

Watch your blind spots; the last months of 2020 are going to be a ride.

A Game of Risk

THE HOLIDAYS MAY FEEL LIKE A BUMPY ROAD IN 2020, BUT OUR MANUAL WILL HELP YOU NAVIGATE THE TRICKY TERRAIN. GEAR UP!

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By Amanda Woerner



Let's take a sec to rewind the clock 365 days. Now, task your 2019 self (hello, sweet, naive friend) with determining the risk of the following: running a turkey trot; flying to Europe; preparing your 7-year-old for her first sleeper....

Your risk tolerance for any of these is based on how you weigh their pros and cons, says Baruch Fischhoff, PhD, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University. Last year, the benefits of exploring Paris may have outweighed any fears you had about flying. But this year? Ohhh, *this year*.

In 2020, the novel coronavirus pandemic has forced us to rethink the most mundane tasks. (Will grocery shopping ever be the same?!) It's extra confusing if your MD, town council, and governor are all saying different things. Inconsistent info makes it harder to evaluate risk, says Ann Bostrom, PhD, a professor at the Evans School of Public Policy & Governance at the University of Washington.

And these tough calls are taking a toll on our mental health: One-third of Americans reported high levels of psychological distress during the first two months of the coronavirus crisis, per a Pew Research Center survey. When the pandemic first broke out, Kiaundra



Jackson, LMFT, a family and marriage therapist in Los Angeles and founder of KW Couples Therapy, says, she saw a spike in clients, mostly worried about their health and finances. Months later, "it's relationship issues." Sigh.

So with the holidays approaching, this year's convos will be less about what you're bringing to the table and more about whether you'll be at the table—and you may disagree with those closest to you about what's best on that front.

When RSVP'ing to a gathering starts to feel like a nightmare version of *Choose Your Own Adventure*, try these techniques to find your way.

Two-thirds of Americans aren't comfortable flying during the pandemic.

GET ON THE SAME PAGE

If you and your fam aren't seeing eye to eye (er, mask to mask?), agreeing to follow the same news source—not everything on the Internet—is a good way to make sure your disagreements are at least based on consistent info. Maybe you'll rely on your county's COVID-19 dashboard, or perhaps you'll decide to follow what your governor says. This will help you avoid decisions based solely on fear, Fischhoff says. Also consider the "bounds" of the problem you're facing. That's a fancy way of asking yourself and anyone else in your camp: *Who will be*

Luckily, I've become my own best advocate. During flu season, I've always said, "If you're sick, please don't be near me." Now, if I'm going for a hike with a friend, they know they have to mask up and stay six feet away. I've learned to trust others while being vocal about my needs. (Useful skills!)

When I was waiting to get my transplant and feeling hopeless, I'd remind myself that this was temporary. My advice: Start making plans for the future—even virtual ones!—that excite you. It helped me during my isolation, and might help you too.

when the pandemic hit and everything came to a standstill. I heard that the immunocompromised and people with underlying health conditions, like myself, were more at risk, and I was scared.

I received my second kidney transplant in 2018, and after that, I felt nothing could hold me back. I finally started to make plans again and was planning a trip to Portugal



My Health, My Rules

At 8 years old, Alysia Yamasaki was diagnosed with a disease that attacks her kidneys. Now 32, she knows how to voice her needs.

GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF ALYSIA YAMASAKI (PORTRAIT)

affected by our decisions? "If you're responsible for an older person, they are within the bounds of this problem," says Fischhoff. COVID-19 poses different risks to different people, so that could change your plan of action.

TALK IT OUT

If your S.O.'s version of "being safe" means going about his business with some hand sani in his pocket, while yours is more like "only leaving the house for groceries," it'll take work to find common ground. Jackson encourages couples to set aside time once a week to speak about how they're feeling based on the latest news and reexamine what risks they're comfortable taking. But instead of saying, "You're stressing me out by not social distancing," reframe your statement: "I'm concerned about exposing ourselves to people who may not have been following the same protocols." "You" statements put the other person on the defensive, says Jackson, "whereas 'I' statements take away the judgment."

MINIMIZE WOES LIKE A PRO

If you're more risk tolerant than the rest of your crew and you're PO'd about Thanksgiving basically being canceled, it might feel as if your pie doesn't taste as delish this year. But remember: Risk isn't all-or-nothing; it exists on a spectrum, so your first move might be to talk through possible safety protocols. "If you focus on concrete measures that everyone can agree on, you may be able to have social situations that feel more manageable," says Bostrom. That means discussing the option of dining outdoors, depending on your climate, or whether it would be realistic for the family to quarantine for two weeks before seeing one another. If that doesn't cut it, zero in on smart ways to uphold traditions, even if they're different in this new world, says Jackson. Some ideas: Coordinate giving thanks via Zoom, agree on some recipes for a shared experience, or drive by a relative's house for a side-dish drop-off. Not quite the same, but still so sweet!



Boundary-Setting

101

Deciding against an IRL meeting is one thing, but sticking to your guns when your mom calls you crying and your sister tells you to stop being dramatic is another. Draw your road map:

1 Make it clear it's about you, not them.

Jackson advises saying something like, "Yes, I might not be part of a family gathering this year, but I need you to understand this is not because I want to break tradition."

2 Anticipate pushback.

"When you set a boundary and stick to it, there may be discord, but it won't last forever," says Jackson. Expect to talk through your decision more than once; when you're tired of rehashing it, say, "I'm no longer going to have this conversation; my mind is not going to change."

3 Have an accountability buddy.

Remember gym buddies? Like that. "It's good to have someone to hold you accountable," says Jackson. "You need added support or you might waver and go back on your word."

4 Use positive affirmations.

It sounds cheesy, but giving yourself a pep talk can help. "Repeating your decision internally or out loud will help reinforce it," Jackson says.