good reasons to exit an event. They also leave nothing to worry about in terms of offending the host so you can leave without fears of hurting someone's feelings.

### Take breaks.

Sometimes all you need to stay longer at an event is a mental break from the action. Scope out the location when you arrive so you find the spots that can work for a quick Candy Crush moment or a little time away from the crowd. Be sure to look outside for break spots like a fire pit or a nice bench for a breath of fresh air. And if all else fails, a quick escape to the bathroom can also work in a pinch.

### Engage a buddy to help.

Having a trusted confidant with you (friend or romantic partner) can create just the buffer you need to make engaging with others easier. Then, if you need a break or must escape altogether, you have someone to help you manage your plan.

SOCIAL SITUATIONS CAN BE CHALLENGING for adults with ADHD. That said, many times you may want to participate in events even when they make you uncomfortable or uneasy. Instead of suffering in silence or making a hasty exit you later regret, try these five strategies instead. Better yet, try them before you have an important event on the calendar. That way your strategies are in place and you have practiced them before the big day. 🎧



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