

## #188 - How to Lazy Genius a Pandemic Cookie Exchange

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 188 - how to Lazy Genius a pandemic cookie exchange. Now I know this year may not be the year to host the entire neighborhood or maybe even anyone for a traditional cookie exchange; however it could be a fun way to get everyone in your house involved in the kitchen and flex your creative muscles in showing other people that you care about them... through cookies. So we're going to briefly cover what a cookie exchange is then I'll go through a few steps to help you plan one during a pandemic.

You might be wondering what prompted this oddly specific, holiday-adjacent episode, so let's start there. My husband Kaz loves asking people, mostly me, random but fun questions. So when he did a dessert hierarchy with me, trying to figure out what dessert category I liked best, I played along. And I was as shocked as anyone that my top category is cookies. Like hands down. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. There are tons of varieties but only a handful of relatively easy methods to get there, cookies are portable, comforting, not messy, and low-risk. If you try a new recipe and don't like it, you can always send some to your neighbors. The same cannot be said so much of a cake you've cut into and you're like "yeah I didn't like it you want what's left over?" So yeah I'm super into cookies.

Also it's usually around this time of year where I bake a bunch of cookies for friends, a nod to the business I had before this one called The Sugar Box. I love baking things and wrapping them up cute in a box, and giving them out to friends and even strangers. I've been wondering if I can squeeze any kind of cookie baking or exchange into this holiday season, especially with my book deadline coming up so fast. So all that to say, I've been thinking a lot about cookies and how to get them in my mouth and also get them into other people's mouths.

So the basic idea of a cookie exchange is what it sounds like - you make cookies and give them while others you know do the same back to you. It can have different purposes though with the cookie itself. Is it a chance to try new recipes? Go super festive with flavors? Share traditional family favorites that have been handed down? So many reasons.

Now, as with all things Lazy Genius, before we start planning anything, we first need to name what matters. And yes, it's important to name what matters even for something like a cookie exchange. Because I promise you, the whole experience will feel more festive and authentic if you name why it matters to you. And listen, you might discover hosting a cookie exchange of any kind really doesn't matter to you. But if it does, you need to name what matters so you can plan appropriately. Maybe what matters to you is getting to know your neighbors better, so keep the barriers to entry extremely low and encourage them to stop by your front yard even if they don't bake or have anything to offer. The exchange is human interaction; you're in charge of the cookies. Maybe you want to plan one because you and your coworkers or you and your siblings

talk about the Great British Bake Off regularly, and you would love to have your own technical challenge, maybe over Zoom. Or maybe you want to start a fun tradition for your kids and their friends. You see what I'm saying? All of these examples are technically cookie exchanges, but they have different vibes. You want to name what matters so you plan an exchange that you actually enjoy.

So we've named what matters. Our next step is setting up the ground rules and making our guest list. Yes, gatherings need rules. I'm not crazy. Priya Parker wrote in my favorite books ever *The Art of Gathering* that you as the host are the person who puts others at ease with what's expected. There's nothing wrong with it. It usually makes things more relaxed because people aren't worried about something unspoken. Also when it comes to exchanging cookies, it's nice to have some logistics covered.

First, how many cookies roughly are you anticipating each person leaving with? A dozen? Four dozen? What about the variety? Does it even matter? I've seen plates covered with twenty different cookies or a box of two dozen cookies but only two kinds. So often we don't know what we're expecting until those expectations are not met. So do you have a visual of what your cookie expectation is? If you do, reverse engineer from there. If you don't, great. The point is - if you have in your head that there are going to be a dozen different kinds of cookies but only three other people or families are involved and you end up making eight or nine varieties yourself because no one else is making more than one even though you didn't ask them to make more than one, you might resent the cookie exchange or your friends and we don't either of those things to happen.

Here's your best bet: keep things fun and simple. Think about whatever you can do under the umbrella of what matters and what the purpose of your exchange is to make the whole thing fun and simple. Ask people to bring two dozen of one kind of cookie. Have containers already for people to use or ask them to bring a plate and you'll have big rolls of foil or plastic wrap for them. Drop off little plastic goodie bags in the mailboxes of the people who are coming and ask them to bundle up six in a bag and bring them so there's no actual touching of other people's cookies in these pandemic times. Fun for some is homemade, and simple for some is store-bought. Go ahead and make it clear what people are free to do. Fun and simple. Fun and simple. I'm giving some general ideas here, but as long as you remember your own purpose, you'll start to imagine the fun and simple that makes sense for you.

As you name some of your cookie rules and how you envision things to be in whatever ways your community is existing during these times and even how the weather is where you live since you're probably not doing too many outdoor cookie exchanges in Chicago right now, think about the people. Think about who you'd like to share this with. Again, the purpose behind your cookie exchange is a driving force in this. If it's for your neighbors, then invite only your neighbors. You get the idea. Name who it's for and write them down.

Now you can go super fun by making actual invitations rather than sending a text. Either way is great; it's whatever you want to make matter. I'll make a plug for Canva to create something fun

and simple. They have so many layouts and great designs to start from. And Canva is free to use which is great. You can send the image as an attachment to an email or use an evite website, or you can mail or hand deliver printed invitations you print or make. As is the case with all invitations but just a reminder because all of our brains are fried these days, make sure you list the day and timeframe, the location, how your cookie exchange will work and/or what each person is asked to bring. And going back to the purpose, it would be helpful for your people to have some direction in what kind of cookie to bring. If it's family favorites, say bring a family favorite. If it's something new, invite everyone to bring a cookie they've always wanted to try but haven't had the chance to yet. If it's a GBBO themed exchange, ask people to bring something inspired by the show or their favorite contestant or something. What happens otherwise is you'll say "bring two dozen cookies" and you get five people who all bring chocolate chip cookies. But also here's the thing, if you say the thing about the family favorite and everyone still brings chocolate chip, you actually have a fun situation on your hands because these are all family favorite chocolate chip cookie recipes and you will experience them completely differently. So be specific in some way of what people should bring. Or drop off. Or however you want to do the actual exchange in these pandemic times.

Which leads us to the gathering logistics. Only you know what you're comfortable with. Inside and masked, outside and masked, outside and not masked, a drive-by exchange where no one brings cookies and you make them all and just give them to your friends within a certain timeframe to make them smile, a porch dropoff, a big playdate at a local park where kids play and cookies are in excess. Only you know. But if you start with the gathering logistics, you might not end up anywhere. Instead, start with what matters. Does baking and sharing and maybe getting cookies even matter? Who matters in this? What's the purpose? Once you buy into that, figuring out the best logistics for what you're after will be fairly simple. They only feel complicated when you start there.

And finally, depending on the logistics you decide on, think about drinks, any extra food, safe seating, temperature comfort like a fire or blankets if you're outside, and entertainment for kids if anyone is sticking around for awhile. It's okay to just let gatherings happen and flow without question, but thinking through something using The Magic Question, which is a Lazy Genius principle found in a book I wrote called The Lazy Genius Way, is a way to help you name what you can do now to make your gathering easier later? Do whiny kids who drag all the tiny toys outside make things hard? Then think ahead about how you can make that potential boredom easier. Or maybe it's not boredom. Maybe it's that there aren't any toys or activities outside, so your kids just grab whatever is closest. Get mini bubbles for all the kids or sidewalk chalk or something, again, fun and simple. But Magic Question your gathering or cookie baking or exchange or however it looks by thinking ahead for your own benefit just a little bit.

One last word. Why are we doing this? Why does this matter? For you, it might not. But the overall idea here that could matter to a lot of you is connecting with people over food. It's December. It's Christmas and winter and a beautiful holiday time where we all need a win. Spending some effort on thinking about this in a way that makes sense for you and your family

could be the very thing your December needs, and I hope this path makes it feel like more of a possibility.

If you need a cookie recipe, I've got a few on my website. There are two kinds of chocolate chip cookies, one that's the best in my opinion and needs three days to chill. Yes that is truth. I also super love the Cumberbatch cookies I made that were inspired by Benedict Cumberbatch, the post is complete with photos. They're a double chocolate situation and really lovely. There's also a great gluten-free recipe for chocolate chip cookies where I use GIFs of Chris Pratt to walk you through the process. I do have a vibe. You can find those links in the show notes if you'd like, or just search the word "cookie" on my site and see all the options that pop up.

Okay, that's it for today. Thanks so much for listening! I'm so glad you're here, 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!