

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

DRINKING ETIQUETTE



FOR THOSE WHO DRINK

AND THOSE WHO DON'T!

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Public Health Service Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration

DHEW Publication No. (ADM)76-305
Reprinted 1976

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PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

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WHEN SOMEONE YOU KNOW DRINKS TOO MUCH

Many of us know a family member or friend who shows signs of being in trouble with drinking. What should we do about it?

First, understand that problem drinking does not reflect moral weakness; it is often a symptom of deep troubles, psychological or physical, or both. Alcoholism, which is sometimes the end product of problem drinking, is a treatable illness with a good recovery rate for those who seek proper treatment. The sooner they get aid, the better the chances of recovery.

Second, if you are close to someone with a drinking problem, do not hesitate to talk to him or her about it. Above all, get involved, and don't be put off by feeling it's impolite to do so. In fact, it isn't "polite" to ignore the fact that someone you know well drinks too much.

Encourage your friend to get the effective help that is now available. Most communities have a chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous. The National Council on Alcoholism has branches in many cities. And in many areas there are private and government-sponsored clinics where information and immediate help can be found.



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AN ETIQUETTE OF DRINKING



THE COCKTAIL PARTY— A CROWD IS NOT COMPANY

This American invention has been called “a primitive, dangerous drinking rite.” It seems designed to bring too many people into too small a space to drink too much too fast without eating, all spiced with conversation that can’t be heard—often for the purpose of paying off social debts wholesale.

The typical cocktail party is crowded, and everyone is dressed up, hungry, and a little tense. Many of the guests scarcely know one another. The host or hostess is frequently immobilized by the crowd in a corner of the room. There is little to eat. There’s not much to do but stand around uncomfortably, drink, and talk. And talking is easier than hearing. Some parties go on for hours with no breaks in the drinking.

How to cope? Well, one can stay home. Or go with a game plan—have the ritual drink if you choose, elbow your way to the beleaguered host or hostess, pay your respects, and escape to a quiet dinner served somewhere else.

If you venture to give a cocktail party of your own, be kind to your guests. Invite no more than may be seated somewhere, even on the floor. Set specific hours, say five to seven—and close the bar at seven. Introduce people, lay out a nutritious snack assortment that will carry a hungry guest until eight o’clock dinner. Provide coasters that guests may use to rest their drinks on while relaxing, moving about, and conversing without having to hold the ever-present glass.

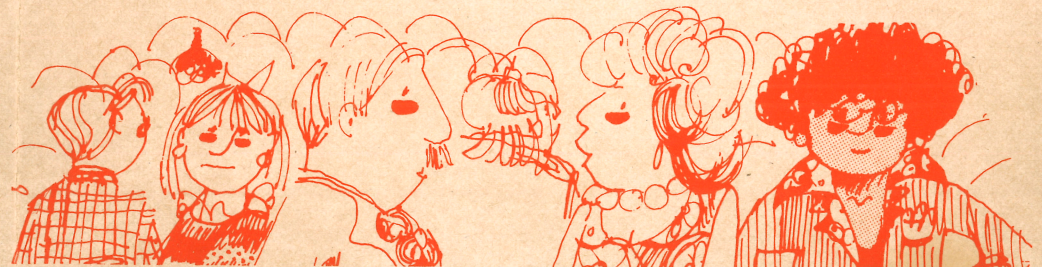
Etiquette means, of course, the rules of manners and behavior that meet standards generally accepted by one’s own social group.

In this country we have a mixture of social groups living according to customs drawn from around the world as well as customs that are uniquely American. So we have many patterns of drinking etiquette. Consider, for example, the different ways we offer, serve, consume—or abstain from—alcoholic beverages in such diverse settings as the traditional Italian home, the cocktail party, the corner tavern, the ghetto bar, the college dorm, the rural dance hall, the drinking home, and the dry home.

In one setting it is sometimes an insult to refuse a drink. In another it is an insult to offer one. In some situations people sip just enough to brighten a meal or social occasion; in others, people routinely drink fast to get high and drink often to get drunk.

The significant thing is that in all of these situations people accept and approve of a variety of rules and practices for getting along together—a code of etiquette that smooths the way for what is felt to be a pleasant social experience. Most agree on what is considerate and acceptable behavior for the specific social occasion.

They agree on nearly everything except how to handle alcoholic beverages. When it comes to drinking, we are truly a diverse society. No consensus exists when it comes to serving and consuming alcohol. This confusion has helped to bring trouble to millions of Americans. Nearly ten million men and women—one in ten adult



is consumed as beer or wine, the physical and psychological changes come more slowly than when alcohol is taken as distilled spirits. Diluting liquor with a non-alcoholic mixer can help slow the effects of alcohol. Alcohol diluted with water is absorbed more slowly than when diluted with carbonated mixers. The average cocktail, a 4-ounce glass of wine, or a 12-ounce can of beer—all have approximately the same ethyl alcohol content.

One acceptable way to regulate the flow of alcohol is to serve spiked punch as the only alcoholic beverage. By offering a bowl of punch that will provide each guest with three or four cupfuls, it is unlikely that anyone will exceed his capacity.

And remember, it is just as important to satisfy those who choose *not* to drink alcoholic beverages. For these guests, a good variety of other beverages should be offered.

GIVING THE PARTY

True hospitality involves much more than plying guests with food and drink. Again, it is the obligation of the host and hostess to set the tone, direction, and pace of activity.

Try something different. Instead of sending guests directly to the bar, try mixing people as they arrive. The warmth that comes from greeting old friends and meeting new people may exceed the flow stirred by a martini or a can of beer. Good conversation is possible without a glass in hand. Alcohol should enhance conversation—not dominate it.

If drinks are to be served, it is good to plan the refreshment sequence well in advance: selecting a bartender, when to open the bar, pacing the drinks, providing suitable snacks, and, importantly, closing the bar.

There are ways to promote party togetherness while keeping things under control:



These groups have achieved a consensus and an etiquette on how to drink safely. This consensus may be one that Americans should consider and adopt.

There is a library full of hints for hostesses, recipes for drinks, party tidbits, and party games, but practically no how-to-do-it guides for serving and consuming alcohol when people get together. This booklet suggests some ways to give social drinking a more rational setting and to help preserve the well-being and dignity of both host and guest.

LOOK HOMEWARD—TO YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

Many of us feel comfortable about our use of alcoholic beverages and the drinking customs of our associates. We haven't had reason to be concerned. At the same time, many others of us are worried because of personal or shared troubles with drinking.

While most of us have been taught such things as how to act at the table, how to behave in public, school, and office, and the need to maintain respect for the traditions and laws of the land, few of us have learned about the realities of alcohol and alcohol use. Until recently, practically no instruction in this area was offered in the classroom. The more fortunate among us learned from our parents to make responsible decisions about alcohol. Others learned about drinking from sources that are frequently unreliable—friends, bar acquaintances, or their own observations.

Where do we as hosts, hostesses, or guests fit into the broad range of American drinking customs? It may be helpful to examine our values and current practices in light of how they affect our own well-being and that of our social group. We need to consider the rights of those who have decided to abstain. We also must learn to understand the meaning of "responsible drinking" for those who choose to drink.

Responsible attitudes toward drinking should make us behave in such a way that we never have to feel sorry for what happened while we were drinking. Basically, this means not becoming drunk. For the individual who has made the personal decision to drink, there are a number