

HOLIDAY SOBRIETY SURVIVAL GUIDE

Stay On Track This Holiday Season:
...With Confidence, Peace, and a Plan



A simple 8-step strategy guide from
a certified addiction counselor.

Holiday Sobriety Survival Guide

*Stay Sober This Holiday Season With Confidence,
Peace, and a Plan*

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INTRODUCTION

Stay Sober This Holiday Season With Confidence, Peace, and a Plan

A practical survival guide for real-life recovery.

The holidays are not a neutral season—they pull on every emotional thread at once. Family dynamics, financial pressure, packed schedules, crowded rooms, overeating, loneliness, old memories, unresolved tension, year-end deadlines, travel fatigue... everything hits at the same time. And everywhere you turn, alcohol or other substances are part of the background like wallpaper.

Finding this season difficult isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign you're human.

This guide gives you the exact tools to stay sober, steady, and in control through the most triggering stretch of the year. Not by being perfect. Not by relying on willpower. But by having a plan, a strategy, and a steady internal stance before you ever walk into a holiday environment.

Everything here comes from Brett Lowrey's real work with professionals navigating early and mid-stage recovery. Brett is a certified addiction counselor and recovery coach who teaches clients tools—not dependency. You stay responsible for your choices and your progress, and that's why you grow strong. These strategies reflect that same philosophy.

This guide was written for someone like you:

A high-functioning professional who carries a lot. Someone who's already done the deeper therapeutic or medical work with a clinician, but who still needs practical, private support for daily life. Someone who values subtle Christian grounding without preachy

tones or clichés. Someone who wants to show up with integrity—for your career, your health, your family, and the future version of yourself.

This is your plan. Let's begin.

STRATEGY 1 : Know Your Personal Holiday Triggers Before They Blindside You

Holidays magnify whatever is already sitting under the surface. Old family roles. Stress from year-end work demands. Loneliness. Grief. Childhood memories. The expectation to “perform” or “be fine.” You don’t need to fix all of this—you just need to stop getting caught off guard by it.

Think of your triggers like weather patterns:

You can’t control them, but you can forecast them. A storm is far less dangerous when you see it coming.

Start by identifying three triggers that reliably show up for you during the holidays. Be brutally honest. Examples from real clients:

- “The second I walk into my parents’ house, I feel 14 again.”
- “My siblings drink heavily and hand me drinks without asking.”
- “When work piles up before year-end, I stop eating and get snappy.”
- “A full house overwhelms me—noise, kids, expectations—no escape.”
- “I feel pressure to pretend I’m fine even when I’m not.”

Once you name a trigger, you can plan around it like an adult—not react to it like a younger version of yourself.

Tool: Trigger Forecasting Worksheet

(Include visually later—text below is final)

1. What environment consistently activates you?

(Examples: childhood home, office parties, airports, crowded rooms)

2. What internal state makes you vulnerable?

(Examples: hunger, exhaustion, sensory overload, feeling judged, loneliness)

3. What specific moment is the danger point?

(Examples: walking in the door, that one uncle's comments, 9–11 PM at events)

4. What is your pre-planned response?

Examples:

- Step outside for five minutes
- Text someone
- Move to a quieter room
- Eat something grounding
- Short walk
- Simple breathing reset

This worksheet turns vague stress into predictable patterns.

Real-World Example

A client who always felt “emotionally trapped” at her family’s Christmas Eve dinner realized her danger point wasn’t the whole night—it was the first 20 minutes when everyone asked personal questions at once. Once she knew that, she created a buffer plan: walk in with her partner, sit on the end of the couch near the hallway, and step outside after 15–20 minutes. That small adjustment changed the entire evening.

Why This Strategy Matters

Awareness isn’t therapy—it’s preparation.

When you can say, “A trigger has been pulled,” you gain distance. You shift from reactive to intentional. You don’t collapse into old patterns—you respond from who you are now.

You don't need a perfect childhood or a perfect family to stay sober during the holidays.
You only need a forecast.

Reflection Prompts

- Where do I historically lose my footing during the holidays?
 - Which person triggers me the most and why?
 - What physical signs show up when I'm getting overstimulated?
 - What's one predictable trigger I can eliminate entirely this year?
 - What's one trigger I can't avoid but can prepare for?
-

STRATEGY 2 : Redesign Your Social Plan Instead of Hoping for Willpower

Holiday social pressure is rarely subtle. People talk as if drinking is part of the costume.

You'll hear things like:

- "Relax, it's Christmas."
- "Come on, one won't hurt."
- "You're no fun tonight."

They don't say it to sabotage you, but the effect is the same: pressure, expectation, and a subtle erosion of your resolve.

Willpower is one of the weakest tools in recovery—especially when you're tired, hungry, overstimulated, or emotionally stretched thin. You need structure, not stubbornness.

The good news? Most of the danger disappears when your plan is stronger than the environment you're walking into.

Step 1: Decide Which Events Actually Matter

Professionals often forget that "No" is a complete sentence.

You don't have to attend:

- every office party
- every extended family dinner
- every neighbor gathering
- every social event you're "expected" to show up for

You are not rejecting people—you are protecting your progress.

Ask yourself:

Does this event support or sabotage my peace?

If it sabotages your peace, skip without guilt.

Step 2: Choose Arrival and Exit Times Before You Ever Show Up

This is one of the highest-leverage things anyone in recovery can do during the holidays.

Think of it like putting guardrails on a mountain road. You drive better when there's structure around you.

Examples:

- "I'm staying from 6:00 to 8:30, then I step outside, call my partner, and leave."
- "I'm arriving after the chaotic first hour and leaving before the late-night drinking."
- "I'm doing a 90-minute appearance and then heading home."

When you plan your exit, you eliminate the moment where willpower breaks down—because you're not asking yourself "Should I leave?" all night.

You already decided.

Step 3: Choose Your Drink Strategy Before Anyone Hands You Anything

The moment someone hands you a drink, you lose control of the situation.

Your drink plan should include:

- Arriving with your own nonalcoholic option
- Ordering something immediately
- Keeping a glass in your hand
- Practicing a neutral script like “I’m good, thanks” or “I’ve already got something”

A real client once said the simple act of holding sparkling water in a real glass cut his social pressure in half. When your hands are full, people leave you alone.

Quick Tool: The Event Planning Checklist

Use this for every holiday event:

Before You Go

- ☐ What time am I arriving?
- ☐ What time am I leaving?
- ☐ What is my drink plan?
- ☐ Who can I check in with before and after?
- ☐ What trigger do I expect?
- ☐ What is my exit script?
- ☐ What is my safe space if I get overwhelmed?

During the Event

- ☐ Keep a drink in hand
- ☐ Stay aware of your overstimulation signs
- ☐ Stick to your timeline
- ☐ Step outside if your internal volume rises

After the Event

- ☐ Text or call your accountability person
- ☐ Do a 2-minute reset (breathing, grounding, hydration)
- ☐ Celebrate one thing you did well

This checklist puts you in control of the environment—not the other way around.

Scripts You Can Use (Professional & Neutral)

People stall when they don't know what to say. Use these verbatim:

If someone pushes a drink

- “I’m pacing myself tonight.”
- “I’m all set—really, thank you.”
- “I’ve got an early morning.”
- “I’m driving later.”
- “Just sparkling water for me tonight.”

If someone pries

- “I’m keeping it simple tonight.”
- “I’m focusing on being present, not drinking.”
- “It’s been a long week; I’m taking it easy.”

If someone teases

- “I’m good. You enjoy.”
- “I’m here for the people, not the drinks.”
- “Not tonight.”

Short. Calm. Non-defensive. Undeniably adult.

Real Scenario (Example)

A professional client attended a holiday team dinner every year and always ended up drinking because “staying longer felt polite.” The year he decided on a firm 90-minute

window, he arrived prepared, kept sparkling water in a real glass, and left before the heavy drinking started.

He called his partner on the walk to the car, drove home, watched a movie, and woke up the next morning proud instead of ashamed.

Structure protects your peace. Structure protects your progress.

Why This Strategy Matters

Social environments are where relapse risk spikes—not because you're weak, but because humans automatically mimic group behavior. You're managing:

- overstimulation
- sensory overload
- social expectations
- hidden stress
- old identity roles
- decision fatigue
- emotional pressure

Having a plan eliminates 80% of the danger before you ever walk into a room.

You're not being rigid.

You're being responsible.

Reflection Prompts

- Which holiday events drained me the most last year?
 - Which ones genuinely matter to me—and which ones simply feel obligatory?
 - Who are the people I need to limit time around?
 - Which script feels most natural for me to use?
 - What would my ideal social season look like if I designed it from scratch?
-

STRATEGY 3 : Build a Pre-Event Reset Ritual That Lowers Stress Before You Walk In

Most people walk into holiday events already overloaded—rushing from work, traffic, errands, kids, travel, family pressure, or emotional residue from the day. They arrive at a holiday gathering at a 7 out of 10 stress level, then add noise, lights, conversations, expectations, and complicated dynamics.

Within minutes, they're at a 10 without understanding how they got there.

You can't walk into chaos *from* chaos.

You need a reset point in between.

This is one of the most powerful strategies in the entire guide because it stabilizes your nervous system before you walk into an environment that demands emotional regulation. A five-minute investment can prevent five hours of overwhelm.

This ritual doesn't need to be deep, spiritual, or poetic. It just needs to pull you back into your body and into the present moment.

What a Reset Ritual Actually Does

A reset ritual:

- lowers your internal pressure
- reduces sensory sensitivity
- slows your breathing
- grounds you before stimulation hits
- gives you a baseline to measure stress against
- separates “your day” from “this event”
- keeps you from reacting emotionally the second you walk inside

You are not trying to be zen. You're trying to arrive steady.

Real Examples from Clients

- Sitting in the car with eyes closed for five minutes
- Listening to one calming song on repeat
- Walking slowly around the block before going inside
- Calling a safe person and saying, "Heading in. I'll check in later."
- Eating something warm and grounding
- Taking 10 deep breaths before opening the door
- Repeating a grounding phrase:
 - "Arrive calm."
 - "Move slow."
 - "I'm in control of myself."
 - "One moment at a time."

These work because they interrupt the momentum of stress.

Reset Ritual Templates (Choose One or Mix & Match)

The 90-Second Reset

- 30 seconds: Deep breathing (4 seconds in, 6 seconds out)
- 30 seconds: Relax your jaw and shoulders
- 30 seconds: Touch something grounding (steering wheel, your coat, your keys) and say your intention ("steady," "present," "calm," "God, help me show up with clarity")

The 5-Minute Reset

- 1 minute slow breathing
- 1 minute body scan
- 1 minute listening to a comforting piece of music
- 1 minute reviewing your exit plan
- 1 minute picturing the most grounded, adult version of yourself walking in

The Faith-Grounded Reset (Subtle Christian version)

- Quiet moment
- "God, give me clarity and peace."
- Breathe deeply

- “Help me to be steady, kind, and self-controlled.”
- Walk in slowly

Spiritual, but not preachy—perfect for your audience.

Tool: Create Your Personal Reset Ritual

Fill in the blanks (this will become a worksheet later):

When I arrive at the event, I will take:

___ minutes in my car / outside / hallway / bathroom
before entering.

My grounding method will be:

- ☐ breathing
- ☐ prayer
- ☐ music
- ☐ short walk
- ☐ calming phrase
- ☐ warm drink
- ☐ call or text check-in
- ☐ other: _____

My intention for how I want to show up:

_____.

My baseline check:

What is my internal volume right now, 1–10?

If it's above a 6, I will take an extra minute before entering.

This worksheet becomes part of your holiday toolkit.

Why This Strategy Matters

Relapse moments often come from emotional stacking—small stressors built on top of each other until you're overloaded. A reset ritual creates a clean baseline, so when stress begins to rise inside the event, it's easier to recognize and manage.

You deserve to enter rooms steady—not rushed, not depleted, not bracing for impact.

A ritual is not overkill. It is preparation for the version of you that you want leading the rest of the night.

Reflection Prompts

- What do I usually feel right before walking into a holiday event?
 - What physical signs tell me I'm already overloaded?
 - Which reset method feels most natural for me?
 - What intention do I want to bring with me this year?
 - What difference would it make if I arrived grounded instead of frantic?
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Brett Lowrey is a certified addiction counselor and recovery coach who specializes in helping high-performing professionals build lasting, meaningful recovery through practical tools, structured support, and grounded accountability. For 20 years, Brett has worked with high-performing leaders navigating substance use, stress, burnout, and major life transitions—guiding them toward

clarity, stability, and long-term change.

His coaching philosophy is simple: recovery grows when you take responsibility, practice daily action, and face your life with confidence instead of avoidance.

Brett teaches strategies that work in real moments, not theories that collapse under pressure.

What sets Brett apart is his ability to understand the unique challenges of high-achieving leaders who want private support without stigma. He provides discretion, structure, and tools that fit the complexity of real life—not one-size-fits-all advice.

Brett works with clients across the United States through group and private one-to-one coaching programs

To learn more or explore coaching options, visit:

www.BrettLowreyCoaching.net

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