On Your Mind, Nov-Dec, 2020

**Birthday Themes**

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Dear Dr. Robinson,

Since this pandemic has started, I’ve been isolating at home with my 3 preschoolers. My husband still goes into work and it freaks me out every night when he comes home. None of us have tested positive for COVID-19, thank God, but that doesn’t keep me from being overcautious and overprotective. My 5 year old asked to have his friends over for a birthday party “like always.” He and his brothers have just been playing in the house with each other all of these months. We’re all stir crazy. Should I just bite the bullet and put together a “normal” birthday party for Bobby and pray that it’s not a super-spreader event?

Signed,

At a Loss

Dear at a Loss,

Boy, do *you* have lots of company. I don’t know how those brave souls put up with a pandemic for 2 years back in the day of the influenza from 1918-1920. It’s “only” been six months and our whole country is just about done with it all.

However, being done with it will not make it go away. Hosting a super-spreader birthday party will be a short term gain (Bobby’s happiness) with a possible long term loss (Let’s don’t even go there!). So, think about possible creative options.

First, could Bobby have a Zoom party with six of his best buds? Get the word out so that presents are received before the Zoom call, and have Bobby open them up with his pals. Have each of their parents available to help them share fun and funny things that have happened to each of them since they were last together in person. Zoom stories, magic tricks, or other visuals that all could share. Don’t forget the birthday cake. Blow out the candles and afterwards send each virtual guest their slice of birthday cake. It could be fun for all.

Another option is to have the party outside, with everybody masked up and socially distant. Obviously, this option is more tricky, but possibly do-able. Bobby could take whacks at a birthday piñata and share the candy with all. They could socially distance a treasure hunt in the yard.

Finally, if your doubts and safeguards are too much to bear, then level with Bobby and active listen his frustration and disappointment that he won’t be having a “typical” birthday party this year. Also, help him put together a family birthday extravaganza that will be safe for all involved. Oh, by the way, tell Bobby “happy birthday” for me. ☺

Dear Dr. Robinson,

My mom suggested that I email you. I’m turning 13 next week. The pandemic shutdown sucks! Wearing a mask increases my pimples. I’m tired of being at home, doing virtual learning, or rather finding ways to get out of doing it. Usually my birthday is the best time of the year for me because of presents, fun, and friends. Not this year.

Signed, Down in the Dumps

Dear D&D,

My heart goes out to you. The restrictions and expectations during this pandemic are taking their toll on all of us. The whole “we’re all in this together” thing is catchy but trite. What about you? How do you deal with this whole mess?

One way that could help you but also keep everybody safe is to journal your feelings. Get them all down on paper. Keep it or throw it away, if you like, but get them out and read it back to yourself. Try to fill up at least 2 pages with feelings and circumstances. Be creative.

Also, talk to your folks, your bestie, or another whom you see as a confidante. Getting your feelings acknowledged as real and valid helps a lot.

Next, brainstorm how you can have your birthday despite all the restrictions. Virtual by zoom? Open air, masked, and socially distant? What else?

Finally, look to the future. Take a moment to write down your plans for an awesome birthday party next year, when the pandemic is in our rear view mirror. Make it fun, fantastic, but also realistic about time and expense. That way it’s do-able and you can count on it.

Hope these options are helpful. Say “hi” to your mom for me. I’m glad she suggested you email me. Later?