



Center for

HARM REDUCTION

Therapy

Volume 8, issue 2

Winter 2014

Wondering how you'll handle your drinking or drug use during the holidays?



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Wednesdays 6 PM

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Harm Reduction for the Holidays: 5 Tips

By Patt Denning, PhD

Holidays offer many opportunities to overdo it. Between parties, celebrations, families, or money worries, we are often at a loss about how to cope. The easiest way is to fall back on old familiar ways—whether or not they have been helpful in the past. Using alcohol and other drugs can be a way of celebrating or coping. Either way, it's easy to over do it.

Harm Reduction offers you a new perspective and a toolkit of strategies. Harm reduction offers solutions that can be tailored for just about any holiday situation that arises: work parties, social events, family gatherings, out on the town, or at home with the TV—each situation can be crafted to help keep you in control of your alcohol and other drug use.

5 TIPS for handling all of these situations

1. JUST SAY KNOW

This means, first of all, figuring out what you want to experience—do you want to have a blast, meet new people/contacts, renew old acquaintances, find a date, or just get through it? Then, figure out exactly how much of whatever you are imbibing will give you that experience. You already know the answer to that question—it is just a matter of focusing on it in a new way. Following are several scenarios likely to occur during the holidays:

Scenario 1: You're going to an office party in your large company. There will be great food and an open bar. There may even be a back room with some cocaine on offer. Your manager and your staff will be in attendance.

Just Say Know: what kind of an impression do you want to make and what kind of example might you be to others around you? It might be fine to be seen as the hard worker who can cut loose, but it might also lead you into making remarks or tell jokes that are out of place. What are your limits before you go from smart and witty to something you wish hadn't happened? When should you quit? And when should you go home?

Scenario 2: You and your new girlfriend are having Christmas Eve dinner at her parents' house.

Just Say Know: have you met her parents before or is this a first "viewing" for all of you? How much do they drink (or use)? What will they be looking for in you? Is your girlfriend going to be anxious and need your support? Figure out in advance what the situation will call for from you and then decide how much is enough and how much too much.

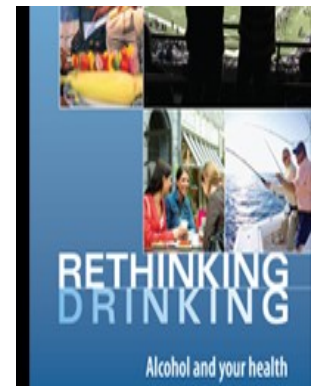
Scenario 3: Everyone you know has gone out of town and you're home alone on Christmas eve.

Just Say Know: You might not be happy to be sitting out this evening on your own. Just you, the dog, and the TV. Do you want to make it fun? Or are you liable to get drunk and create regrettable Facebook postings? How much do you need to

90% of People Drink Heavily Not Alcoholic, new study shows

According to the latest annual National Survey on Drug Use and Health (formerly known as the Household Survey), most people who drink too much are not addicted to alcohol and can change their behavior with some suggestions and help. Contrary to conventional and popular belief, even if they drink to the point of drunkenness, most are not alcohol dependent.

What this means is that if one is a heavy drinker, gets drunk on occasion, or gets (over) loaded on cocaine or other drugs, it is not necessary to declare oneself an addict and get to the nearest AA meeting. What it DOES mean, however, is that one should take a look at the causes, the circumstances, and the consequences of one's overuse. Much harm can be caused by overuse of alcohol, for example, simply because it is toxic to so many organs in the body. Harm Reduction offers many solutions short of lifelong abstinence and commitment to 12-step meetings.



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5 Tips, continued

achieve your goal and avoid regrets?

Scenario 4: Your friends are back and are planning a New Year's Eve stroll through local bars and parties.

Just Say Know: Now this is more like it! Your best friends together and an entire city to roam through. What do you want from this evening? Forget the past year? Rejoice in the new? Just let loose and not have a care in the world?

You likely have many other situations that will occur over the next three weeks. Envision them and ask yourself: "What do I want to experience?"

2. PREPARE YOURSELF, AND DON'T GO IT ALONE!

Now that you know what you want to experience on each occasion, it's time to plan. How much you drink or use doesn't have to be out of your control. Getting ahead of the situation is the best way to negotiate holiday events. Now that you've got some ideas about how you want different events to go, try a buddy system. We all can use some support. Have a conversation—with the people you'll be with, or other people you trust. Tell them what you're hoping for and what you're nervous about. Make a plan and give them a role to play.

Scenario 1: The office party. You've decided that, even though lots of people will be getting pretty wild, you are looking to gain respect from others in the company. You also know that at the end of a hard week and with an open bar, you are liable to let loose. Decide how many drinks will be optimal then tell someone what you are planning. Make a pact to check in with each other each time you go to the bar. If you don't want to entrust a workmate with such a responsibility, set some automatic alarms on your phone and take a break (outside or in the restroom!) before another drink.

3. PAY ATTENTION

The best way to stay in control is to check in with yourself regularly. Get a read on how you are feeling and what you are thinking. Are you more nervous than you thought you'd be? Are people really pushing the booze or the cocaine? Are you already feeling buzzed and you've got hours to go?

Scenario 2: The Christmas Eve dinner. You walk in and there are a lot more people than you expected. And they've already had a few. They welcome you and invite you to catch up with them. After your first drink, find the restroom and take a break. Remind yourself of how you want to be—for them and for your girlfriend. Collect yourself and remind yourself of some of the topics that you planned to bring up in case the conversation got stilted. Get yourself excited about being able to have fun and not get drunk.

4. THREE SKILLS

There are three key skills to help you deal with situations as they arise. Refusal skills, distraction, and substitution—these can get you through tense moments when you are torn between wanting more and not wanting to end up over the top.

Scenario 4: New Year's Eve.

Refusal: This takes practice in advance. Think about how you can say no that feels natural. Rehearse how you will refuse another drink or hit if you don't want one ("no, thanks, I'm good for now").

Distraction: Draw attention to something else about you or the situation ("I'm hoping to see some new faces", or, while sipping on your drink, "check out those people in the corner").

Substitution: To manage your own wishes for more, order some food, get some air, try a non-alcoholic beer, ask someone

to tell you that long story about their vacation.

5. REBOOTING AND RESOLUTIONS

Everything may not go as you had hoped. Some situations you just can't plan for. So you are in the middle of the event and you've had way too much to drink. Stop—try the old "where's the restroom" trick to take yourself away for a minute. Now is the time to encourage, not criticize yourself. And now is the time to restate your resolve—either for the moment, or for the future.

Scenario 3: Alone on Christmas eve. You bought a split of champagne but finished it early. You didn't get enough good food in the house and it's raining. You find yourself cracking open the box of wine left over from last week's holiday dinner and putting some cheese whiz in the microwave. Blown it! Well, maybe not. Remind yourself that this is a tough situation for you. Ask yourself if you *could* just pour out the rest of that not-so-great wine. If not, shake it off and forgive yourself for being human. One night of a missed promise can be the start of a renewed goal. It's most effective to blame the plan, make a new one, and start again!

Rethinking Drinking

Is a very balanced and informative pamphlet. Apply its principles and tools to any drug you use. Download a PDF in English or order the pamphlet in English or Spanish from <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/>

Letter from the Executive Director *Jeannie Little, LCSW*

2014 has been an incredibly productive year for HRTC. In January, we formed a national research group called *Harm Reduction Therapy Research Leaders*. That group has met monthly, made a research plan, and begun work on the first phase.

In late 2013 we received a grant from the *Taproot Foundation* which matched us with four experienced marketing professionals. They studied our work and came up with a focused brand strategy and key messages. Out of that process came a new website, look, blogs, and an upcoming expanded program. See article below.

Thanks to a late 2013 grant

from the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust and a just-received grant from the GGS Foundation, we have been able to expand our services to homeless youth. Over the last year, we began a training and support program for At the Crossroads, a youth outreach and case management program. Now we will be able to expand our hours at the Homeless Youth Alliance, where we have been working for many years.

In the last year, we have trained even more people than ever—a total of over 1400, with 450 people receiving ongoing training and consultation. We offered a popular harm reduction therapy track at the recent

national harm reduction conference in Baltimore and followed that up with a plenary talk and several workshops at the Harm Reduction Hawaii conference. In her talk, Patt mentioned the Hawaiian values of *ohana*, family, and *kuleana*, responsibility to highlight the idea that we are all one, there is no US and THEM, and we all bear responsibility for and to each other, a fitting message as we enter the holidays.

From all of us at HRTC, Happy Holidays!



DRUG POLICY IN THE NEWS

The American Civil Liberties Union has announced a \$50 million grant from the Open Society Foundations in support of its campaign to end mass incarceration in the United States. The nationwide campaign seeks to reform criminal justice policies that have increased incarceration rates dramatically, attributable to the War on Drugs, during an era of declining crime rates and widening racial disparities. The nation's adult jail and prison population currently numbers more than 2.2 million people, with one in a hundred adults behind bars — the highest rate in the world. The ACLU aims to cut that number in half by 2020 with the most ambitious effort to end mass incarceration in U.S. history.

HRTC—New Website and New Programs

Thanks to a grant from the Taproot Foundation and the generous sliding scale from Tectonica, a web development company in Buenos Aires, HRTC has a new logo and a new website with much improved information, *and* regular blogs. HRTC is now called the Center for Harm Reduction Therapy. All of this is in preparation for an expansion of our services next year.

In 2015 we will be expanding our programs and services. Most important, we will be developing an intensive outpatient program for people who need a few days or weeks to a few months of consultation, therapy, and groups. People can come from the Bay Area or from anywhere else and stay in our many hotels to participate in a program either in San Francisco or Oakland.



HRTC will launch new short-term groups for private clients and will also offer occasional public presentations.

If you know someone, or if you have a group, who would benefit from knowing about harm reduction, please contact us!

90%, continued

The survey showed that 29% of Americans over 12 years old meet the criteria for excessive drinking. This very high percentage is boosted by the fact that all underage drinkers and all pregnant women are defined as excessive drinkers, regardless of the amount. And we know how many high school and college students drink!

In harm reduction

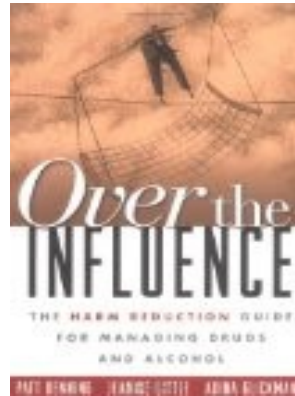
practice, safety measures, moderating, or quitting are all equally valid and effective options to reduce harm and manage one's drinking or drug use. The main article in this newsletter offers 5 tips on how to plan so that you avoid the pitfall that this woman fell into. If you have felt trapped between only two options—loss of control or complete abstinence, try harm reduction!





New Website! New Logo!! New Name!!! New and improved information!!!! Check it out!!!!

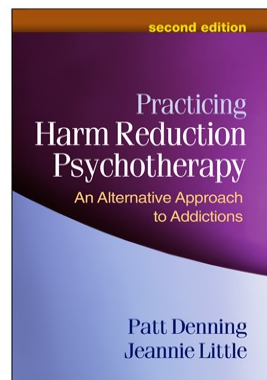
Upcoming events and news—



Stay tuned for the **2nd edition of Over the Influence**, our popular guide for managing drugs and alcohol. Writing began in Dec and we hope to have it out by next holiday season, just in time for New Years' resolutions.

We will add a few new concepts, update the drugs section, and provide more tools and questionnaires to help the reader evaluate him or herself and plan changes.

All, we hope, in a slightly smaller package.



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The Center for Harm Reduction Therapy employs a revolutionary treatment program to deliver individually tailored solutions to substance abuse.

This treatment program, called Harm Reduction Therapy, combines substance abuse treatment with psychotherapy, which enables clients to address both their substance misuse and the issues behind it. It is a client-empowering program, in which client and therapist collaborate in prioritizing the issues to be addressed in treatment. Together, they develop treatment plans, and jointly implement gradual, realistic steps to achieve their goals.

Unlike traditional “quit now and forever” programs, we do not ask that clients stop all substance use, unless that is their goal, and we help families find alternatives to “tough love.”

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