

294 - How to Celebrate Your Own Birthday

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 294 - how to celebrate your own birthday! My birthday is December 27th, so tomorrow if you're listening to this on the day it releases. I am 41 years old and am closer and closer to my inner-self age of 43. I feel like I've been 43 for the last 20 years.

But I think that it is a very common problem for adults, maybe even especially for women, to know how to celebrate your own birthday. When you're a kid, the adults in your life plan your birthday. They throw a party or make your favorite food or any number of things. But once you become an adult, no one really does that for you anymore. Or you might have a parent who still wants to throw you a party, but for a lot of folks, as you get older, you like celebrating with your family, but you also want a separate celebration with your friends. It shifts, right? And even for the friend stuff, you might feel weird throwing yourself a party or inviting people out to celebrate your birthday. You want someone to remember or surprise you or not surprise you or any number of things. There can be a lot of layers to it, but y'all! It's your birthday! It should be celebrated! So let's talk about how.

I am going to open this episode with a reading from a woman who repeatedly tells me she is not my demographic, Jamie B. Golden. Jamie shared this post on her own birthday just last month. And no I will not read this in an Alabama accent. I would not disgrace Jamie's delightful voice with my poor attempts to sound like her. Okay, here it is.

"My best advice about birthdays is plan it yourself. If it means being alone with a great book and your favorite takeout, do it. If it means flying across the country and seeing your favorite musician, do it. If it means planning a shopping trip to your favorite store and booking your own group reservation at your favorite restaurant and asking your friends to prepare a 30 second presentation on the topic of their choosing and then playing a breakout game you love, do it. Me planning my day meant there were no unmet expectations. I met all of them. Then, there was room for extra delights." And she lists some that I will not list here, but I remember Jamie also saying at one point that we don't want to make other people be mindreaders. We kind of want people to read our minds, and that makes sense. Being surprised and delighted and known is so beautiful, but that's not the only way to be known. Sometimes people don't know what you want unless you tell them, and some of you might say that takes the value out of it. If they don't know on their own, it doesn't really count. If a friend has to be asked by you to celebrate your birthday then it doesn't really count.

So I get that. I do. And I also want to offer an alternative way of thinking. If you stay in that place of wanting your mind read, wanting to be surprised, wanting people to initiate, and then it doesn't happen, what happens within you? What happens to you and that relationship? My guess is you're super disappointed, maybe even hurt, and that person didn't mean to disappoint or hurt you. They just didn't know.

It's rare as an adult that we have birthday traditions that people can count on or even know what a friend's plans are. I know that I have friends I love so much, and I know they'd like to celebrate their birthday with me. But I also know I'm not their only friend. They might have other ways they want to celebrate, different people or groups to celebrate with. I'm not their only person, so even approaching them and saying "what do you want to do for your birthday" to me is an incomplete question. There are way more variables than just me and that person, and sometimes those variables do keep us from just initiating birthday plans with a friend, let alone actually plan them.

I also think that because we as adults often have such specific ideas of what would make a great birthday, kind of like Jamie said with the books or the concert or the big day with friends, we also know that our friends with birthdays might have a different desire for their birthdays than we have for them. You might think that a surprise party for a friend would be so fun, but it's her worst nightmare because she prefers one-on-one time and not group time, especially when people in the group don't know each other. But because you might value that, it's easy to think someone else will.

We all value different things. We are all such different people. And we're all trying to weigh those layered complexities of adult birthdays in our relationships. Do they have plans? If I make plans, am I interfering in plans that already exist? Am I making it awkward? That could be happening in the minds of your friends as you wait for someone to initiate celebrating with you and then you get really sad when they don't. I did not expect this episode to start this way because we're super close to it being a downer, but also a lot of us experience our birthdays as though they are a downer because we had unmet expectations.

So if you're a person who really loves for other people to celebrate you without prompting, you have a choice to make. You can prioritize that desire, accepting that it will often be unmet and will likely bring about disappointment and hurt feelings, at least sometimes, or you can prioritize the desire but communicate that desire to your people. To a partner or friend or group of friends. You can say to a spouse for example that you would really love a surprise party one day. Or you'd really love to wake up on your birthday and have the whole day planned. You can communicate specifics of how you want to experience your birthday ahead of time, and then let the chips fall if you want. That is a very valid approach to birthdays.

But I'm going to say that for the rest of the episode, I'm going to align with Jamie's advice. Plan your own birthday. We are long past the days of getting surprised with a new doll or bike or getting picked up early from school to go get ice cream. Those kinds of birthday memories are so fun as kids, and if you have kids yourself, you likely enjoy surprising them and making them feel seen and known. But adult birthdays are different. They just are. And I think the sooner we can embrace that and get comfortable planning our own birthday celebrations, the more birthdays we'll actually enjoy.

We'll be right back...

So let's talk about how you could go about planning your birthday. I have a short list of ideas and perspectives just to get things rolling. There isn't an order here. Just some thoughts to consider.

Number one, what you do this year doesn't have to be what you do every year. What you do this year doesn't have to be what you do every year. We often like tradition and repetition, or we think that once we commit to something, it's locked in forever. If you get fondue - do people still get fondue? - with these three girlfriends this year, you are not obligated to continue having fondue every year with those three friends. Traditions are lovely, but they are not the rule. So take the pressure off that whatever you do this year is not what you'll have to do every year.

Number two, take a whole day. This is bossy big sister time, but at minimum, you should have an entire day to celebrate your birthday. It doesn't have to be on your birthday if you work and can't take the day off or whatever, but at minimum, I want you to have an entire day. I'm not trying to be elitist with this either. I know that there are a lot of roadblocks for many of you, and taking a full day to have fun for yourself is hard. You're a single parent with no family around. You have an incredibly demanding job that doesn't allow for time off or at least time off without being accessible. You have a parent you're taking care of and can't just leave. I get it, and that is so hard. So I want to say that I see you in that and recognize that it's not so simple. And at the same time, there are perhaps things you can do to create that space. You can ask another relative to take care of your dad for a day. You can ask a co-worker to cover for you while you're taking this day to yourself. You can hire a babysitter for your kids or if you simply just can't, you can do things with them that day that you love to do. Eat the food you love. Go to the park you love. Let them watch their screens so you can watch the movie you love. It's too easy for some of you listening to make excuses that are in some ways legitimate but are not deal-breakers, and I don't want you to do that. I want you to have a day - a full day to celebrate your own life. At minimum. Don't fight me on this. If you want to fight me, swap roles. Imagine someone you love is super resistant to spending a day celebrating their own birthday. You would move heaven and earth! You wouldn't let them say that their birthday doesn't matter or that it's just too hard to take one day a year to do fun things. You would get bossy big sister with them just like I am with you. You are worth celebrating. Please celebrate yourself. For a whole day. Minimum.

Number three, spread out the celebration. You might want to do something with your immediate family and something different with your parents and something else with that group of friends from work and then another thing with friends from church or yoga or book club or whatever. You don't have to have just one single communal celebration. You can spread it out amongst different people if you don't want them to overlap.

Number four, if you have someone who is in your life and has been for a long time and you want to have a birthday anchor with them, make one. Emily P. Freeman is my dearest friend and one of my oldest friends, and every year for each of our birthdays, we go out to lunch. Sometimes it's on the actual birthday, sometimes it's a day or two before or after, but we always have lunch. Either burgers or Greek food, and then if we have time to hang out after with a walk or hanging out at a coffee shop or whatever, we do. But at minimum, we have a birthday lunch. My birthday

is tomorrow, hers is in April, and we've done that for years. If there are other celebrations, sometimes we're at each other's, and sometimes we're not. Remember, what you do one year doesn't have to be what you do every year, but at minimum, we have lunch together for our birthdays. And if you are a person who feels a little guilty about doing something just for your birthday, maybe doing a birthday share type thing with a buddy takes some of that guilt away because it's for both of you. I don't want you to have guilt at all, but if you do, that might help.

Number five, do whatever you love. Do whatever you love! And it can be a few things you love! This year, I'm going to go to a movie with my husband which we never do, I'm going to have a meal with my family, I'm going to have my birthday lunch with Emily, I'm having dinner with a few friends at a favorite restaurant, and I got a hotel room in my town and I'm going to be by myself and maybe go shop at a favorite store or two or just sit in a tub and read a book. I don't want how I'm going to spend those hours, but I know that I'm going to be alone.

I mentioned that to one of my friends last week, that I had gotten a hotel room and was going to be alone, and she was like, "Ew! I would never want to be alone!" It made me laugh, and also that's normal. Do whatever *you* love. The important word here is you because it is your birthday. It's okay and in fact quite normal to celebrate your birthday differently than other people celebrate theirs. Jamie loves breakout rooms. I can't imagine spending a birthday in a breakout room, but that's because we're different people. Do whatever you love to do, what makes you come alive, what is super fun, what you rarely get to do, and make it happen. Ask the people in your life to do the thing with you or to create space so you can do something yourself. Just ask. Do whatever you love.

Number six, plan a little. You don't have to plan a lot. You don't have to plan everything. But thinking about this earlier than the day before your birthday will go a long way. You can even think now, even if your birthday is in July, what would be fun? Start thinking about and maybe planning a little. Mark off the day in your calendar. Look to see if that favorite band is on tour and if you can go see them. Ask the best friend who lives across the country if she wants to pencil in that birthday weekend and maybe y'all take a little trip together. Just plan a little.

And number seven, birthdays are meant to be fun, to be a celebration. If your birthday is not fun for you or a celebration for you, I want you to take a small step in changing that. There is nothing that should consistently and forever interfere with you being celebrated. Yes, there are seasons with broken relationships or loss or unprocessed trauma or any number of huge heavy things that make you hate birthdays. But it doesn't have to stay that way, and I don't want it to for you. So if there's any part of you, big or small, intense or kinda meh, that's just real shruggy about birthdays and you're just dismissing your own, I want you to take a small step toward changing that. Whatever it is. Because ultimately, birthdays are meant to be fun. They are a celebration of your life, and your life is beautiful and worth celebrating. I don't know you or know your life, and I still know that's true. Because every single person matters. Every single person deserves to be loved and seen, and what better time to do that than on that person's birthday.

So don't feel guilty about inviting friends to do something with you. Don't skip your birthday because it doesn't really matter. Don't get yourself a special coffee that day and then call it quits. Value your life and your time and a chance to do whatever you love for at minimum a day. What you do this year you don't have to do again. You can celebrate different ways with different people. You don't even have to celebrate with people. But your birthday is worth celebrating, so right now, let go of the weirdness, embrace that you're a grownup and might have to do it yourself and that's okay, and then maybe plan a little. Just a little. Mark something down. Send a text. See if there are any specials on that cool downtown hotel that you've always wanted to stay in. Do a little something that moves you toward celebrating yourself. Because you should. I don't should you often, but I will today. You should celebrate your birthday. It's really fun. I'm about to celebrate mine, and I can't wait. Because I planned it. I'm doing what I want to do, and it's going to be rad.

Thank you, Jamie Golden, for being our wonderful example of how to plan our own birthdays.

Before we go, let's celebrate our Lazy Genius of the Week! This tip comes from Jessi Metzger, and it is a dream for parents stressed out by bedtime and/or laundry. Jessi writes this: "My girls are 4 and 6 and have been driving me bananas when it comes to grabbing pajamas at bedtime. They rip through their pajama drawer trying to find matching tops and bottoms. So I decided once that they will only sleep in one piece pajamas (either nightgowns or footie pajamas). It sounds so silly, but it has saved me so much grief every evening. A surprise benefit is that I'm not tempted to buy cute two piece pajamas because I know it doesn't fit our lifestyle." Jessi! I love this so much. This is one of those ridiculously simple, feels a little bit silly, tips that legit can change things in your life in major ways. I've said it 17,000 times, and I'll say it again. We think the answer to our stress is a big overhaul. Big solutions, big systems, big changes. But that is never the answer. The answer is tiny choices like this made day after day that create a life that's oriented toward what matters to you and simple solutions to lower stress. Is Jessi's bedtime routine with her girls completely without stress now? Of course not. But it's less stressful because of this simple decision. And I know I mentioned laundry earlier. Jessi didn't mention laundry, but I feel like washing and putting away one piece pajamas is way easier than two piece matching ones. This is such a great tip. Thanks for sharing this with us, Jessi, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, y'all, that's it for today. Thank you 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.