

42. Being With Your Emotions



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

Period Power with Maisie Hill

42. Being With Your Emotions

If you are in the horrors with menstrual cycle issues or you want to learn how to harness your hormones then you are in the right place.

Welcome to the *Period Power* podcast. I'm your host Maisie Hill menstrual health expert, acupuncturist, certified life coach and author of *Period Power*. I'm on a mission to help you get your cycle working for you so that you can use it to get what you want out of life. Are you ready? Let's go.

Okay folks, this is episode 42 of the *Period Power* podcast. And a heads up for you, this episode might be an emotional one for me. I have been swimming in my emotions this past week or so which is kind of perfect because I planned on doing an episode all about being emotional. So here we are. And you'll have heard me talking about emotions a lot, especially if you're in The Flow Collective because in there we have all sorts of resources that actually help you to be emotional because being emotional is a great skill to develop.

Our emotions, they literally rule our lives. How we behave is based on how we feel. And I spoke about that in last week's episode. And the reason that we do anything in life is based on how we imagine we'll feel once we've done that thing. And a very common scenario that I see in approximately I'd say 99.999% of my clients is this habit of resisting and avoiding emotions. And then what happens is they just all get squeeze down inside of us and then they all come out somehow in the part of the cycle where they're actually accessible because they're close to the surface.

This is typically premenstrually for a lot of people. But for others it might be at the start of your period. For some of you it will be at ovulation or at other points in the cycle. So there's variations here of when it happens. But it's very common, we're just trying to get by and just white knuckling our way through life and through our emotional states. And then there's a point in the cycle where it all just comes out somehow, whatever that looks like for you.

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So our hormones help us to access our thoughts and emotions. But there can be this almighty build up of unacknowledged, unprocessed emotions and then it's just this deluge of emotions hitting you like a tidal wave. And when I'm talking about emotions I mean your feelings. And you'll hear me switching between the two today.

But whether I say emotion or feeling, what I mean is one word that describes your emotional state, so, sad, excited, nervous, bewildered, joyous, flirtatious, humiliated, proud, annoyed, calm. All of these are examples of feelings. And I know this might sound obvious when I'm saying it, but it is important. And if you just take one thing from this episode, let it be that an emotion is one word that describes how you feel.

Because usually what we do in the English language is we say sentences like, "Well, I feel that was a mean thing for them to say." Or "I feel they were being unfair in that meeting." Or "I feel the best thing to do is to get some food into the kids before we go on this journey." But it would be more accurate to say, "I think that was a mean thing for them to say." Or "I think they were being unfair in that meeting." Or "I think the best thing to do is to get some foods into the kids before we go on this journey." Which by the way is always the correct thing to do.

Because those sentences are thoughts, they're not feelings. And those thoughts do create emotions so you could feel hurt. You would maybe feel injustice, or you might feel decisive. But when we say, "I feel", usually what we mean is I think. And I do this all the time as well. I mean I do it less than I used to, but it is one of those habitual quirks of the English language. And I don't think it's surprising that we do this because I think it's more socially acceptable to say, "I think", than "I feel", because there is such a stigma to feeling.

There's a stigma attached to the idea of being emotional even though we all are. But it's like we're all going to great pain, and I mean that literally, to avoid being seen as emotional. And I think this is true of all humans, including cis men, but of course we're talking about this through the lens of

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being socialized as female and having a menstrual cycle that changes our hormonal landscape and our experience as we move through each cycle.

So there is a stigma to being someone who cycles and having emotions even though we're really no different because there's a whole bunch of studies showing that cis men are just as emotional as us. But the thing is, is that as soon as you put emotions within the context of the menstrual cycle and relate them to hormones, suddenly they're very different. That was me being sarcastic in case you didn't pick up on that. But why is being emotional a problem in the first place?

Again, it makes total sense that experiencing our emotions is challenging for most of us. Because most of us have never been taught how to do this. And from an early age usually we've been encouraged to hold our emotions in, to literally stop crying. Think about a child crying most of the time the parent or caregiver's objective is to stop them from crying, versus supporting that kid as they cry and acknowledging they're upset or whatever else is going on.

So we get in the habit of stuffing our emotions down, of using distraction as well to try and get away from our emotions. But it's like trying to push a beachball under water, the more you push it down the more it's just going to come back and hit you in the face and cover you with water. And some people, by the way, are unable to identify, to describe and express their emotions verbally. And it's referred to using a word that I am going to do my best to pronounce for you, it's here we go, alexithymia, I think I've got it there, alexithymia.

So emotions as well as some people having a hard time being unable to describe their experience, to name it and to express their emotions. Emotions can also feel big and really scary to us, especially if you grew up in environments where it wasn't safe for you to express your emotions or the way that your caregivers expressed their emotions left you feeling unsafe. So this is a nuanced conversation. But ultimately what happens is

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we try to block out our emotions. And I'm largely talking about negative emotions here.

But I think doing that can actually result in an absence of joy and of fun too because we just cut off our parts of our emotional experience in life. And you have heard me say before on the podcast that there's no such thing as negative emotion, it is a useful phrase when I'm explaining things to you here. But emotions aren't positive or negative, they're just different. And I love how my colleague and friend, Maggie Reyes compares them to colours in that there all sorts of colours that exist, but they aren't positive or negative, they just exist, and they are all different.

So I want you to think about what your life would be like if you experienced your life in full colour, when you can inhabit every part of it because you're able to experience any emotion. Think about all the ways that you are currently holding yourself back because you're trying to avoid feeling a certain way. We can relate it back to the think, feel, do cycle that I spoke about last week, how you feel influences what you do and your behaviour.

And you'll do things differently depending on how you're feeling. And the reason that you won't do something is because of how you imagine you'll feel if you fail at it. So this is why our feelings matter. And if you know that you can handle any emotion, think about how you would show up to your own life, what would be different? Don't get me wrong, half the time your life will still suck and half the time it will feel amazing. That won't change. It's just the great 50/50 of life.

But when you're able to be emotional you'll be equipped to handle both sides of the coin and that will feel radically different to spending all your energy trying to avoid and get out of experiencing what we could call negative emotion. Because we spend a lot of time and energy trying to get away from our emotions. And experiencing the emotions, it can feel like the pits, it can feel awful. And sometimes it might feel like you're descending into doom and darkness, and your brain might be trying to tell you, "You've

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got to avoid this because we're never going to return from the depths of this."

So you try to avoid it at all costs, but it costs you a lot to do this. The behaviours that we use when we're trying to avoid our emotions can cost us financially like if you are prone to online shopping to try and feel better somehow. And they can cost you your health. If you're using substances maybe like alcohol to try and get away from your feelings. You can even use what we would usually describe as positive health behaviours in a way that they create a negative impact, like exercise.

Exercise is fantastic but done to excess, if you're relying on it to support your mental health, you can stop ovulating. And you'll stop having a menstrual cycle. And then from there you go on to lose bone density, which puts you at risk of fractures. So there is a cost to avoiding your emotions, not to mention the whole time you're doing these kinds of things, you're also deepening the belief that negative emotions are awful, which isn't useful.

So what I'm suggesting as a radical alternative to all of this is that you experience your emotions, that you sit with them, that you notice them, that you pay attention to them, that you just watch your experience of being emotional, that you become the watcher of your emotions, just observing them. So this is what I've been doing this past week, I've been doing a lot of this, noticing naming my feelings and processing them.

So here's what's been going on. A couple of Fridays ago I found out that I had been accepted onto master coach training which is basically an advanced coaching programme for coaches. And it's hard to get in. Usually it's by invitation only but this year The Life Coach School made it so that you could apply. And a lot of people applied, and I got in. And I'm really excited about it because the training is rigorous. Everyone I know who's gone through it has said that it was the hardest thing they've ever done and the best thing they have ever done.

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And some of my coaching besties also got in. So there was a lot to be happy about on Friday. And I was really feeling the joy and the excitement of what it's going to be like to go through this together. But that was also the evening that my son came down with COVID. So this is a perfect example of how life is 50/50. Half the time it's great, half the time it sucks. And he's totally okay. He was ill for 12, maybe 16 hours and then back to normal but of course we were all isolating at home, Paul had it too. Amazingly I didn't get it.

I didn't have any symptoms. I was testing every day but nothing. So I mean I will say that they literally came down with it in the perfect part of my cycle because it was the run up to ovulation for me. So my immune system, my hormones, they were all firing on all cylinders and working fantastically. I am also double vaccinated, so there is that. And I like to think that I have strong Scottish genes that help these things too.

So that was on the Friday. And then on the Saturday I was on Instagram, and I started seeing posts about September 11th. Now, 9/11 is a big deal to me because I was there. I was four blocks away in the South Bridge Towers down by the South Street Seaport when the planes hit. So I was asleep for the first one and I woke-up because the sensation of the impact and of people screaming. And then we watched the second plane hit the second tower. And my then boyfriend's mum worked in one of the towers. She thankfully got out but so many people didn't.

So it was a very intense week in my life, and I did experience some trauma from it. For years I was triggered by the sound of helicopters and any footage of that day will just bring it all back. But all this time I just haven't felt entitled to my emotions about that day and those weeks. And it wasn't my family. It wasn't my neighbourhood. It wasn't my country. So I haven't really let myself feel those emotions. And usually on September 11th, I just avoid social media.

But this year I've intentionally and purposefully let myself be on there because I knew that I needed to be with those emotions and that I'm finally

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able to. So as I did this I noticed that my belly felt different. There was this slight tension across my abdomen from my belly going up to my solar plexus and across my diaphragm and kind of rising up to my throat. You know like how grief and sadness can hit your throat? And there was this depth to it and an ache. So that's how on this occasion sadness and grief felt to me when I was just watching it and noticing it.

But doing that helped me to be in it. And this is what I mean by noticing it, or just watching it and trying to describe the physical experience of an emotion because when we do that it's not so big a deal. The emotions are a big deal, they're important, they're all valid. But our experience of them, we suddenly are able to increase our capacity to experience them. So I'm very able now at this stage of my life to be with sadness and grief. And with that comes this softness from allowing it, that's incredibly loving at the same time compared to the hardness that used to be there from resisting it.

And this was upsetting but this is also happening whilst I'm going about my day. So being with your emotions and processing them doesn't have to be on your own in your bathroom or in your bedroom, sobbing your heart out. It can be that and it's not a problem if it is that. But I just want to open you all up to the possibility that there's other versions of what this can look like. It's like there's other flavours. And it's not necessarily about the expression of emotions, or emoting, it's about being with them, which is different.

So this was all going on for me whilst Paul and Nelson had COVID. So I was anticipating getting it too. And I was staying at home as a precautionary measure because right now the government guidelines are that if you're double vaccinated you can still just go on about your life. But I just thought, I'm just going to stay at home and try and take care of the other people out there in the world. So I was staying at home as a precautionary measure.

And I was wearing a mask a lot. And I struggle with masks to be honest because of the sensory impact of them as someone who's autistic and has sensory processing disorder. I know I can get an exemption from wearing

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them, but I've been managing to do it. So I was wearing them a lot at home and the combination of what I was thinking and what I was feeling, plus the physicality of wearing a mask resulted in some anxiety. So I was aware of a tension in my chest and feeling it across my collarbone as well, and a tightness in my diaphragm and a restlessness.

You might have that experience too of feeling a bit anxious and feeling like you need to do something, and something has to change. So I suspect that if I tried to push that all away it would have ultimately led to panic. But I was paying attention to how I was feeling. So I went into the garden, I took my mask off, and I just sat with the anxiety and what it was bringing up, the memories of 9/11 and I just sat there. And I rode those waves because emotions are like waves. And we can just go swimming in them.

And that's when I suddenly realised that the last time I wore a mask this much was the week of 9/11 because of all the dust. It was just so much dust everywhere. And I was just like, "Oh." Just all of these things just came together for me, and they wouldn't have done that if I'd have just been trying to get away from it all. So there was that.

And then a couple of days later it was the anniversary of my mum's death. So I've had lots of opportunities these past couple of weeks to experience my emotions, which is exactly what I asked all the members of The Flow Collective to do this month, to be willing to sit with their emotions and to do so lovingly and gently. And it was kind of like, this often happens when I'm teaching things.

Teaching you all how to do that opens up a portal for me to do the same at an even deeper level than I have done before. My capacity for experiencing my emotion increased even more through talking you all through my process of doing that. And in the midst of all of this, all the grief, the sadness, the heartache, there has been this softness and tenderness.

And just treating myself like that whilst experiencing these emotions, it's so, so different to what my history of being emotional or not being emotional, I

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should say, has been like. Which basically my past, years ago would be like, I've got no idea what I'm feeling, completely unable to identify the feelings that I have. It's taken me a while to get here but I'm telling you that if I can do it then you can too.

So what I encourage you to do is to always be swimming with your emotions, to let those waves be there and to let them pass through you. And to begin with they might feel huge, they might feel tumultuous, they might feel scary and like you're going to drown in them. But with practice the waves become familiar, and you know how to work with them. And you just adjust your breath, you adjust how you move and instead of being opposing forces, it's like you join and you realise that it's okay, that it is safe for you to feel your emotions.

I do want to acknowledge that there's challenges in doing this. It requires something of you. And when this episode airs the members in The Flow Collective will have done a whole month of this work. So to all of you, I want to celebrate you all because you've literally done something that your brain did not want to do, to sit with the emotions, it usually tries to escape from. So props to all of you for doing that.

And just to all of you, it is really worth doing this work because when you're open to experiencing any emotion your life opens up both in terms of your inner experience of living and your outer experience of interacting with the world and creating the life that you want. And if you want my help in retraining your brain on how to do this then come and join us in The Flow Collective. Get on the wait list using the link in the show notes or in my bio over on Instagram because we will be opening the doors again soon.

But for now, next time you feel an emotion, just pay attention to it, try to name it. When you notice yourself having a reaction, a response of some kind, just get curious and try to find a name for the emotion that you are feeling. It is so valuable to do that. And just remember that this is all about increasing your ability, your capacity to experience emotion, it's not about feeling good all the time. So it's just important to remember that.

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Alright, that is it for today, folks. I will catch you next week.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of the *Period Power* podcast. If you enjoyed learning how to make your cycle work for you, head over to maisiehill.com for more.