

How to leave a party early and still be a good person

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The nice people of the world think you have to say goodbye to everyone at the end of a party. You can't just say goodbye to the host and hostess or sneak out entirely. We're here to confess that, in this arena, we are not nice. We have snuck out of many a Bar Mitzvah or wedding that lasted hours and hours past our bedtime.

On the way to the affair, one of our husbands is wont to ask: "What time does this party end?" We remind him that unless it's a 5-year-old's birthday party and the magician will be done by 2 p.m., the end time isn't specified.

Invariably, the follow-up question is: "How long do you want to stay?"

Good question. "When is it appropriate to leave?" and "To whom do we have to say goodbye?" are two big existential questions that we are still pondering after years and years of exiting family picnics, graduation parties, business dinners, college reunions, fancy weddings, and teenage Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.

Look for your signal to leave



We're friendly. We like to socialize. But how long is too long to for a second cousin's wedding? We've never met the lucky bride; we don't know her family, yet we chatted with her Uncle Earl from Boston for 20 minutes. We heard all about how the food was really wonderful on his recent riverboat cruise.

We're happy to see our cousins and catch up with them, but we find that we are giving the same spiel when they ask what's new. No, we don't know if he's ever going to marry that girl or what she's going to do with that degree.

After a while, our feet hurt, we're stuffed from the hors d'oeuvres, and we've caught up on all the news. It's still the cocktail hour.

How long does a good guest stay? We don't ever want to be the first to go, so we keep our eyes peeled for the signal. We point out, "Oh, look, the Goldbergs and the McCormicks are leaving."

While Ellen will be close behind those two couples, Joyce considers dessert — served and eaten — her signal. No matter if midnight rolls around and the waiters are just serving the sirloin, she stays planted until the lava fudge cake with three strawberries makes an appearance.

If it's a wedding, she'll wait to see the couple cut the cake, but she doesn't have to stay around to catch the bouquet or to sway in a circle on the dance floor to the final song, "That's What Friends Are For." Been there, done that.

When you gotta go, you gotta go

Some people sneak out really early. When the waiter carrying two extra plates of salmon points to the empty spots at our table and asks, "Are they coming back?" we know in our hearts that they are not in the bathroom. They snuck out without saying goodbye to us.

Another moral dilemma: Do we tell the waiter they've left or keep quiet in case we want extra mashed potatoes?

Ellen is married to the one of nicest guys in the world. He is considerate to everyone. The downside of this is that he thinks you can't leave a party until you say goodbye to everyone. That's why Ellen is often seen in the hallway yelling, "Come on; just go. No one will even care. They won't miss us."

They usually compromise by saying goodbye to the hosts only before rushing out of the room without making eye contact with the rest of the family.

It's easier to say goodbye when you know only a few people. When it's time to leave, you give a general wave to the room and skip out. In fact, the whole party can be more fun. You can take as many pigs in the blanket as you want, speak only when spoken to, and not worry about looking silly on the dance floor.

Sometimes you don't know anyone and you still can't leave. That was the case recently when Ellen and her son, Andy, had to go to a college "meet and greet" at a stranger's home. Walking up the driveway, Andy said, "Let's just sneak out as soon as we can." After all, he's his mother's son. But with parents sequestered outside and teens trapped inside, there was no way to coordinate an escape plan. They were stuck to the bitter end. At least they got dessert.