

## #158 - Staying In Touch When You Can't Touch

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 158 - staying in touch when you can't touch. Our last few episodes have been related to how we're living in this coronavirus pandemic but can also be relevant when we're not. We still need to manage our time when time makes no sense. We'll have plenty of life stages and situations where we need to clean the house when everyone is inside it. Hopefully this episode will feel the same as some of the past ones. Right now, we're separated from each other in ways we never have been before, but there will be other times when we want to stay in touch with people we love when we're far away from them, whether it's across the country or six feet apart. So today, how do we stay in touch when we can't actually touch?

Physical touch is a real thing to grieve for a lot of us. If you're into the five love languages and your love language is touch, this is a tough time for you. I've had a couple of porch sits which I'll get to in a second, and it's so weird to be with my friends and not hug them hello, especially when we're all in this strange crisis together and hugs feel like a normal display of comfort and connection. So yes we can't physically touch, but we can still connect. That's the point of today's episode, to break down how we can do that.

The goal of any time with another person is meaningful connection. You can be in the same room with another person, but without meaningful connection, it doesn't really feel like you were with them. But thankfully the reverse doesn't follow the same idea; you can still have meaningful connection when you're not in the same room. So if the point is meaningful connection and meaningful connection can exist just about anywhere, the anywhere shouldn't necessarily be the thing we start with. But that's our tendency, isn't it? We want to start with the tangibles and logistics. And right now, those are gone. Our structures are on semi-permanent hiatus. Church, school, going to work, running groups, book clubs, going out to dinner with friends or having people over to your house, playdates, all the things. The structures are all gone. And because the structures are all gone, it feels like our chances of connection are also gone. And if we stop there, if we stop at the lack of normal connective structures, it's a really hopeless situation. But meaningful connection isn't based on the structure or the institution.

Think about all the major events that are being cancelled. Not necessarily the Olympics although that's incredibly major, but personal things like weddings, graduations, birthday parties. Because the typical structure of celebration won't work right now, we feel like the whole thing is lost. Now listen, I'm not saying "hey it's cool you can't have your regularly planned wedding you'll be fine it's about connection not the institution!" I'm not that mean. There is a lot to grieve, you guys. So much. I had plans for Annie's fourth birthday that had to pivot. I'd been planning a big in-person book launch party for August 11th that we're not going to be able to do because of restrictions. It's really sad. There's a lot that's really sad about all of this lack of gathering and connection. But this is our collective reminder that the meaningful connection is the most important part, and while a lot surrounding that connection looks way different right now, we can still take the time and aim our energy at trying to creatively think about that meaningful

connection so that we don't lose it all. So in these next few minutes, I want us to look at the hopeful parts. It doesn't negate or dismiss the horrible parts. We can do both.

I want to share three perspectives during this time of being apart, and then at the end I'll share a few tangible ideas of how to apply those perspectives to your life and your relationships.

So the first perspective is that we can pivot. Okay, so when this all started (for us, it was early/mid March), we didn't see anyone. Of course we stayed home. I texted some people, but we more or less had the perspective of physical isolation which led to relational isolation across the board. Also we were all in that same crazy place, trying to teach school and figure out how to entertain the kids all day every day without going anywhere. How to manage suddenly being alone if you live alone or learning to cook because you usually eat out with friends and rarely cook multiple meals a week for yourself. A lot changed, and all of that early day panic was made simpler for us by just staying put. That's how it started, and it's how it stayed for us for awhile. Then came Annie's birthday. When it was time for her to turn four, I thought, "Man, this is a bummer. We need to figure something out." We did a social distancing yard party where people dropped by staggered apart so we didn't have more than one or two family units there at a time, and it was great. I wrote a post about it on my Instagram feed if you want to check it out. But after that party, after having to get myself out of the assumption that we would never see anyone again for several months, after thinking creatively about connection, it started to feel like yeah we can do this. Listen, we don't know how long this socially distant life will last. We're likely going to get hit with second and third waves of sheltering in place, and being apart for so long where we're completely isolated from each other like we were in the beginning just isn't sustainable. It's time to pivot. So I'm just reminding you that just because you started out this situation one way doesn't mean it's how it's going to be the whole time. You can change things up. You can get creative and make different decisions that are still safe but also meet your need for meaningful connection. We'll get to some specifics in a bit.

The second perspective is that living apart and not connecting in the ways we used to helps us really see what matters in our lives and in our relationships. When we got together before, we just got together. It was great, but it might have been more or less automatic. We go to church, same as every Sunday. We go to all the places same as we always. That automatic way of living and gathering makes our vision a little fuzzy to what we're actually doing, why we're actually doing, and what really matters about it. Now that we can't gather the same way, we're beautifully exposed to the things about our relationships and connections that we miss. What is about going to church that you really really miss? What is it about having people in your home that you really really miss? Be specific. Naming that thing is a gift in showing you what matters to you. It's not just "I miss going to church." Why? Why do you really miss it? We've all been given this unique opportunity to put a microscope on what matters if we just take the time to look.

And the third perspective that can give us some hope in how to approach staying in touch when we can't touch is the concept of lovely limitations. I've mentioned Myquillyn Smith or The Nester on this podcast several times before. She's my home guru and a decorating lazy genius. I'll put

a link to her book *Cozy Minimalist Home* in the show notes for you; it's a fantastic book and I give it as a gift all the time. Anyway, Myquillyn has a concept she calls lovely limitations. Basically, we tend to look at limitations as a bad thing. Limits keep us from doing what we want to do, right? In Myquillyn's world of decorating, a limit is the budget, a weird window that makes it harder to find a place for the bed to go, a room that has to serve three functions when you really only want it to serve one. Obviously in our context, we've got the limitations of six feet, open spaces but a lack of public places we normally have access to, and our regular rhythms are pretty much shot. But lovely limitations, if we choose to see them that way, can help us get creative and find solutions and ideas we never would've thought of otherwise. We don't let the limitations stop us from still moving forward with what matters, and sometimes the solution to that weird window or six feet brings us closer to what matters than we thought because we're choosing to see the limitations as lovely as best as we can *and* we have this newly discovered lens of what really and truly matters about the situation.

So I think those three perspectives - you can pivot and start making choices that are different than ones you made in the very beginning, you can use this time to really see what specifically matters about the things you miss, and you can see these limitations as lovely and not just annoying or difficult and see what creative solutions come from that. I think those reminders can help recontextualize staying in touch because we're not letting anything be a dead end or a roadblock. We can keep going. We have to go in a different direction, but our only option isn't to just stop. Which is honestly how it feels sometimes, especially if we don't reframe things in a more hopeful way.

Okay, so now let's talk about a couple of tangible considerations as you try and stay in touch when you can't touch. We'll actually make this a step-by-step thing for you listmakers out there.

So step one: Name the person or event. What person or family do you want a meaningful connection with right now? Think about it; not every person or family will connect with you in the same way. Personalities, proximity, the age of kids if there are kids, schedules... all of those things change how you meaningfully connect with someone, so name the specific person or persons you're wanting to connect with so that you can be intentional about that connection when you make it. Or maybe you're considering how to meaningfully connect around an event like a birthday or anniversary or graduation or something. So start with the event or person.

Step two: Connect with purpose. We all want meaningful connection, but what's the main purpose behind that connection? We connect over lots of things across even more emotions. The purpose could be celebration, remembering, getting to know someone better, sharing an experience, laughing, experiencing the chemistry with someone when you're in the same physical space. Connection is the umbrella across the whole thing, but what exactly is going to connect you with this person or connect you and your people with this event?

Step three: Focus on what can best fulfill that purpose. If you're wanting to connect with your grandparents for the purpose of making them feel cared for, you might not FaceTime them in the middle of the day with everyone running around your house when you're likely to be interrupted

a lot. I'm not saying that talking with your grandparents in the middle of regular life is bad or insensitive at all, but if your purpose in having meaningful connection with your grandparents, especially during a time when we're disconnected on some level, is to make them feel cared for, calling them when you can give them your attention in a quieter space might serve that purpose better. That's a pretty basic example, but sometimes we don't think about the factors that might contribute to the purpose behind our connections. And when our regular ways of connecting are more or less upside-down, it's nice to put a little more thought into why we're doing what we're doing.

Step four: Be creative. I mean, duh, and also ew. But what we tend to do is start with "think creatively!" We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to come up with something outside the box because we know we need a new idea to deal with all of these limitations, but if we start with that broad stroke of thinking outside of the box without even knowing where the box is and what the purpose is in the first place, we start spinning our wheels without a clear direction. So yes we have to think creatively right now. Times are strange, and we're all feeling pretty disconnected from each other. But name who you're wanting to connect with, name the purpose of that connective time, and see what things would contribute to that purpose actually happening. Once you have those things, then you have a better idea of where to put your creativity. You know what you're working with. Now that doesn't necessarily mean that you have to make the most upside-down strange amazing girls hang of all time. Sometimes creativity means just getting outside of the normal schedule of how you used to connect. I was talking with a group of friends the other day about how our regular times of seeing each other aren't happening anymore, things like church, family dinners, or just stopping by to drop off something the other needed at Target. Because those regular things aren't happening, we're not seeing each other, so we need to find new ways of seeing each other. We have to be proactive because the routine stuff is taking a break. Do we need to throw a masquerade ball or something crazy to see each other? No. We just have to be a bit more creative in scheduling time together because the time used to be more or less scheduled for us. So be creative but don't translate that to Instagram-worthy decorations or elaborate costumes or something. Creativity is just thinking differently but usually with a little imagination because normal solutions aren't as easy to come by. So be creative, whatever that means for whatever connection you're after.

And step five: Scatter joy. How can you add joy to this meaningful connection? Even if your purpose is more or less existing in a sad place, like if you've lost someone and you're grieving that loss in fractured socially distanced community, joy is still welcome. I don't mean joy in a distracting, dismissive sense. Joy isn't the same happiness. Joy is deeper. Joy is hopeful and brings light into dark places. Again, not that we can't exist in the dark. We can and sometimes need to. But meaningful connection is enhanced by considering where we might scatter joy. Lighting a fire that everyone sits around in your front yard at a socially appropriate distance because flickering, moving, ambient light is a weirdly special thing, blowing bubbles for your kids while their cousins on FaceTime seven states away blow bubbles in their yard at the same time. Maybe think about the senses and what it would mean to share the same sensory experience which totally brings joy to the people involved. When you do a Zoom call with your girlfriends,

everybody drinks the same thing or lights the same candle. You could even mail something sensory to your people so that everyone can experience the same thing together. A week or two ago, Bri McKoy mentioned on Instagram about how she and her husband had to cancel a trip to France they were going to take with another couple. On the day they were supposed to leave, they did a French wine tasting with French cheese over Zoom with this same couple. Definitely not France, but it was something. It was meaningful connection in the most creative way they could think of as a stand-in for not being in actual France. It's something to grieve, but they also scattered joy in that grief. So think about how you can add joy to your meaningful connection.

Now I will say that this feels really different if you're trying to plan a pandemic wedding vs. getting together with a friend on a regular Tuesday. But I think the overall journey is the same. Name what matters, right? And a gift of this time is that we're exposed to what matters in a deep way. When so much is taken away, it's easier to see what we would most like back. So use that information to spur you on in staying in touch when you can't actually touch.

Really quickly, a couple of things that I've done that have helped: porch or driveway sits. Everybody brings their own chair, their own blanket and drink, and we sit around together. It's fantastic. If you have a fire or twinkle lights, bonus. I have a weekly Zoom call with my mastermind group. Standing appointments are such a great thing, and they're so low pressure. I have the same with our church community group. We've also started doing a guys night and a girls night alternating every other week where we pull into our church parking lot in a circle like we're in college and just sit around and talk. There's a great park with a wide sidewalk where my kids can ride their bikes on one side and their friends can ride on the other side and me and the other mom are socially distant but together. Work through these steps and maybe discover a way to connect and stay in touch. In fact, I'm working through this process myself on how to feed people during a pandemic. I love having people over. Gathering is one of my favorite things in the world and when I feel most alive, and I really miss it. But I'm not giving up. I'm thinking through these steps for myself of how I can meaningfully connect with people with gathering feeding energy but when we can't gather. I'm in that get creative phase right now, and it's strangely fun and energizing. So take your time. Small steps.

Because listen you're not going to figure all of this out all at once. You're going to miss people. You're going to feel like whatever way you connect is a shadow of what it could be. And in a lot of ways, that's true. But remember the three perspectives from the beginning: you can make choices that are different than ones you made at the start and not stay totally stuck where you are, you can name what you miss and what matters most, and you can see these limitations as lovely and let them move you into a place of creative thinking so that you can still experience meaningful connections.

We're all different with different relationships and circumstances and needs, so again, it would be a bit wasteful for me to give you 15 hacks for gathering on zoom. Hopefully this way of thinking will unlock something in your brain and give you permission to move toward meaningful connection in the way that makes the most sense for you. This is really hard, and we're all just

doing the best we can. So you're doing great. Remember what matters, and let the rest fall away.

Thanks for listening. I so appreciate your time, especially when podcast-listening time is shrinking for so many people. It really means a lot, and I'm so glad you're here. 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!