



Phone-Free Gathering Guide

Created by the LOG OFF Movement to promote the
facilitation of phone-free gatherings.

Introduction: Why Phone-Free Events?

In a world that moves at the speed of a scroll, our moments of genuine connection have become increasingly rare. We often gather in the same room, only to find ourselves lost in separate screens. But what if we chose something different?

Phone-free events create intentional spaces where people can be fully present, both with themselves and with each other. They are an **invitation to reconnect**, laugh without interruption, and experience time together without the constant pull of notifications.

These events also provide the perfect place to partake in activities like reading and writing, which many of us want to do, but often make excuses for not doing.

Whether you're hosting a birthday party, a campus hangout, a community dinner, or a casual night with friends, going phone-free helps create an environment that feels lighter, freer, and **more human**.

You don't need to be a professional event planner. You **just need to care about presence**. This guide will walk you through every step: planning, inviting, setting up a no-phone space, and helping people ease into the experience.

This isn't about being anti-technology.

It's about creating room and being present. Eye contact. Shared laughter. Deeper conversations. Full attention.

Let's build spaces where we show up completely, not just scroll through.



Planning The Event: Organizing A Phone-Free Event

1 - What's Your Why?

- Friends coming back in town?
- Want to deepen the connection?
- Knowing what your why is will help you figure out the best type of event for you.

2 - Choosing the Right Event

- Party: Phone Valet
- Meal: Phone Stack
- Large Gathering: Phone-Free Zone
- Study Nights/Retreats: Phone Basket at the Door
- We'll explain each one of these phone-free methods later.

3 - Inviting People

- Consider in-person or unplugged invitations (make it an experience)
- Not for you? Just be intentional in your invitations.
- The way you invite people should make clear the importance of phone-free time.

4 - Setting the Space

- Have the phone-free method ready (basket, valet station, zone signage).
- Add visual cues like "Be Here Now" signs or small table tents.
- Arrange seating to encourage conversation.
- Provide something to do right away so guests are engaged from the start.
- Create a welcoming, comfortable environment that signals the tone of the event.

5 - Planning Activities and Flow

- Conversation starters or cards
- Shared meals or snacks
- Group activities like charades, art projects, or outdoor games
- Plan a natural start, middle, and end so people feel comfortable without phones.
- Think about how you will fill the time without relying on screens.



What To Do:

Phone-Free Activities To Consider

1 - Heads Up

- Write the name of a famous person on a sticky note and place on player's head.
- Player wearing sticky note asks yes or no questions.
- If the answer is yes, they can ask another.
- If the answer is no, next players turn.
- First person to guess their person wins

2 - Egg Drop

- Break group into teams, give each team an egg.
- Put a variety of supplies on the table.
- Each team has X amount of time to build a contraption to protect the egg.
- When time is up, drop each egg with contraption and see whose survives.

3 - Speed Friending

- Pair everyone up (ideally with someone they don't know)
- Set up conversation cards for each group.
- After 5 minutes of conversation, rotate.
- At the end of the night, prepare paper contact cards for participants to give to new connections.

4 - Collaborative Art Wall

- Hang a large blank poster on wall.
- Have table of supplies (pens, markers, paint, etc.).
- Have sign explaining the poster.
- Have as passive activity throughout event.

5 - Local Monuments Orienteering

- Share a physical map with a few local monuments as points, each with a different order
- Break up into groups, with each group having a map, compass, and disposable camera
- Have the teams set off and see which can get a group selfie at each location first.



Finding The Words: Inviting People To Your Event

Inviting people to a phone-free event doesn't have to be awkward. In fact, it's a chance to set the tone for something intentional, refreshing, and different from the usual hangout.

This page gives you tips on how to invite people, what to say, and a sample invite you can copy or customize.

1. Group Text or DM

Quick and easy for small gatherings. Set a friendly tone and be upfront about the phone-free part.

2. Handwritten Invites

Go the extra mile before the event. Shows that the phone-free part is the basis, not just an add-on.

3. Online Graphics or Posters

For large gatherings where the other methods just won't do.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Fully Present
 - Unplugged
 - No Phones, Just People
 - Low pressure, high connection
 - Be there, not just online
 - We're trying something different
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SAMPLE INVITE

Hey friends!

I'm hosting a little get-together this Saturday night, and I want to try something different—no phones.

It's called a phone-free hang, and the goal is to be fully present. No scrolling, no posting—just good music, snacks, and real conversation.

You don't have to be "on." You just have to show up. I'll have a phone basket at the door so we can all unplug together.

Hope you'll join. Let me know if you're in!

📍 My place | 🕒 7-10 PM | 🍕 Food provided



Phone-Free, Your Way

The Four Methods Explained

Earlier, we mentioned four ways to make an event phone-free. Each one sports a different vibe, size, and setting. Here's a closer look at each so you can pick the one that works best for your event.

Phone Valet

For this option, have a designated person (you, a co-host, or helper) who collects phones at the door, and provides some sort of unique “ticket” to the owner to ensure everyone gets the right one back. It's like a small ceremony right at check-in, setting the tone before the event even starts. This is a great option for a medium-sized event.

Phone Stack

When guests arrive at the event, they place their phones face-down in a pile on the table. Want to make it fun? If anyone checks their phone before the event ends, they take on a lighthearted penalty (buying a round, truth or dare, whatever fits your group). No attendant needed. This is great for a smaller, more intimate setting, such as a group meal.

Phone-Free Zone

Rather than collecting phones, at this event, you designate a specific area as phone-free, using signage to mark it. Guests self-regulate instead of handing devices over. This works well for events where collection isn't practical, such as for large groups.

Phone Basket

Guests leave their phones in a basket as they arrive to this event. No attendant required. It's the lowest-effort option and works especially well for smaller groups and longer events, such as study nights and retreats.

A Quick Note

None of these methods needs to be done exactly this way. Feel free to experiment to find the option that works best for YOUR event. And don't be afraid to try a new one if another doesn't quite land.



Acknowledging Reality

Knowing Boundaries of Guests

It is important to recognize that for many individuals, this may be their first phone-free event. Some will struggle with buy-in to the idea. Some will have special needs to be accommodated for (phone use for medical or other special case needs). There's also simply the fact that there are moments when guests may need to step out to utilize their phone. The following are some recommendations on how to handle these situations.

1. Clear Communication Beforehand

Guests feel most comfortable when they know what to expect. Consider sending out a message before the event reminding attendees it will be phone-free. Explain the reasoning and what accommodations will be available. This reduces awkwardness and helps prevent pushback at the event itself.

2. Setting the Tone at Check-In

Offer simple ways hosts can introduce the phone-free expectation when guests arrive. Consider a friendly greeting explaining the process. Prepare a designated spot for phones with a clear, calm flow. Give a reminder that stepping out for necessary phone use is totally fine. This reinforces boundaries but keeps the atmosphere positive.

3. The Obvious

For individuals who need access to their phones for medical or other special case needs, reassure them that they are able to have their devices with them. However, you may want to recommend that if they need to use it, to politely step out of the room. This helps ensure the continuity of the phone-free environment while accommodating for the individual's needs. If someone just isn't feeling it, that's okay too. You can't force presence.

4. When Something Happens

Let's say you have a phone valet system, and a guest says they need their phone for a call. Don't be judgmental. Allow them access to their device and ask that they step outside the space of the event. When they come back in, put their phone back with the others. This allows for business to be taken care of without harming the nature of the occasion.



Documenting Awesomeness

Keeping Memories of the Event

Wait a second. If I don't have my phone at this event, how will we even remember the memories made? The first integrated phone camera was introduced in 2000. But there was also 109 years since the user-friendly Kodak camera started rolling out, increasing access to cameras. We can celebrate that over a century of tradition by returning to the use of single-use devices at our phone-free events.

1. It's just a camera. And that's the point.

Consider getting a digital camera. This way you celebrate the phone-free moments, and still have access to photos for your socials after the event.

2. Now that's old school

You could go the polaroid route. This way it's a physical keepsake for guests. It also limits the focus on documenting and emphasizes living in the moment.

3. The Inexpensive Route

You can get a cheap film camera, good for about 30 photos, for under \$20. Yes, there are stores that still process film. They can also provide you with both digital and physical copies of your photos.

Reminder

Yes, some of these methods are not going to provide the best quality photos. But we are choosing to create these spaces to celebrate the value of just living in the moment, not under the distractions of digital technology. And, no matter what option you pick, make sure to get permission from guests to be included before sharing access to the photos.



Your Checklist

There Will Be A Test... The Event

BEFORE THE EVENT

- Define the purpose of your event (“What’s your why?”)
- Choose your phone-free method
 - Phone Valet
 - Phone Basket
 - Phone Stack
 - Phone-Free Zone
- Prepare physical materials
 - Basket/valet tags
 - Signage (“Phone-Free Zone,” “Be Here Now”)
 - Conversation cards / activity supplies
- Communicate expectations ahead of time
 - Invite text, handwritten card, or poster
 - Mention accommodations for medical or accessibility needs
- Assign a co-host or helper to manage arrival flow, if possible

DURING ARRIVAL

- Greet guests and briefly explain the phone-free setup
- Reassure guests they can step outside to use their phones if needed
- Mark or organize phones so guests know they’re secure
- Offer a first activity or natural conversation prompt right away

DURING THE EVENT

- Model presence by keeping your own phone away
- Introduce activities or let conversation flow naturally
- Check in with guests who may need accessibility adjustments
- Handle exceptions without judgment
 - Let guests step out or return phones when needed
- Keep energy comfortable (refreshments, music, lighting)

WRAPPING UP

- Announce any photo-sharing plan or album for after the event
- Thank guests as they retrieve their phones
- Ask for quick reflections (“What surprised you tonight?”)
- Note what worked well and what you’d adjust next time



A Conclusion

Keep Choosing Presence

Phone-free gatherings are not about perfection. They are about choosing presence, even for a short moment, in a world that constantly asks for our attention. Whether your event was quiet or lively, structured or spontaneous, you created a space where people showed up fully. That matters.

As you continue hosting, remember:

- You are building community, not enforcing rules.
- People often appreciate the break more than they expect.
- A single intentional night can change how someone relates to their phone.
- What you created may stay with someone long after the event ends.
- Every gathering teaches you something new about how people connect.

Hosting a phone-free event is an act of care. It sends the message that the people in the room are worth your full attention. It shows that slowing down is possible, even when it feels rare. It offers a moment of relief from the constant pull of screens and notifications. Most of all, it reminds people that connection can be simple again.

Thank you for choosing to create something different.

Thank you for choosing connection.

Thank you for choosing presence.

Here is to more moments worth remembering and fewer we drift through without noticing.

Here is to spaces that feel lighter and conversations that feel deeper.

Here is to the courage it takes to set your phone down and truly be with the people around you.

You did something meaningful. Keep choosing presence, and keep inviting others to experience it with you.

