

IN THE

HOTSEAT

The dos and don'ts of hosting and attending parties With Maggie Oldham, the original Modern Etiquette Coach and convention expert.



FOR HOSTS

DON'T If your plan is not to serve cocktails specifically, don't call your event a cocktail party. Instead, the gathering could be called a party, reception, celebration, bash, etc. but leave out the term 'cocktail.'

DO Send out invitations (electronic or paper) at least four weeks in advance for a formal cocktail party (with a larger guest list), or at least two weeks for a more casual event. Invitations should include the host's name(s), date, time, location, RSVP method, deadline and dress code (if there is one!).

DO Consider hiring a bartender. This relieves you of having to mix cocktails and prevents messy disasters that can happen when cocktails are 'self-serve.'

DO In addition to alcohol, have a variety of non-alcoholic beverages. This can be as simple as soft drinks/mixers, sparkling and still water. If you have a bartender, it's helpful to have self-serve still water available.

DON'T Forget the less-glamorous essentials. Napkins, ice, and a visible waste bin. You'd be surprised how often hosts forget these three very important elements.

DO Make sure all sparkling wine, white wine, beer and mixers are chilled for at least two hours.

DON'T Serve cocktails in incorrect stemware. For example, Champagne in a wine glass - use a flute or coupe. Don't offer wine in a rocks glass, and certainly do not serve an old-fashioned in a Collins glass!

DO As the host greet all guests. Offer to take their coats and, of course, a beverage.

DON'T Unless you have specific cultural rules/guidelines, ask guests to remove their shoes. If you don't want people walking in their shoes in your home, don't host a party. Or, take your party outdoors.

DO Know graceful and classy ways to encourage guests to leave. This can be done by gradually turning on lights, turning down the music and beginning the clean-up. Guests will get the hint it's time to leave when they see you putting dishes in the sink or tying up the rubbish. If none of these actions seems to be working, it's totally fine to be honest and say (starting with your closest friends/guests) "We've had such an incredible evening, but unfortunately we have to get up early tomorrow to [insert activity here]. We will definitely plan something again soon!"

GUESTS

DO If the invitation says RSVP, it is crucial to respond. The invitation is specifically and explicitly asking you to do so. If the invitation does not say RSVP, then it is not important to answer. If the invitation says RSVP with regrets only, then respond only if you cannot make it. If you're a host asking for

RSVPs, then be sure to include a by-date so that you don't have responses trickling in at the last minute. As a guest, be sure to follow the by-date.

DON'T Forget to bring the host(s) a small gift or token of appreciation. However, this is on a case-by-case basis. Do: When the party is held in the host's home or when you are attending a party

outside of someone's home in celebration of a guest of honour (birthday, retirement, anniversary, shower, etc). Don't: When you are attending a party outside of someone's home and it is not a celebration for a guest of honour or when the party is held in the host's home but the invitation says "In lieu of gifts". When you should bring a gift, what kind of gift to bring? If you know the host or guest of honour drinks, then a bottle of wine is always a welcome and safe bet. Otherwise, fresh flowers or a scented candle is a wonderful gift for any occasion.

DO Hold your drink in your left hand throughout the party so that your right hand is free, warm, and dry for shaking others' hands.

DO Keep a plate or napkin in your hand if you plan to enjoy any passed hors d'oeuvres or canapés. This prevents dropping crumbs when taking a bite. The plate or napkin also serves as a place to discard toothpicks or other non-edibles that may come with the passed hors d'oeuvres. When taking a canapé, place it on your napkin or plate first before taking a bite.

DO Allow the host(s) to make the first toast. If you are a guest, never announce to the other party guests that you would like to give a toast. If you are a guest and you would like to make a toast, first ask the host(s) if it would be OK. If they say it is, then ask for an appropriate time. You do not want to make the mistake of giving an unapproved toast seconds before the host comes out of the kitchen carrying a birthday cake with candles!

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PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES; STYLING: JESSICA HARRIS



Adding a glass to celebrations done right, for guests and hosts