

How to avoid issues at the work Christmas Party

With Christmas a matter of weeks away, many employers will be finalising plans for their annual Christmas party. Whilst these events offer a great opportunity to celebrate and reward staff for their hard work throughout the year, employers must be careful to ensure parties pass without incident:

- **Remain Inclusive** - Choose the venue and activities wisely to ensure the Christmas Party is inclusive. Consider where factors such as medical conditions or religious beliefs may prevent individuals from consuming alcohol or eating certain food.
- **Warn against misconduct** - Send an email to staff beforehand reminding them to behave professionally at all times and that normal workplace rules on inappropriate behaviour will still apply during the event.
- **Respond to complaints** - Be prepared to respond to any grievances relating to misconduct at the Christmas party, especially those that involve allegations of bullying and harassment. Individuals found to be responsible for this behaviour should be dealt with in line with any pre-existing disciplinary policy.
- **Manage social media activity** - Consider warning staff beforehand about posting the night's events on Facebook, Instagram etc. as poor judgement could create an embarrassing situation for fellow colleagues.
- **Acknowledge absences** - Refer to your usual absence policy if faced with unauthorised absences the following day, making sure to conduct return to work interviews to gather information before deciding on the best course of action.

Secret Santa and the perils of gift giving at work

Employees often choose to provide gifts to each other during Christmas and many employers choose to run a Secret Santa initiative, where staff are encouraged to exchange gifts anonymously between themselves. However, this can lead to claims of bullying and harassment.

Did you know?

It will be wise to inform staff ahead of time that gifts ought to be non-discriminatory and that even well intended 'jokey' presents can cause offence. Although it may be tempting to dismiss complaints about gifts as trivial, employers should investigate any grievances properly to avoid tribunal claims.

Managing annual leave over Christmas

Most staff will want to take annual leave over Christmas and employers will be free to impose their usual annual leave rules. Alternatively they may choose to assess demand and relax certain rules in order to approve more requests than normal under the circumstances.

Did you know?

Employers can devise their own rules about annual leave over Christmas and may even impose mandatory holidays if the business shuts down during this period. In these circumstances, it will be important to provide employees with sufficient notice that they will have a period of annual leave imposed upon them.

Double pay for working on Boxing Day?

Employers may choose to offer enhanced rates for working on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. However, staff are not automatically entitled to double-pay or time and a half, for example, meaning employers are within their rights to pay staff their usual rate on these days.

Did you know?

Employment contracts will typically determine whether staff are entitled to enhanced pay rates for working over Bank Holidays. Although this is not a statutory requirement, many employers consider this practice as an effective way to compensate staff who have to work during these periods.

The Christmas Party is held in high regard by many employees and with this in mind it will be essential to manage staff behaviour at these events and ensure any misconduct is dealt with appropriately. Thankfully, our Advisory Team are on hand 24/7 to offer expert guidance in dealing with any fallout that may occur during the Christmas festivities.

Please contact the 24 Hour Advice Service for advice on your specific situation before acting on the information in this publication.