

#62 - The Lazy Genius Summer Strategy, Part 1

Hey, everybody! This is The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. It's the first Monday in May, and we can already feel the heat of summer, at least the heat from the pressure of summer schedules and to do lists and fear of our children literally coming to blows day after day. So for the entire month of May, we're going to Lazy Genius our summer. The hope is that by the end of this series, you will have a grounding perspective that carries through the entire summer, a few tangible tips that save you time and energy, and some ideas on how to balance structure and freedom during the summer months.

Now, let me say that this series is not just for moms of little kids or even moms in general. I am a mom of little kids; I have two boys in elementary school who are not usually at home during the day and a two year old daughter who is home with me always. A lot of my perspective is rooted in my own experience as a mom of younger kids, but this series will offer help for folks in lots of different situations. So not every word will be for anyone, but if you're regular listener of this podcast and already resonate with a lot of Lazy Genius ideas, you'll find something in these episodes to make your summer better. Yes, a lot of this is framed within having kids, but a lot of works for everybody.

So that said, in this first episode, we're going to talk about perspective. We're going to create a mindset, but first we need to acknowledge the mindset we've currently been working with.

Like I said, May just started, and Leslie Rich said it best on Instagram - May is December 2.0. Which is totally true. A lot of you are teachers, and May is bonkers. If you have kids, there are plays and recitals and class parties and all the things. You're gearing up right as you're entering a season where you're supposed to gear down. But that energy still runs beneath the surface. Plus, you're tired from all the going and planning and forgetting permission slips and paper plates and that you were supposed to make that hotel reservation for your vacation. I think if we were to look underneath May like you look under a couch cushion, we'd find so many missing things. Lots gets dropped and forgotten, and it's easy to leave May with a sense of exhaustion and not enough-ness. Nobody makes it through December 2.0 without a few casualties. So that's the starting energy which is tough.

Then it's suddenly the beginning of summer, and you think "Okay, how do I do this right? How do I have structure for myself and free time I rarely have or how do I create structure for my kids who usually get from school, but it's summer! I don't want to be a drill sergeant and only be structured! Summer is free and fun and spontaneous. How do I balance structure and freedom?"

So you might start intensely on one side of the pendulum, probably on the opposite side you usually lean toward. You start with all this freedom but then major guilt sets in because you've done nothing or your kids are now destroying everything because there's no routine to the day. And remember, you're still in recovery mode from December 2.0. So when things start going crazy, you swing the other way. You create sticker charts until your fingers bleed, you set up a rigorous schedule for yourself with gym visits and park outings and playdates planned six weeks

out. Or you're on the other side and you started organizing the garage like gangbusters but fizzled out the first week and just want to burn it down. We swing far. We swing hard and we then swing far. And then I don't have to tell you that the guilt is thick after those swings. We aren't doing enough. We're doing too much. We're forcing memories. We're not making enough memories. This cycle is a bit cruel. There's just too much pressure.

So here's where we're parking for the next few minutes. I'm just giving you little pep talk today. The summer is not putting too much pressure on you; you're putting too much pressure on the summer. Even if you're already in survival mode and can't imagine how you're going to make it through ten weeks of all the kids being home and asking what's for dinner before they eat breakfast, asking "what are we doing today?" or "where are we going today?" it's important to keep the right things in perspective. Right now, we feel overwhelmed because we're looking at the worst scenario of any day and compounding it across 80 days. We want to look at the summer as a long game, but we also need to stay right where we are. You might be familiar with one of my favorite humans on the planet, Emily P. Freeman who has a podcast called The Next Right Thing which you should be listening to. She and her husband, John, have been talking in our community recently about imagination, how we allow our imaginations to get ahead of us. At a parenting workshop last week, John said that worry is a distorted imagination. And we worry about the summer, don't we? We imagine all the fights and the complaining and the lack of being alone, and those images make us feel feelings that make us get stressed out, and then we're operating within the framework of summer sucks and please when do my kids go back to school. It spirals really quickly.

I do want to say that those feelings are valid and some of those scenarios might actually happen, but let's not carry them all at the same time in a framework of worry and stress. You don't need a hundred things to go right in order to enjoy the summer and make it out unscathed. That's a lot of pressure. That's a lot of mental energy spent on solving imaginary problems.

So what is our framework? If you're a teacher and you're home for the summer and have a lot of expectations about all the rest you'll have and projects you'll accomplish, what's the best framework to keep you from worrying about imaginary things? If you're a mom of young kids and are terrified that you aren't going to be alone for two months, what's the best framework to keep you from worrying about imaginary things? If you have teenagers and feel like they're all of the sudden giant humans who drive away in your car and rarely talk to you anymore, what's the best framework to keep you from worrying about imaginary things?

In that parenting workshop, John used the word connection. Our goal isn't to survive; it's to connect. We connect with our kids and let the other stuff fade away. We connect with ourselves and be honest about what we need when we need and ask for help. We connect with our dreams that don't get a lot of attention during the repetitive days of the school year. We connect with our city, being willing to explore places we don't usually make time for. And if you think about connection, it's small and slow. We rarely connect with people or experiences when we're rushing through them, when we're not looking people in the eye, when we're distracted by our phones or a task or the real and desperate desire to be alone.

But when we're not carrying all of that worry, all of those expectations, all the responsibility of your kids' exploration of nature, of what amazing things they create when they're bored because apparently that's when kids do cool things? When they're bored? Mine just keep complaining that they're bored. But if I carry the responsibility of what comes out of their boredom, if I try to

micromanage, even inside my own head, if I try to micromanage what lessons they're learning from the arguments or from trying new foods or whatever it is, I'm going to turn to ash and I'm going to miss the connection. So are you. We can't keep carrying all of this. We have to connect, and we can't connect unless we pack light.

So today, let's decide what to pack. Let's decide what your focus is going to be during the summer. How do you feel about connection being the primary goal? It might make you squirrely to think about sitting on the living floor reading *Happy As a Hippo, Angry As a Duck* to your preschooler. The repetition and lack of productivity is draining and maddening... unless our priority is connection. In that moment, the point is to connect with our son or daughter. Other times, the point is to connect with yourself, with a friend, with work that makes you feel like a person. But ultimately connection is what we're after, and connection requires presence, smallness, and moving slowly.

Now you might be nodding your head but also wondering how that practically fits into a summer where everyone likes each other by the end of August. What else do you prioritize? So many of us get to the end of the season and feel like we have nothing to show for it, so what one single thing that when you look back on the summer will have made it a great summer. It's your summer anchor. Everything else might float within reach, but that one thing is solid and absolutely happening.

It could be a project. Cleaning out the garage, having a yard sale, finishing your book proposal, planting flowers in your yard. Anything goes here as long as it's something that feels important enough to be the only thing accomplished all summer and that's okay.

It could be an experience. Without question, this summer you want to load up your crew in the car, whatever your crew looks like, and take a spontaneous road trip. You've been wanting to do that for years, and you don't want this summer to go by without it actually happening.

It could be a feeling, a practice, or a relationship. You want to not yell and actually listen to your kids as people and not just as tiny humans who demand crackers every two hours. You want to create some kind of liturgy around your day - an iced coffee on the back stoop, lighting a candle and reading a book, meditating for five minutes, starting the day in your garden - the options are endless, but maybe your summer anchor needs to be something small that anchors each day.

So whether it's a project, an experience, or a feeling, what will you pack for? Pack light for that one thing, and leave the rest behind. This summer, it's all about connection and your anchor.

Now in packing light, that doesn't mean you abandon all other obligations and responsibilities, but you know as well as I do, especially if you've been listening to this podcast for awhile now, small steps build on each other. Being a genius about one thing gives us the freedom to be lazy about others, but they often still get done, just not steeped in expectations and guilt like usual.

And if you live with other people, I'd encourage you to gauge their expectations of the summer, too. Ask your kids, what one thing do you hope we do this summer? Or what one thing would you like to try? What's their summer anchor? There are five people in my house, four of us who are old enough to actually have opinions, so our four things will be our collective summer anchor. I want to write a book proposal. Sam wants to start drum lessons. Ben wants to play with his friend Elizabeth. Kaz wants to just be with us and take the occasional nap. We can do

those things. We can pack light and make those things happen. We can have everything else revolve around those things, move slowly in making them happen and connect in the spaces between. Ben can't play with Elizabeth every day. Sam can't play drums every day. How can we keep that anchor important every day and affirm who they are as people and what they want? Keep it front of mind. I can have Sam drum on the countertop every morning while we're playing Spotify and connect with his love of music. Ben can draw pictures for Elizabeth until we plan a time for her to actually come over and connect with how tender-hearted he is. Notice that I said connect with and not connect over; the connection doesn't come with an agenda. I'm not putting an expectation of connection on my kids. What I am doing is recognizing who they really are and connecting with those things, connecting with what I notice and see in those long summer days I usually don't get.

What about me and my summer anchor? How can I connect with myself? I can collect random thoughts for the book proposal in a notebook until I'm able to barricade myself in a Starbucks for a few days to put them together, and in the meantime, I'm valuing something that's outside of my role as a mom. I'm connecting with who I am on a different level. Recognizing and validating what's important to each individual on a regular basis makes everything else fall into place a little better. And you can take those small steps we love so much around here, even for your kids. Have them pack light, give them their summer anchor, and make it important.

Back in October, we talked about opening and closing ceremonies for the holidays since Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas all seem to fall on top of each other and we never really celebrate anything intentionally. The summer is the same. Have opening ceremonies. They can be mental for you where you mark the moment and decide what you're packing light for. They can be physical where you and the family go out for ice cream and talk about what you hope happens this summer. They can be whatever you want, but marking the beginning of the summer and choosing just one thing to do, experience, or feel will immediately release you of a lot of the pressure you might be feeling now.

In the coming weeks, we'll talk about some practical things like summer heat and meals and sibling arguments and how to create a summer routine. We'll get practical, but today, pack light. Start preparing for what the summer will hold, and only hold one thing. When you name what matters most, you realize what doesn't matter as much as you thought it did. And above all of that, our goal is connection. Slow down, release your grip on what you want to happen and what you're afraid will happen, and connect with what's happening around you. Look your people in the eye. Walk slower. Take longer. Notice where you are, and try to stay there. Staying is hard. It's much easier to move to the next thing and check off boxes, but staying is a beautiful practice you can begin in tiny ways this summer.

So today, just spend time deciding your summer anchor, process what it means to connect with the people and places around you, and then consider ways to purposefully usher in the summer with some kind of opening ceremony.

Can't wait to talk again next week. I'll be live on Instagram this Thursday around 12:15pm EST to answer your questions about this episode, so I hope to see you there @thelazygenius. Thanks for listening, guys, and remember to be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. See you next week!