



A Guide to a Successful Evening Out

by Jonathan D. Carroll, MA

SPENDING AN EVENING OUT WITH FRIENDS, family, or loved ones is always enjoyable. But as an adult with ADHD, I can tell you that these situations can also be very challenging. By better understanding the challenges and developing compensation strategies, you'll be better equipped to handle potentially difficult situations. Here are some suggestions to make evenings out more enjoyable.

The best place to start is to gather as much information as possible. Here are some questions to get your plans off to a good beginning.

- Who's going to be there?
- What kind of food will be served?
- Is the location noisy?
- How is the lighting?
- Will I sit inside or outside?

The more information you have, the better you'll be prepared.

Let's start with the company. We all know that we can act differently with different people. For instance, we can obviously be a little less reserved around our friends or loved ones than we can around coworkers or our boss. So it is important to learn as much about everyone as possible.

Let's say you're going to dinner with someone from your partner's workplace. Knowing some details about the other people is key.

What things interest them? Are there topics we should not discuss? Being as prepared as possible helps regulate personal behavior. As I've learned the hard way by not following my own advice, sometimes we can say or do the wrong thing without even knowing it. But with some preparation, we can avoid potentially negative situations.

It's just as important to understand the menu.

- Do you have any dietary restrictions?
- Do the people you're going to dinner with have any dietary concerns?
- Is the food spicy or unfamiliar?
- Are the portions large or small?
- How expensive is the restaurant?

All these questions should be answered before you set foot in the restaurant (*hint, it's called the internet*). You can prepare during the day by eating comfortably before heading out. If the food is spicy, you might want to make sure that everyone is okay with it. The last item, the cost, can be a huge issue for a few reasons. We all have different financial situations. If you're going to choose



an expensive restaurant, make sure that everyone in your party is okay with it. Some people enjoy an adult beverage, while others don't. If you do and you know others aren't drinking, I would suggest you go to the bar and order your own drink. That can help to eliminate an uncomfortable situation. The more preparation you've done, the less stressful these situations will be.

So now that you've established who you're dining with and what you're going to eat, the next step is to help yourself acclimate to the environment.

- What is the lighting like?
- Is the place noisy?
- Is it crowded?

All these factors can affect your ability to self-regulate. I strongly recommend getting to a place early and getting a feel for it. If possible, try to situate yourself away from a lot of stimuli. When I go out to dinner, I usually sit with my back to the entrance door. By not watching people enter and exit, I am better able to focus on my company. I'd also recommend not sitting by televisions. Any such distractions can hurt your ability to focus.

You know best how you're wired, so do the best you can to prepare yourself. Share some of your challenges with your part-

ner or someone you trust. They'll help you manage as well.

Take a break if you feel like you're losing a bit of your self-regulation or control. There are times when going to the washroom or taking a short walk can help re-regulate you. Don't be afraid to do this. I'd also recommend avoiding immediate distractions like having your cellphone within reach. Sometimes we rely on our phones for a break, but to other people, this can come across as rude. Put your phone in a place where it won't be a temptation. Sometimes it's helpful to let your partner carry your device. That way you have someone to help monitor your use. Try to be as focused as you can on the current situation without having any unnecessary distractions.

The last and most important thing is to have fun. We can try so hard to fit in sometimes that we forget that we are people too. And the challenges we have, others have as well. Try not to let these things ruin your good time. Making a few adjustments, arming yourself with as much information as possible, and being self-aware are the keys to a successful evening out. 🍷

Jonathan D. Carroll, MA, is an ADHD and executive function coach as well as a special education advocate and educational advisor. He is based in the Chicago area, but also works remotely with US-based and international clients. His website is <http://adhdefcoach.com>.