WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

Keep your exit sentence simple.

Try this when it is safe:

“I’m heading out now. We can talk another time.”

You can decline an invitation, shorten a visit, or choose a different way to connect. You do not have to win an argument before leaving.

My own exit sentence:

Someone who knows my plan:

A way I can get home safely:

If leaving could put you at risk, seek a safety plan with qualified support instead of relying on a script.

WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS STRUGGLING

A shorter visit can still count.

Planning ahead. Asking for a ride. Choosing another gathering. Small changes can protect room for your own well-being.

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US SUPPORT

Medical emergency or suspected overdose: call 911.

Emotional distress or suicidal crisis: call or text 988.

Family support: SAMHSA.gov/families
Relationship safety: TheHotline.org

General adult education. Not medical, legal, or crisis services. Adapt plans to your circumstances and seek qualified help when needed.

SOURCES / FURTHER READING

SAMHSA / Family support

The Hotline / Safety planning

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Hard dinners. Clear limits.

You can care about the people there and still make a plan for yourself.



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01 / BEFORE YOU GO

Choose what fits this time.

A family tradition can matter and still need a different plan this year. Start with what you know about this gathering.

CHECK THE SETTING

Will there be pressure, conflict, or substance use? What has happened before? You can decide how much contact feels workable.

CHECK YOUR OPTIONS

Going is one option. A shorter visit, a phone call, or skipping this event can be options too. Consider who depends on you.

What I want from the gathering:

A sign I may need to leave:

SAFETY COMES FIRST

If threats, coercion, or violence are part of the picture, get support with a safety plan. A well-worded boundary cannot make another person safe.

02 / PLAN THE PRACTICAL PART

Make leaving possible.

Choose arrangements you can actually use. A car is not the only way to have a plan.

TIME

Decide when to arrive and leave. If helpful, tell a safe person: “I’m planning to stay until six.”

TRANSPORT

Arrange a sober ride, accessible transport, or trusted pickup. Do not depend on an impaired driver.

CHILDREN AND DEPENDENTS

Plan sober care and a way home for anyone relying on you. Agree on the plan with the adults involved.

My time or check-in point:

My backup if plans change:

A backup can be a small, practical form of progress.

03 / PRACTICE BEFORE THE ASK

Use words you can repeat.

Pick one situation you expect. Keep your response brief enough to remember.

A REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

“No thanks. I’m not drinking.”
“I’m not discussing that tonight.”

The situation I expect:

My one-sentence response:

Support I could ask for:

AFTERWARD, NOTICE

What worked? What was harder than expected? What would make the next gathering more manageable?

One thing I will keep:

One thing I will adjust:

Leaving early or choosing another plan does not erase your care for the people involved.