

Stressed About Dressing for the Holiday Party?



Question: Our annual workplace holiday party is coming up. Spouses are invited to our hotel hosted event. Based on my experience last year, I know a few people dressed inappropriately. I felt bad for one under-dressed individual and was embarrassed for another who wore revealing clothing. How do we communicate to our employees that they and their partners need to abide by a holiday dress code?

Have Fun Sharing the Holiday ‘Dress Code’

A holiday party is supposed to be fun and engaging but often has an underlying frequency of stress and pressure. It is nice to dress up, or dress down, or show off, or relax. Everyone has different perceptions, experiences, and expectations. Dress code information must be very clear on the invitation. It can be difficult for your employees to guess the expected attire, so they do their best with wildly varying results. If you want to help take the guesswork out of the equation, give your employees a hand. Create fun and informative workplace holiday party invitations and make sure everyone attending is given a copy.

Location, Location, Location

The most obvious way to communicate workplace holiday dress code expectations is to add details to the invitation; consider a printed version, a flyer posted around the office and information sent via email. In the ‘invitation’ identify the type of event, time, location, seating, food and expectations for holiday attire. An invitation that reads *‘Dress warmly and join us for a sleigh ride and some hot chocolate and cookies’* communicates something very different than *‘Put on your best black tie or little black dress and join us for cocktails and live Jazz’*. And both of these communicate much more than *‘You are invited to join us for our Office Holiday Party on December 10th’*.

Have fun with the invitation, but be informative. You do not need to create a formal sounding dress code if you communicate the message in your invitation. Simply include a few details such as ‘Family friendly event’, ‘Dress nice, not naughty. Santa will be watching’.

Styles of Dress for Holiday Parties and Events

Formal: ‘Cocktails’ and ‘Cocktails and Dinner’ are generally formal or semi-formal.

Depending on your event add details including black tie (formal), white tie (ultra-formal) or 'creative black tie' (formal but trendy version of black tie such as a modern tux and dress).

Semi-Formal or After Five: 'Cocktails and or 'Cocktails and Dinner' can still be applied to a less formal events. If you are selecting semi-formal, the table settings, entertainment, and food should reflect this.

Semi-formal will be slightly less formal and no black tie; a dress shirt or a cocktail length dress would fit right in.

Keep in mind that "Cocktails" is generally a 'stand up' and mingle event. "Cocktails and Dinner" or "Dinner" are sit-down events.

Let them know if the event is in an offsite location such as a hotel or restaurant or private club. Communicating the type of establishment, room, food and seating often tells the tale.

TODAY'S EXPERT



[Tara Orchard](#) is a consultant, strategist, coach, trainer and writer. She combines psychology, personal development, social/emotional intelligence, learning strategies and technology trends with a capacity to deliver information and coach others successfully.

Informal or Festive Attire: If you are going to a casual establishment (commercial or private) consider inviting your guests to wear fun/sparkly clothes, holiday attire, or professional attire, but not formal attire.

Casual or Dressy Casual: This does not mean anything goes, but it runs closer to jeans and a sweater, or nice slacks and a blouse. Dressy casual is a little more upscale, including a sports coat or a nice holiday outfit. Plain casual may include sneakers, jeans, and other attire appropriate for a hayride or sitting on the living room floor in someone's house.

By including information in the invitation you help those who choose to read the invitation. You can even remind them to check the company dress code policy if in doubt.