#222 - Taking Care of Yourself As the World Opens Up

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't! Today is episode 222 - taking care of yourself as the world opens up. Are you tired yet of talking about the pandemic? Me too. But I think we're more tired of living it. And where we are right now is still pretty rocky. We've got the Delta variant coming, it's been recommended that all kids wear masks to school which is hard, and there are different parts of the world that are still in various stages of lockdown. Plus we all have different health issues and experiences with the vaccine. We have all been through different experiences this last year and a half, and it's changed us all but in pretty different ways. And then there's the whole "How do I talk to people again?" It's a lot. So today I want to talk about taking care of yourself as the world opens up. We'll lay some groundwork and then apply a couple of principles for you to consider over these next few weeks, especially as we move out of summer and into more of a steady routine. At least we assume so. We leave every possibility open I suppose.

So when I was preparing for this episode, I started listing out all of the things that we might feel challenged by as the world opens up. Y'all, the list was very long. Some of the things were stuff involving masks. In the beginning, if someone didn't wear a mask, there was a certain association there. None of us enjoy wearing masks, but we were trying to do good by our neighbors by making a collective sacrifice to keep as many people safe as possible. But a couple of months ago in certain parts of the US, mask mandates really started to fall, especially for people who were vaccinated. So suddenly you're in Target and because you're vaccinated you're not wearing a mask, and it feels really strange. Essentially, there are a lot of strong opinions around masks, and as the world opens up and you walk into it, you're confronted by those differing strong opinions all at once, no matter what your particular stance is. It's a lot.

And that's just one thing. Some other things. You could be afraid of your kids getting sick. Kids aren't vaccinated yet, and as this new Delta variant shows up, there's a real fear of our kids getting sick because they're more vulnerable. That's real. I think even just learning how to deal with people again is a thing. A lot of us haven't been in contact with many people for quite some time, and trying to work those muscles again is very anxiety-producing.

And a lot of you are just having a low-level fear about a lot of things. There's just a general sense of dread with no real central point. Everything just feels hard. And I've said this before but I'll say it again - we've been through a traumatic year. Our edges are frayed. Our reserves are worn. What we used to be able to handle has a shorter shelf-life. That is normal and okay. I just think it's always important to put our challenges in the right context. If you forget that you've been worn down, even a little bit, from living through a pandemic, you're not being kind enough to yourself. These kind of reminders help us go "wait, that's right! That's why this feels so hard!" I will never not remind y'all of those things.

So the challenges are numerous. But again for a lot of folks, there might just be a general sense of dread. And I was thinking about that and about the list of specific challenges, I realized that

the commonality here is that we want to avoid being dysregulated. We don't want to feel like we can't handle what's in front of us. We don't want to feel like we're out of emotional control. We don't want to have panic attacks or anxiety attacks or get a surge of anger because we feel out of balance or disconnected with ourselves. The challenges we face right now as the world opens up are the kinds of things that can potentially do that, that can disconnect us from ourselves. They take us out of ourselves. We get nervous about a social situation because we don't know how to be a person. We cancel a playdate at the park because we're afraid of our kids getting sick. We get irrationally angry at someone improperly wearing a mask or not wearing a mask at all but maybe they're vaccinated and we don't know or maybe they're just trying to stick it to somebody and then we spiral out of control with everything that's going on just inside our own heads. I think it's a normal thing to want to avoid those kinds of feelings. It's a normal thing to want life to feel… normal.

But here's the thing. We all have different definitions of normal, right? What normal looks and feels like to me could be very different from what it looks and feels like to you. Also we all have different specific things to lead us to a place of craving that normalcy. We have different things that unsettle us and make us experience anxiety or fear or strong emotions in some way. It's all different. Everything always is, right? We're all too different to have the same experience, and therefore we can't all have the same solution.

So here's our first general step that everyone can apply as we take care of ourselves as the world opens up. Pay attention to what specifically takes you out of yourself, to the thing that starts you spiraling. Is it an emotion? When you feel angry about anything, is it hard to get back to center? Like, it doesn't matter what you're angry about. Experiencing anger is just harder to come back from. So maybe it's a specific emotion. Maybe it's a specific situation. Anything regarding masks makes you spiral. Anything regarding social situations makes you spiral. Anything involving your kid's schooling and all the requirements and changes from that makes you spiral. Any conversation with your family member who has very different views from you about all of this stuff makes you spiral.

Name the specific emotion or situation that makes you feel dysregulated. This is a great place to apply the principle start small. Sometimes I wish that Lazy Genius principle was actually "make it smaller." Make it smaller. Sometimes you don't need to start something. You just need to look at where you are and make it smaller. So for example, if you have a general sense of dread, it's hard to meet that dread from a place of compassion and movement to make it better. You can't do a lot if you're just feeling gross or scared or angry in general. Except maybe breathe, but if you're like my sixth grade son, you think that advice is stupid. But if you can specify something about your dread or however your general feeling is manifesting, you're more likely to be able to find some sort of solution to help it all feel a bit easier by making it smaller. Make it smaller. A general sense of dread makes sense, but if you can be specific, you'll be able to find a solution.

Once you've done that, once you've made your challenge smaller, you can apply a couple of Lazy Genius principles to that problem, and for something like taking care of yourself as the world opens up, I think there are two heavy hitters to use. The first is Decide Once. Deciding

once means to make a decision one time about something and then just doing that thing until that thing doesn't work anymore. So for example, let's say you have a lot of anxiety around masks. Your sense of dread is tied to masks but maybe more specifically around all the decision-making around masks. Certain establishments require them, some only require them for vaccinated people, some don't at all, and maybe only part of your family is vaccinated because you have young kids. There are a lot of opportunities for decision fatigue around masks. So instead of feeling that weight every time you leave your house, just decide once that your family will wear masks inside every store and restaurant. That decision doesn't take away every bit of stress about the pandemic, but it sure does lighten the load. Just decide. Stop going back and forth over and over again. Decide once.

Another way you could decide once about a specific challenge as the world opens us is that you're going to always check in with a certain friend after you do something social. Or even just run an errand. Maybe you need something to center you at the end of any interaction with public life, so your decide once is to text your friend before you leave and when you're done. Just a simple "I'm going" and "I did it." Simply marking that something is hard and letting someone into that (remember, let people in is another Lazy Genius principle) honestly makes that thing just a little lighter. Don't do things alone.

Decide once on the things you'll say yes to or no to, decide once on how often you talk to that family member and even what you'll say to end the conversation, decide once on how far it's worth it for you to drive to a social thing, decide once that you're going to keep doing grocery pickup and grocery pickup only for the rest of 2021 and then you'll evaluate again. It could be anything, but I will almost guarantee that a lot of your general dread is coming from all the decisions that are out there before you. The more you can make now at once, the better you'll feel. Just name what your specific challenge is and see if there's one thing you can decide to make that challenge less stressful.

Another principle you can apply is to go in the right order. There are a ton of things that have very specific right orders. Making soup for example. Decorating a room; The Nester mastered that one for us. But for general life things, there is a right order that can help almost any situation. That is 1) name what matters, 2) calm the crazy, and 3) trust yourself with what comes next.

When we're overwhelmed, it's hard to know where to begin. Our brains actually don't know how to process information in a rational way when we're under stressful situations. There's actually brain chemistry stuff I don't fully understand but can understand enough to know that's kind of a bummer. So when you're feeling overwhelmed, start by naming what matters. Maybe name that while you're taking some deep breaths because breathing helps tell our brain that we're safe. So deep breaths and name what matters about the situation directly in front of you and what matters about it in this actual moment. Right now. This isn't some big life purpose philosophical question. What matters about this situation right now? Then once you name that, calm the crazy that's getting in the way of that thing. Once the crazy is calmed, it's much easier to see the situation rationally and know what to do next.

I cannot tell you how helpful this process is. I mean, I try in the chapter of The Lazy Genius Way that goes into the right order in more detail, but it is a profoundly helpful, embarrassingly simple process. Just breathe, name what matters right now, calm whatever is making you crazy, and then see what comes next.

Let's go back to Target. We've had a few examples flirting with shopping at Target and masks and stuff. So let's say you're shopping at Target. You've got a cart full of groceries and clothes and Joanna Gaines stuff that's on sale (actually does Joanna Gaines stuff ever go on sale? I don't think it does). Anyway, you have a full cart, and you're ready to go home. You're wearing a mask because you've decided once that you're going to for awhile until you feel comfortable. And let's say when you're in line, the person in front of you who is not wearing a mask is talking loudly and not being aware of any sort of social distancing and is just generally irritating you. As you stand there in line, your irritation grows. You just want to get home, but now you're thinking that you might get there later than you wanted with more stuff than you planned on which means that putting it all away is going to take longer and now the guy is being loud and annoying again and you're just a simmering pot.

Okay. Let's go in the right order. You're feeling some stress. Take a deep breath there in line and name what matters right now. What matters most about right now? I think if you're in this community, you care about people. You really do. This is one of the most beautiful compassionate communities online. I don't think you would be here or resonate with this idea of letting people decide for themselves based on what matters to them if you didn't have some deep-seated sense of compassion for your fellow human. So my guess is that something that matters in that moment is that you show respect for your fellow man. That you don't treat this person in front of you with anger or invisible eye-rolls or judgment just because they're being annoying. So maybe you name as you breathe that what matters most is that you remain kind. You want to remain kind. Okay cool. Now what? Let's calm the crazy. What about the situation you're in is making you crazy? Is it the volume of the guy or that you're tuned into what he's saying? It's almost like you're hate-listening like you'd hate-scroll. Is that what's making you crazy? Pull out your phone and read your book. Or put in your earbuds and listen to a podcast or a song while you wait instead of his voice. Or maybe what's making you crazy is the mounting stress of what's in your cart? Maybe the guy isn't really the issue; the guy is just exacerbating the issue. So if your timing and your stuff is making you crazy, calm that crazy by thinking as you wait in line what you can do to make that easier. You can ask The Magic Question which is another Lazy Genius principle - what can I do now to make this thing easier later? What can you do now to make unloading your stuff or putting it away or getting to the car or whatever the specific is, what can you do now to make that easier later? Maybe you bag your own items and batch them. Batching is another Lazy Genius principle. As things come through, you know what needs tending to now and what can wait until later. Bag your stuff based on that. Or maybe you think about what can make the process easier later and that's listening to some great music because music always makes you feel a little better. Go ahead and scroll your Spotify app or whatever now while you're in line and pick out what music you're going to listen to when you get back in the car and home again to unload.

This is a very simple example, but the point is that the simple things have a bigger impact on our lives than we give them credit for. So name what matters, calm the crazy, maybe even using some other Lazy Genius principles to help do that, and then trust yourself with whatever needs to happen next.

The final principle I want to bring up is to be kind to yourself. Be patient with yourself as you take care of yourself. A lot of us don't see taking care of ourselves as a worthy way to spend our time, especially for something as "silly" as just being a person in the world right now. But that is a hard ask these days, so be kind to yourself as you take time to process what that looks like for you. If you need a nap or a coffee or a walk around the block or a quick check-in with a friend after you go to the grocery store, be kind to yourself about those needs.

I also want to remind us all that we all have different needs. We are all processing this way of living differently, and it's important to remember that so that we can be patient and more compassionate toward others who are living in their own general sense of dread that's maybe coming out sideways.

A week or so ago at church, the person preaching read this quote from Dietrich Bonnhoeffer which was so good, and I want to share it with you. Bonhoeffer says, "We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do and more in the light of what they suffer." More in the light of what they suffer. If we can remember that every person has a story, every person has insecurities, every person has stuff they haven't really worked out or fleshed out that negatively impacts us, the more we can see that loud guy in the Target line as a person with a story, who has suffered things that maybe he doesn't know how to process yet. And what's funny about that example is that we can unintentionally "other" people when we don't need to. In the example, I said the guy wasn't wearing a mask and you were. Who cares! Maybe he's vaccinated. You've decided once to wear a mask; that doesn't mean that everyone who doesn't is a bad person. But when we have our eyes fixed solely on our own needs without any lens of the humanity around us, we can other people so quickly. We make that guy a bad guy not just because he's loud but because he's being cavalier with his health and everyone else's because he's not wearing a mask. And yet most of the people around you aren't masked; he's just speaking in an irritating way and you're losing sight of what's true about this person.

I want to live more with a mindset of regarding people based on what they have suffered, what their stories are, not on what they do or don't do. As we weave that mindset into things like going in the right order and being kind to ourselves as we process all of these things, the more we'll be able to consistently and kindly take care of ourselves as the world continues to open up.

A lot of y'all have messaged me in recent weeks and even months with this very question. How do I get back into the world? How do I do this transition? How can I handle this well? And there's no single answer because we all struggle with different aspects of this, we have different opinions and social situations and immune systems. But what we can do is make it smaller. We can make our fears smaller and then apply a Lazy Genius principle or two to that particular

thing. We can be kind to ourselves as we figure it out day by day. We can remember that every person we encounter has a story and has suffered their own things and move toward them with a deeper compassion. We can just go day by day. You're doing great.

Okay, before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy genius of the week. I am obsessed with this one. This week, it's Megan Gerken. I saw Megan post about a Decide Once that she does, and I seriously couldn't love this more. So Megan puts together a lot of care packages for people. I don't know the particulars of that, but I love that that's something common in her life. And she has decided that yellow is the happiest color to put in a care package, so whenever she sees something at a store that's cute and yellow, she gets it and saves it to use in her care packages. Her decide once is the color yellow. I'm just so in love with this idea. Obsessed. It makes me think of wanting to add yellow happiness to everyone in my life, and it also makes me think of Bri McKoy who is if the color yellow became a person but that's neither here nor there. Megan, thanks for this very specific but very perfect example of being a Lazy Genius. Love it love it.

Okay, y'all, that's it for today! Thanks so much for listening and sharing this episode with your people, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm kendra, and I'll see you next week!