

Key Employer Considerations for End of Year Celebrations

How to Celebrate Without Having to Investigate

As the 2025 party season approaches, many Irish organisations are putting the final touches on their End-of-Year celebrations. This annual event continues to play an important role in strengthening team relationships, boosting morale, and building organisational culture. With hybrid and remote working now firmly established across Ireland, the End-of-Year Party also provides a valuable opportunity for colleagues who rarely meet in person to connect.

While it's important to celebrate another successful year, Employers must be mindful of the specific HR and legal risks associated with work-related social events. Inappropriate behaviour remains the most common issue, and incidents that undermine a colleague's dignity can have serious consequences not only for working relationships but also for an Organisation's reputation.

To help ensure your party celebrations don't require HR investigations, Employers should take the following minimum precautions in 2025.

1. Reinforce Standards of Conduct

Employers may be held vicariously liable for inappropriate behaviour by Employees at work-related events whether held onsite, offsite, or outside normal working hours. After-parties that flow from the main event may also fall within this scope.

To reduce the risk of liability, Employers must be able to show they took all reasonable steps to prevent misconduct.

Before the event, it is best practice to remind Employees that:

- Standards under the Dignity at Work, Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment policies apply equally at all work-related social events.
- Any incidents or allegations arising from the event will be treated as if they occurred during working hours.
- Behaviour at social events can still lead to disciplinary action, including dismissal in serious cases.

Sending a short pre-event reminder email or posting a message on the company intranet is usually sufficient.

2. Highlight Key Policies and Procedures

Prior to the event, Employers may wish to remind Employees of the following:

- Attendance at Work: To minimise the risk of absences the following day.
- Email, Internet & Social Media Policy: Particularly important given the speed at which images, videos, and AI-generated content can be shared.
- Dignity at Work: Reinforcing behavioural expectations and zero-tolerance provisions.

- Grievance & Disciplinary Procedures: Notifying Employees that complaints will be treated as work-related matters.
- Health & Safety: Including venue-specific hazards and any necessary risk controls.
- Drug & Alcohol Policy: Clarifying consequences for attending work under the influence.

3. Practical Considerations for 2025

Attendance is Optional

Employees should not feel pressured to attend. Personal, cultural, family, or neurodiversity-related reasons may influence someone's decision not to participate.

Promote Inclusivity

Ireland's workforce continues to diversify. To ensure all staff feel welcome:

- Refer to the event as the "End-of-Year Party" rather than a "Christmas Party."
- Provide inclusive food and drink options for vegans, non-drinkers, and those with cultural or religious dietary requirements.

Avoid Work/Performance Conversations

Managers should avoid discussing performance, promotions, salary, or career progression at the event. Informal comments can easily be misinterpreted in a social setting and may create expectations or disputes later.

Secret Santa/Kris Kindle

If participating, remind Employees to choose gifts that are respectful and appropriate. If in doubt, Employees should not give items that risk offending or undermining the dignity of the recipient.

Travel Planning

Encourage Employees to plan safe travel home. Provide information on public transport, local taxi services, or pre-booked transport if appropriate.

The Morning After

If Employees are due to work the next day, remind them that attending under the influence of drugs or alcohol may breach Health & Safety rules and could result in disciplinary action.

4. Most Importantly: Enjoy the Celebration

The End-of-Year Party remains one of the best opportunities to build positive relationships in a relaxed environment. For hybrid and remote teams especially, this is a valuable moment to reconnect.

Once the appropriate precautions are in place, Employers and Employees alike should relax, have fun, and celebrate the achievements of 2025.

How Adare Can Help

End-of-year celebrations can sometimes create uncertainty for Employees around expectations and appropriate behaviour. Communicating relevant policies, codes of conduct and event

guidelines sets the tone for a safe and enjoyable celebration. Clear communications also help to reinforce the Organisation's commitment to dignity and respect, wellbeing, and professionalism.

If your Organisation needs HR support in preparing for your end-of-year party, reviewing Employee conduct policies, or equipping Managers to handle event-related responsibilities, our team of HR experts at Adare is here to help. We can provide practical advice and tailored HR solutions to ensure your celebrations and operations run smoothly.

Adare is a team of expert-led Employment Law, Industrial Relations and best practice Human Resource Management consultants. If your Organisation needs advice, support, or guidance about compliance requirements or any HR issues, please contact Adare by calling 021 486 1420 or emailing info@adarehrm.ie to learn what services are available to support your business.