

289 - How to Lazy Genius Holiday Expectations

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 289 - How to Lazy Genius Holiday Expectations. This Thursday is American Thanksgiving, and we're coming up on a season of lots of holidays, and with those holidays come many many expectations. You have them, your kids have them, your parents have them, your boss has them, the Internet has them... it's a whole vibe. So today we're going to talk about how to be a Lazy Genius about the holiday expectations you will encounter from others and from within yourself.

Why does this matter? Because pretty much every single argument or frustration or disappointment you have ever had centers on unmet expectations. Are you mad at your kid for not cleaning his room? It's because you expected him to, and he didn't. Mad at your partner for not helping you clean up after the dinner you made? It's because you expected them to, and they didn't. Mad at the weather for raining out your literal holiday parade? It's because you expected to have a good time, and you didn't. Everything comes down to expectations, so it's really important to name that going into this season.

Now listen, even as I say that, I don't want you to think you're about to listen to a downer of an episode. I can hear the trajectory of my words and feel the sadness creeping in. When I was a kid, my mom called me Eeyore because everything was the worst. Thanks for noticing me. And while I genuinely adore Eeyore and need someone to make a justice for Eeyore t-shirt, I also want to say this is not a solely Eeyore episode. There's a little nervous Piglet energy in there. There's some linear Rabbit and Owl energy for sure, too. But I'm mostly going to try and channel by inner Pooh and Kanga and maybe a little Tigger as we navigate this. The holidays are meant to be lovely and connective and something to mark, no matter your situation or what matters to you. It's the rare person who just completely dismisses the season and is full on Scrooge. How many characters can I name here today, guys? So I want us to be honest about the importance of unmet expectations and kindly and creatively think about how we can Lazy Genius those expectations so we can enjoy ourselves and our people. Cool?

So the unmet expectations are from two places: within you and outside of you. You have your own expectations of how something should go, or you are unknowingly at the mercy of someone else's expectations. The second part of this is a boundary. Expectations always require boundaries of some kind. You'll need a boundary for yourself when your expectations are not met. You'll need a boundary for yourself when someone else's expectations aren't met and they're letting you know that. It's almost impossible to live in a world with expectations and navigate those expectations without some sort of boundary. So let's break this down.

Let's start with your own expectations. Let's say you have an expectation that dinner around the Thanksgiving table this week will be pleasant and kind. No hot button topics. No arguing. No passive aggressive comments. But then the people gather, and the people don't behave the way you hoped they would. That does something to you on the inside. It's disappointing. You

have to process the emotions that come up. You might experience memories of past holidays where the same thing happened and wish you had a family that operated differently. In summary, unmet expectations often create emotional labor. They just do. You have to deal with it whether you want to or not. Your version of dealing could be stuffing it down which is a thing, but then it stays and doesn't metabolize and you stay mad or distant or disappointed and now we're for sure in Eeyore territory. So before that happens and catches you off guard, you can think like a Lazy Genius.

First, you need to name your expectations. Sometimes we don't know what they are until they're not met. That's true for me quite often, but try to name what you can. Imagine what would make your holiday gathering or whatever scenario you're thinking about really great. And then imagine what would make it really disappointing. Try and pinpoint what your expectation is for that thing.

Now, you have two choices: you can share that expectation with others and let people in, or you can have a plan in your head for kindly letting it go or kindly creating an environment where you can process the disappointment. And that process will often include boundaries. Because here's the thing. Even if your expectation is met, holding on to it firmly and fiercely will drain you of energy. It absolutely will. So instead, no matter what happens, you can begin even now to let that expectation go. To hold it loosely and create boundaries for yourself on how to deal with the disappointment if it comes.

Or if that expectation really matters to you, for example like a kind holiday table, share that expectation with your family. Different families have different dynamics obviously, so I'm not saying that every single idea works here. But you could text everyone with something that's honest but humorous and diffusive, like "I'm excited to hang out with everybody this week! Let's all go home with only leftovers and no silent treatments, so keep your hot button topics at home! But bring leftover containers because we'll for sure have plenty of food." Something like that. Or you could bring the same energy to the table as you sit down. Saying something humorous but honest about staying kind or confining topics to a certain category or something. If you're a praying family, you could even make a joke in your very genuine prayer. Like "God, we're grateful for this time to be together. May our conversation honor you, may we all keep our hot button topics to ourselves, and all of us go home with smiles and leftovers instead of silent treatments. Because you love us, help us love each other well." Will all of these ideas work for you and your family? Zero percent. But the point here is if your expectation matters enough to you, say it! Say your expectations! If a kind table matters, you can speak to it. You really can. And if you're like, "No Kendra I can't because I'm the baby in the family or no one listens or they all like arguing" or whatever the reason is, I get that. That means you will need to kindly and creatively let your expectation for a kind table go. You can model what you hope for, but you also need to create boundaries now. Remember, expectations always require boundaries.

If you have an expectation that isn't met, you can have boundaries in place for how you are on the inside and you also might have boundaries for how you behave on the outside. Maybe your boundary that you put in place beforehand is that if the table conversation hits a point where you're uncomfortable or a certain topic is breached and you know that the family has not read

either book by Sarah and Beth from *Pantsuit Politics* and don't know how to have disagreements while still being loving, you can have a boundary where you leave the table. You don't have to announce anything or make it a thing. Just have your own boundary in place where you're not going to sit in the room when something inappropriate to you happens. And you can leave. That's a boundary. Another boundary could be that you're not going to engage if someone baits you or says something that makes you uncomfortable.

For example, let's say you're single and a family member you don't see except at Thanksgiving and Christmas always has a comment about your still being single, like it's a tragedy or something. Your expectation or your hope is that no one will make your singleness something to be solved while you're eating mac and cheese. But you also know there's a chance that expectation will not be met, so you have a boundary that is a line you respond with when someone asks you about your relationship status. You can say with lightness and kindness but also candor, "I'm not going to answer that" or "My life is way more interesting than my being single, don't you have a better question" or something. You can create a conversational boundary before you enter a scenario of unmet expectations.

So name your expectation, and then decide if it's an expectation you want to make known because it matters or if it's an expectation you need to release. Name what boundaries or guardrails can create a path for you to stay centered and feel like yourself and tapped into kindness and what matters most, as opposed staying in major Eeyore energy. Being Eeyore for a little while is fine, but you don't want to stay that way forever. That's why I love the Hundred Acre Wood. You need everybody to experience completion. You need Piglet's fear so you can see what matters. You need Tigger's enthusiasm so you can enjoy life. You need Kanga's nurturing so you can feel safe. You need Owl's smarts so you can see things pragmatically. You need Rabbit's perfection because sometimes you want to put effort into things. You need Pooh's contentment so you can be okay when things don't go according to plan. And you need Eeyore's sadness so you can engage with emotions that tell you truths about yourself. Oh my goodness you guys is the Hundred Acre Wood the Enneagram?! That's another episode for another time, but now I'm deeply intrigued.

The point? Name your expectation, decide what you're going to do with it, and then create a kind boundary so you'll still feel like yourself.

We'll be right back...

Next up: expectations that others have of you. That's a biggie, especially during the holidays. Grandparents might have an idea of when and where and how you celebrate a holiday. There are expectations about gift giving and who's cooking and how long you spend together and how each person exists in their family of origin and who has what role. There are seriously a lot of expectations swirling around out there in our families.

So what do you do? Kind of the same thing. You can compassionately name that your mother or mother-in-law or grandmother or kid or somebody who's getting a little huffy or weird or mad or

withdrawn has an unnamed, unmet expectation. We all experience that, and you can model the compassion to notice. You might notice that your mother is clipped in how she's speaking to you. In holidays past, you might have just ignored it, and perhaps in this holiday you do the same. That's your boundary. Perhaps your mother hasn't done the work to name her own stuff, and you will get sucked into a conversation that is not profitable because your mother isn't kind or compassionate in her own processing of the situation. The answer isn't to always name the expectation for the person outright. Sometimes that's emotionally dangerous depending on the relationship.

But you can name it in yourself. You can notice that your mom is speaking in short sentences that is for sure an indicator something is wrong even if she says nothing is. You can think about your mom and name that maybe she's dealing with unmet expectations of having help from everyone else, of hearing lots of gratitude because she's been cooking for hours and no one has said thank you yet. You can notice that your grandmother, her mother-in-law, makes your mom nervous, and maybe she's dealing with her own parental pressure. You're showing empathy. Even if you don't engage directly in what you think is causing your mom or anyone else stress, by naming that she's having an unmet expectation in your own head, you're able to have empathy and soften. You can have compassion for the situation. Then you can stay within your own personal boundaries and love that person well. That might not mean saying, "Mom, you seem upset. Is it because you have a toxic relationship with Grandma and you feel like she's judging you all the time?" That might not be the best path. But you can go up to her and say, "Thanks for working so hard on this meal, Mom. Anything I can do to help?" Enter in in whatever way stays true to your own boundaries.

Having boundaries does not exclude love. In fact, I think the two are directly linked. Boundaries are loving because they honor the relationship and the individuals within them. So don't think you're being a bad kid or parent or person by having boundaries. They're actually really loving for yourself and your people.

So you might see that someone else has an unmet expectation and name it with them or for them within yourself. Now what if someone else has an expectation of you personally? Maybe they say it, and maybe they don't. What then?

A great example of this is relatives who have different expectations of how Christmas gifts for your kids should work than you do. You don't want more quote unquote junk, and they want to get everything shiny and sparkly from the store so they can see the joy on their grandkids' faces. What do you do then? Okay, let's walk through the expectations and boundaries and what you can do with them. You have an expectation that your parents or in-laws will finally honor your request to not get toys and instead get your kid an experience. That's something I see and hear often when folks talk about this. You have that expectation. Okay, do you share it again, or do you let it ride and see what happens? Make that decision and adjust your own expectations appropriately. If you don't remind them, they might not remember. Or because it's not as important to them as it is to you, they will lead with what is important to them. So acknowledge that. Don't make assumptions or automatically resent them when they don't honor

an expectation or boundary that you haven't spoken to in awhile. So you've named the expectation and what you'll do with it. Now you can put a boundary in place for when that expectation is still unmet. Or you might instead need a boundary of how you talk to them about the expectation. Maybe the boundary is that you only text the words or that you only speak the words with your voice. Maybe the boundary is that as the in-law you don't want to be the one to have the conversation. Whatever it is, name what boundary or guardrail or pathway would be helpful for you as you navigate an unmet expectation.

You can also name what boundary you'll put in place for yourself when someone else's expectation isn't met. How will you handle a disappointed grandmother? How will you handle a passive partner? How will you handle a sad kid? What boundaries will you put in place for yourself so you can be available in whatever way feels appropriate or necessary for that relationship?

Expectations and boundaries. Boundaries and expectations. Every holiday is full of both, either unnamed, unmet, really strong, completely absent, and everything in between. But if you can start to see your holiday situations, even the most benign of examples, with the lens of expectations and boundaries, you'll be able to better navigate what you need and what other people might need. Is there an unmet expectation from you or someone else? Does that expectation have to do with you? Are you staying within your boundaries and the boundaries of the other person to acknowledge them? How can you model that but also not depend on everyone else's following your example? How can you just exist as a person without feeling responsible for how everyone else is doing?

Kindly speak the language within yourself of expectations and boundaries during your holidays, and I think that will give you a kinder, softer posture towards yourself and others.

Here are a couple of final quick thoughts as we close. First, your only choice isn't to just react to someone violating your boundaries or not meeting your expectations. You can exist in that tension for a beat and be okay, or you can plan ahead for when that happens. Second, remember that whatever you decide to do this holiday season isn't forever. Sometimes we have specific expectations or boundaries for a certain season, and that doesn't make it the rule forever. Third, remember that so much of our stress is likely anticipatory. I remember Beth Silvers giving me that term several years ago, and anticipatory stress is a bear. Name it. Release it. Worry is fear of something that hasn't happened yet, so try and soften toward that anticipatory stress. Let it help you name what matters, and also relax around it.

This episode did stay more on the Eeyore side of things, but I hope it's a helpful resource for you these next few weeks. A couple of other episodes that might help are episode 244 - when things don't go according to plan, episode 40 - the lazy genius navigates family tension, episode 87 - the lazy genius guide to flexibility, and episode 235 - when you disagree on what matters. I hope those help too!

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! I'm excited about this one today because of how much holiday travel might be happening very shortly, even in the next day or two, and this tip from Brianna Woelmer is travel related! Brianna writes this: "One of the things that stresses me out about packing is that logistically it would be a huge help to load the van the night before, but it feels like we can't because of all the last minute stuff we can't pack until after using it the day it's time to go, like toothbrushes, hair straightener, the baby's sound machine, etc. Enter what I call "the last minute bag." It's just the bag we use for all those things we still need the day of travel but everything else can be loaded up the night before. It has saved my sanity and lowered my stress levels for several trips now. It's so simple that I'm sure everyone has already thought of it, but just in case it can help someone traveling for the holidays, I wanted to share!" Well, Brianna, I had never thought of it, and I'm sure a ton of other people hadn't either. That's the thing about tips like this. So often the solutions we need are really simple; we just can't see them. Plus I love the name "the last minute bag." Names really matter, y'all. They help contextualize us within our problems and systems and help us know what something is or where it goes. So Brianna this is such a great tip, especially for this season, and thank you for sharing it. Congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

That's it for today! Thanks so much for listening, 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!