



Holidays, Celebrations & "Just One"

Surviving the days built around the substance · Recovery in Focus · Session Packet

Most days in recovery, you are only dealing with your own triggers. On certain days, the whole culture piles on too. Weddings toast. Funerals gather at the bar after. New Year's counts down to champagne. The game comes with a cooler, the barbecue comes with a case, and the holidays come with family, money stress, old memories, and an open bottle on every counter. Counselors call these **high-risk events**: occasions where cues, emotions, and social pressure all spike at once, on a schedule you can see coming months away.

These days carry a second danger that ordinary days don't: the most dangerous sentence in recovery sounds most reasonable on them. "It's a wedding. It's one toast. It's just one." The problem with that sentence is what everyone in this room already knows from experience: for a brain trained by addiction, "one" has never stayed one. The first one is the one that opens the door to all the rest. The good news is that these days are predictable: a risk you can see coming is a risk you can plan for, down to the hour, the drink in your hand, the exit, and the ride home. People don't white-knuckle their way through these days successfully very often. People plan their way through them all the time. This session builds the plan.

What is in this session?

This session has four parts, usually covered over two group meetings:

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|----------------|---|--------------------------------|
| CLASS 1 | 1. The Days That Stack Against You | 2. The "Just One" Voice |
| CLASS 2 | 3. The Event Plan | 4. Scripts and Exits |

After this session you will be able to

- Name your own high-risk events and what each one loads against you
- Hear the "just one" voice coming and answer it
- Build a complete event plan: before, during, exit, and after
- Use ready-made scripts for offers, toasts, and "why aren't you drinking?"

What will be asked of you?

You'll be asked to look at your calendar honestly, including the events you've been telling yourself will be fine, and to practice saying refusal lines out loud until they're boring. Boring is the goal. A rehearsed line at a party is just a thing you say.

Part 1: The Days That Stack Against You

WAIT, REALLY?

Treatment programs and crisis lines see the same calendar every year: relapses **cluster around holidays, celebrations, and big games**. The dates change by person. The pattern doesn't.

Why these days hit harder: they stack everything at once. Cues (the smell, the cooler, the toast). Emotions (grief at funerals, family friction at holidays, pure joy at weddings, and joy is a trigger too; plenty of people used at their happiest). Social pressure (a drink put in your hand before you're asked). Loneliness (the first sober holidays can ache). And permission logic: special days feel like they sit outside the normal rules. The calendar does you one favor in return: unlike a bad Tuesday, these days are marked months in advance. You always know they are coming.

EXERCISE 1

Answer yes or no:

1. I've used or drunk more around holidays or big events than regular days. ☐ Yes
☐ No
2. Happy occasions have been as risky for me as hard ones. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. There's an event on my calendar right now I've been telling myself will be fine.
☐ Yes ☐ No

EXERCISE 2: MY CALENDAR, HONESTLY

Check the events that have history with your using, and add what's coming:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Christmas / winter holidays | ☐ Funerals and wakes |
| ☐ New Year's Eve | ☐ Summer barbecues / the lake / the river |
| ☐ Thanksgiving | ☐ Paydays that feel like events |
| ☐ My birthday | ☐ Anniversaries of losses |
| ☐ Game days / playoffs | ☐ Other: _____ |
| ☐ Weddings | |

The next one coming, with its date: _____

EXERCISE 3

Pick your hardest event. What does it load against you, specifically? (Cues, feelings, people, pressure, memories)

Part 2: The "Just One" Voice

On ordinary days the using voice has to argue. On special days it only has to sound polite. Listen to its event vocabulary: "It's a toast, it's tradition." "Everyone's having one." "It's what he would have wanted." "You can't not drink at your own brother's wedding." "One beer at a game isn't using." Notice what every line has in common: none of them mention the second one. The voice only ever sells the first one, because the voice knows what you know: one has never stayed one.

EXERCISE 4

Answer yes or no:

1. "Just one" has ever cost me more than one. ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. I've used an occasion as permission. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. I can hear my own version of the "just one" line in my head right now. ☐ Yes
☐ No

EXERCISE 5: THE VOICE AND THE ANSWER

My "just one" line, word for word, the one my voice actually uses:

My answer to it, written now, while it's quiet:

Luis

Luis is eight months sober at his cousin's wedding, and he planned nothing, because family is safe, right? The toast comes and a glass of champagne is in his hand before anyone asks. Everyone stands. His uncle catches his eye and raises his glass. The voice doesn't say get drunk. It says one sip for the toast, you'll put it down after. Luis sets the glass down, picks up his phone like it buzzed, and walks to the hallway. He calls his sponsor and says one sentence: "Toast almost got me." Ninety seconds later he's back, holding a soda the bartender swapped without a word, because Luis asked him to an hour earlier. Turns out he did plan one thing.

EXERCISE 6

1. What did the voice sell Luis, and what didn't it mention?

2. Name the two moves that saved the toast: _____

3. What's the toast moment at YOUR next event, the exact moment pressure peaks?

End of Class 1. Talk it out:

- What's your riskiest date in the next three months?
- Say your "just one" line out loud, then your answer. Which felt stronger?

Part 3: The Event Plan

An event plan has four parts. People who come home sober from hard events usually ran all four.

- **Before:** decide if you are going at all (skipping is a complete plan); eat first; book a meeting or call for that morning; tell one person at the event and one person outside it; and if the drinking is heaviest in the early hours, arrive late on purpose.
- **During:** a non-alcoholic drink in your hand from minute one (an occupied hand gets fewer offers); your person in sight; your car, not a ride you can't control; a check-out text at a set time.
- **The exit:** decided in advance: the time, the line ("early morning, great seeing everyone"), and the rule that overrides everything: the moment the craving gets loud, you leave. No goodbyes required. A text from the car counts.
- **After:** the debrief call on the drive home, made every time, especially when it went fine. Wins need witnesses as much as close calls do.

EXERCISE 7: MY EVENT PLAN

Build it for your next real event (from Exercise 2):

The event and date: _____

Going / not going, and why: _____

Before (meeting or call that morning, who knows I'm going):

During (drink in hand, my person there, my transportation):

My exit time and my exit line: _____

My debrief person for the drive home: _____

EXERCISE 8

Answer yes or no, about the plan you just wrote:

1. There is a person at the event who will know I'm sober and watching my back.

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. I control my own ride home. ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. I would actually leave mid-event if the craving got loud. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Any "no" above is the weak spot in the plan. Fix it before the date, not at the party.

Part 4: Scripts and Exits

The hardest three seconds of any event is the offer. Not because the words are hard, but because unrehearsed words hide when you're on the spot. The fix is the same as every skill in this series: decide the words now, say them out loud until they're boring, and let boring do the work. Short beats explained. You owe nobody a medical history at a barbecue.

- **The offer:** "I'm good, thanks." (Full stop. The most underrated script in recovery.)
- **The push:** "Not tonight. Hey, did you see the game?" (Decline plus redirect beats decline plus silence.)
- **The toast:** raise whatever is in your hand. Nobody checks the glass. It's the arm that toasts.
- **The "why aren't you drinking?":** pick yours: "Driving tonight." "On a health thing." "I don't drink." All three are complete sentences.
- **The person who won't quit:** that's not a script problem, that's an exit cue. "Good seeing you" and move, or go.

EXERCISE 9: PICK AND REHEARSE

My offer line: _____

My "why aren't you drinking" line: _____

My exit line: _____

Now the group practices: offers get made around the room, lines get said back, twice each, until they're boring.

EXERCISE 10: THE SOBER TRADITIONS LIST

Events feel empty when the substance was the tradition. Build replacements; check what you'd actually do:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Be the one who grills / cooks | ☐ Take the photos |
| ☐ Run the music or the games | ☐ The early-morning-after hike or breakfast |
| ☐ Be the designated driver, openly | ☐ A sober watch party for the game |
| ☐ Bring the good non-alcoholic drinks | ☐ Other: _____ |

SKILL OF THE DAY: BORING ON PURPOSE

Say your three lines (offer, why, exit) out loud once a day this week, in the car or the mirror, until they bore you. Rehearsed and boring is exactly how they need to feel at the event.

Take it to the group

- Which event on your calendar were you planning to wing, and what does its plan look like now?
- Luis asked the bartender an hour early. What's the version of that move at your event?
- Grief events and joy events: which is riskier for you, and why?
- What sober tradition could you own so completely that people expect it from you?

Session summary

Certain days stack cues, emotions, and pressure all at once, and hand the "just one" voice its most convincing material. Their one weakness is that they're scheduled. In this session you named your high-risk dates, wrote your answer to the "just one" voice while it was quiet, built a four-part event plan with a real exit, and rehearsed your scripts until they started getting boring. That is the goal. Boring lines and planned exits bring people home sober.

Words used in this session

- **High-risk event:** a scheduled occasion that stacks cues, emotions, and social pressure: holidays, weddings, funerals, game days, birthdays.
- **Permission logic:** the feeling that special days sit outside normal rules. They don't.
- **The toast moment:** whatever single moment at your event carries the most pressure. Plan for that minute specifically.
- **The debrief:** the call on the drive home, made win or lose. Wins need witnesses too.

Takeaway: You cannot make the calendar safe, but the calendar tells you when the hard days are coming. Plan all four parts, rehearse your lines until they bore you, and remember the one thing the "just one" voice never mentions: the first one opens the door to all the rest.
