

How to refuse an invitation? How to be a good host? Here are a few things to remember



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With Holi around the corner, I couldn't help but think of a colourful topic to write about for this column. A little tongue-in-cheek, shaken and stirred — get ready to sip this heady Holi drink for your mind.

I'm talking about manners regarding invitations and gifts. In this season of fun and festivities, after the Covid silence, there have been and will be invitations galore — from simple get-togethers to big bashes, which entails sending and

receiving invitations and gifts. Over the decades, my husband and I have accumulated our fair share of beautiful and thoughtful invites and replies, but over the past couple of years, we've had some hilarious, eye-rolling, eyebrow-raising, and borderline annoying ones too. Yes, I'm sharing examples. No, not sharing names. So sit back, enjoy, and take it with a grain of salt. And maybe a dash of pepper too.

Think about the enormous effort hosts put in for any event. Invite lists, invite creatives, decor, food and beverages, WhatsApp group messages, emails, follow-up reminders, and most importantly, the love and care they put into inviting people to be a part of their happiness. And all that love and enthusiasm is met with these replies:

- ▶ "Shall try"
- ▶ "Shall try my best"
- ▶ "Shall come if I'm in town"
- ▶ "Shall revert" but never do
- ▶ "I didn't get any message" but message shows DELIVERED
- ▶ "Oh I didn't see"

These cryptic and elliptical replies

leave us confused and wondering if you will, in fact, show up, and confused as to how many seating areas there should be.

The polite but lost replies: Some reply with only "thank you". Yes, we're so glad, and appreciate your courtesy and love for brevity (we like short, crisp replies too), but do we count you in or out?

Some others with the namaste emoji: We're adopting namaste over handshakes too and love our Indian culture, but it really doesn't give us a clue about whether they plan to visit or not!

Many reply to actually confirm or decline: These people, for sure, are our favourite. Even if they declined. Why? Because they at least have the manners to inform us. And usually these are the people who have the busiest, most packed, hectic schedules that include inter-continental travel. They are sure of their plans, sure of who they want to meet, and always reply warmly.

"Oh yes! Where? When?": These are the downright confused busy

bee. A strange reply that we are met with when we call to remind guests closer to the event after having sent the invite. And even on the day of the event, there are those that ask you, yet again, "where should I come, what time should I be there?" when the details are on their phone WhatsApp! "Sorry, shall miss the play": Erm, that's okay. For whoever invited you to the play. But what about the book launch we invited you to? It's amazing to see these bees get their wires crossed not just about days and dates, but the entire occasion itself.

The complete silence non-replies: This lot seems to love the song *When You Say Nothing At All*. There's no word of acknowledgement, and so, of course, no commitment to say "yes" or "no". We understand this rids them of



Be mindful about deciding on the gift, especially food and beverages

their headache, but think of the poor hosts who are trying to balance the invite equation with unknown variables — please, just reply! We get that you love your privacy and we dared to reach out. If you're not interested, please say so.

It is always good to look at the mirror. The same people who do not bother to reply expect others to send the RSVP immediately against their invite.

➔ CONTD ON P22

➔ FROM P21

DO AND DON'T OF INVITATIONS AND GIFTING

How and when you send invites and gifts is an excellent way of showing people how much you value and appreciate them and their time. It's the little things that matter. These little drops in the ocean help us establish and nurture the relationships that weave together the social fabric of our lives. Let us take a look at some of the do and don't of invitations and gifting.

WHEN YOU'RE THE HOST

Save the date: This is no longer reserved for weddings. Especially important if you're planning a formal or a big event. A "save the date" allows people to prioritise your event if they wish to.

Send detailed invitations out at least two weeks in advance: Everyone is busy juggling their own schedules, so if you really want people to attend, give them time.

Include an RSVP section: Always add and highlight your request for an RSVP and include a number too.

Send a reminder: Two to three days before the event, send a "gentle reminder".

Respect your guest's privacy: It is really surprising and offensive how event managers call up senior, respected individuals on their personal mobile numbers to ask about their RSVP status, or even their address to deliver the invite or gifts! This is an absolute invasion of privacy and bad manners. The more senior they are, the more they value their personal approachability. Just because you have your invitee's number does not mean you will hand it over to all of your staff involved in planning the event. When someone asks for their number, you cannot share it without their permission. Either you should make the call yourself or ask politely whether they are comfortable with your sharing their numbers.

GIFTING, A TRICKY DEPARTMENT

➔ Send gifts at least a day or two before the event. Especially for birthdays and anniversaries. It allows the recipient to have the time to savour your gift because it won't get lost in the sea of gifts on the day of the party.

➔ Wrap the gift keeping the recipient's taste in mind. Use colours, materials, styles that are the recipient's favourites. For example, if they are passionate about sustainability, don't send them a gift wrapped in bubble wrap and layers of plastic or other non-biodegradable wrapping. Try jute, fabric, reusable baskets, or even newspaper.

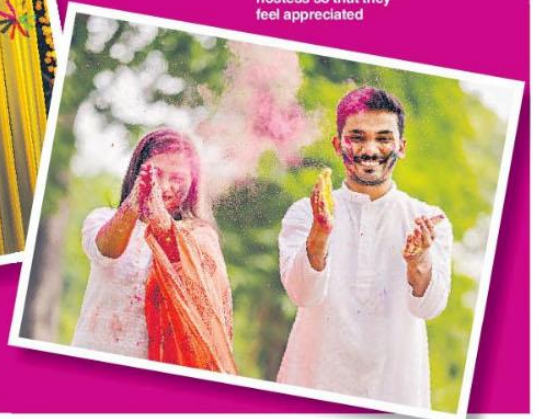
➔ Choose the gift based on the recipient's favourites. Be mindful about deciding on the gift, especially food and beverages. Make sure you're aware of their food preferences and allergies — vegan, vegetarian, non-vegetarian, gluten-free, dairy-free, nut allergies, which cuisine they like and so on. For beverages, don't end



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➔ How and when you send invites and gifts are an excellent way of showing people how much you value and appreciate them and their time



➔ Make it a point to meet the host or hostess so that they feel appreciated

up sending wine or whisky to a coffee or tea lover.

➔ Write a personalised note. Even if it is just your signature, a short note, or a long personalised letter, sending a note in your own handwriting conveys both warmth and how much you value the person.

WHEN YOU RECEIVE AN INVITATION

➔ There's no room for "maybe". Hosts put in a lot of effort in planning an event — whether it's a dinner for six or a party for 60 or 600. Respect that by replying with a clearly understandable "yes" or "no".

➔ If the invitation is for cocktails and dinner, it is always better to let the host know if you will attend only cocktails or stay back for dinner. If you've already committed to be somewhere else, the host will be happy that you were frank and honest and saved the extra counts. Not replying in advance and skipping silently is

not appreciated.

➔ Accept with actual enthusiasm. Share how much you're looking forward to the event and extend congratulations if it's a special occasion. Always add a compliment too about the design of the invite.

Some of my husband's favourite responses when someone calls to invite are:

➔ "We are really excited!"

➔ "We are going shopping for the party"

➔ "You need not call me for this"

➔ **Decline with real regret.** If you are unable to attend, say that with warmth too. Express how it is your loss that you are unable to attend, how much you will miss not being there.

➔ **Be discreet.** If you are in a group outing with the host and other people, do not mention the invitation.

LET'S TALK ABOUT GIFTS

➔ Send a prompt acknowledgement

immediately. This should be done the moment you receive a gift or are notified when it reaches your home. A simple "thank you" to acknowledge receipt is always appreciated.

➔ Send a photo. When you open the gift, you may like to take a photo and send a short note thanking them once more while complimenting their choice. This time, make sure you mention a specific aspect of the gift that makes it special to you.

COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

One point to note — you never know if someone is suffering from depression, social anxiety, or some personal grief or illness that you know nothing about. They may not reply at all or send something non-committal. If you get such a reply from a person who usually responds immediately and with enthusiasm, do take a moment to check in on them. Compassionate communication is of the utmost importance. It's very easy to judge, to jump to conclusions.

WHEN YOU'RE ATTENDING A LARGE EVENT

➔ Discuss the event on the way, like who is the host, hostess, bride, groom, special occasion, invitees with whom you would like to meet etc. so that when you meet them you can talk about something specific.

➔ Make it a point to meet the host or hostess so that they feel appreciated.

➔ If the host is talking to someone, wait for your turn. So, what did you think? Have you ever been at the receiving end of such funny and not-so-funny replies? Share with me on askminubudhia@caringminds.co.in. Wishing all of you a happy, safe, and hilarious Holi.

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