

Ep #49: Radical Self-Care



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

Period Power with Maisie Hill

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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.

Hello folks and welcome to episode 49 of the *Period Power* podcast. I have just got back from being in London for the weekend. It wasn't the point in my cycle where I'd usually go to London if I'm honest. My period was due and that's when my sensory needs are the most heightened, so my preference is definitely to be away from the other humans, even the ones that I love dearly and whose company I enjoy and appreciate.

But my partner, Paul recently bought tickets to see Irreversible Entanglement who are a jazz and spoken word collective from the States. And when he was buying the tickets, he was wondering who to invite and I just piped up, "What about me?" Which was not what he was expecting because for a start I suppose going up to London involves childcare and being the cycle aware man that he is he asked where I would be in my cycle. And when I said period would be due, he was genuinely concerned about how I'd be feeling and particularly the sensory side of things.

But as I also found out later on after the gig, he was also hoping for a weekend away and a chance to go record shopping with a friend. Anyway when he asked if I thought I'd be able to do it, I just said, "Well, I don't know. I may not actually be able to tell you for sure until the day. But if we plan for me going then there are definitely things I can do to regulate myself in advance so that I'm more likely to have the capacity to go."

So in my mind I'm thinking that yeah, I would like to go but I'm not going to push myself to do it. And I don't want to be in a situation where I feel obligated, or kind of affected his kind of big night out because he's a massive fan of this group. So I just gave myself some space in my reply. But I was also very upfront with him that I might need to cancel last minute.

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And that meant he was really able to make a decision based on that information.

And if he'd have said, "You know what? I'd rather go with a sure bet of someone who's definitely going to be able to come", that would have also been cool with me. Because I'm generally very unattached to these kinds of things. But between this first conversation with Paul and the actual date of the gig something else happened. So one of my clients from The Flow Collective basically had commented on our weekly wins thread that she had gone out dancing just before her period and that's not something she'd have usually done but she just thought, let's just go for it.

And she went out dancing, had a really fun time and then just made sure to take extra good care of herself at the start of her period. And she was just celebrating how she felt great for all of it, great to go out, great to take care of herself. And it hadn't had a negative impact on anything, and it was really quite liberating for her. So I was musing that over for myself and just feeling really inspired by the story that she had shared. So I thought, fuck it, I'm going to give it a go too.

So we went to London and Paul's niece, Alison, babysat. I say niece, I don't know, I always think of nieces like they're little, but she is a grown woman. So she took care of Nelson. And we got to go to dinner as well and it was just all fantastic. So a shout out to Alison, thank you very much because we actually realised on our way to the gig that it's been six years since we last went to a gig together, the last time we went to one was when I was pregnant. So it's been some time and it was needed.

Now, the topic that I want to talk to you all about today is self-care. So I have been thinking about self-care a lot, well I always am, it's my job and I'm a big fan of it personally. But I've been thinking about it in a kind of focused way for the past few weeks and that's for several reasons, the main one being that about a month ago my son had a fever. It wasn't COVID but he was ill for almost a week and so Paul and I both got very little sleep that week. And then I caught the cold that he had so then I wasn't well.

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And basically there was this week where I wasn't really able to do much work and I had to cancel some stuff, postpone other things, you know how it goes. And then it was half term and so my son's school was closed for a week, and they also had two inset days, so extra days off. So he was off for 10 days at the end of October and this was all happening in the lead up into us opening the doors to The Flow Collective. So not the best timing. So basically there was this sequence of things that happened that just ended up being, that I ended up working in ways that I don't usually do.

So I agreed to do a call with someone on a weekend and I never work weekends. And I did some calls in the evening after my son was asleep. And that's also highly unusual for me to do. So I was just reflecting on why I did that. And really, it's no wonder because I think most of you will be quite familiar with the, well, I've had some time off to be sick and I had to reschedule things. So now I've got to make up for that and just do the times that other people can do.

And we can just have this story running in our heads that's quite unintentional and just end up putting pressure on ourselves to do things that actually aren't very caring towards ourselves. Especially at a time when we probably need to take extra care of ourselves, if we've been dealing with illness or not getting much sleep then we need to really be prioritising ourselves. So when I realised that's what was going on, I was able to get back in the driver's seat, and make some decisions, and change things up in a way that really took care of me.

And that was also a time when I had this amazing conversation with my friend and colleague, Maggie Reyes. And I mean every conversation with Maggie is wonderful. And you're going to get to hear her on the podcast very soon. She's going to come on and chat to me. But the reason this conversation was so impactful is that Maggie asked me this one question that I have not stopped thinking about since. So here's what it is.

Maggie and I were just chatting about a bunch of stuff, and she asked me, "What would it look like if you were taking exquisite care of yourself in this situation?" Isn't that an amazing question? I'm going to repeat it. "What

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would it look like if you were taking exquisite care of yourself in this situation?” So not just how could you take care of yourself but taking exquisite care of yourself. And just the presence of that one word freed my brain up so much. It really helped me to access all of the stuff I would stop doing or start doing in order to take care of myself.

And this was really fascinating for me to observe because I am great at taking care of myself in all sorts of ways. But I have really slowed my life down a lot in order to take care of my brain, and my body, and my relationships, and my business. But I still have a propensity to get caught up in things at times. And that’s when things can go off piste for me. And that’s kind of what has happened in the last month. So on the whole I’m very aware of my needs and my capacity, what I’m able to do.

And I also have a large toolkit of things that I can do to take care of myself, including other professionals who I can go to for support. But there are still times when my selfcare goes out of the window. And I say all of this because I want to acknowledge that even when you’re an expert and you have the knowledge and the ability to care for yourself there can still be obstacles to doing it. And I think it’s important for you all to hear that. So my point here is that selfcare is ideally an ongoing conversation that we have with ourselves because if it isn’t it’s very easy to get off track.

And just to be clear, when I say selfcare I’m not talking about using bath bombs and going for massages. Selfcare can absolutely include that but it’s also so much more than that. But to go back to Maggie’s question, the reason I love the idea of exquisite selfcare is because it’s so different from what I would call scraping by selfcare. And scraping by selfcare is what most of you do, it’s what most of us do, not all of you, but most of you.

And if you think you’re in the minority here and that you do exquisite selfcare all the time I really encourage you to look at every aspect of your life. Because even if you’re great at selfcare like I consider myself great at it, there will be areas of your life, there will be times of your life where you’re just doing enough selfcare to get by.

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For instance, a key piece of selfcare for me is that as a general rule I don't go to kids' birthday parties, they're a nightmare for me. I think they're probably a nightmare for most people but particularly for me being autistic and the sensory stuff, all those loud noises, shrieks, multiple sources of noise, chitchat even with lovely people, that can also be challenging for me. So I used to go to them, but I would just end up so dysregulated from them. And then that would impact the rest of our weekend together as a family.

So Paul and I agreed that he would be the one that would take Nelson to the birthday parties. And there was actually this one day this past summer where Paul was DJing, and Nelson had not one but two birthday parties to go to in one day. But thankfully both of them were outside and not at one of those hellish indoor soft plays. And I was also at the point in my cycle where I'm more likely to have the capacity for such things. So it worked out well. So not going to kids' birthday parties is me practicing an exquisite level of selfcare.

Whereas scraping by selfcare in that situation would be just using noise reducing earplugs and trying to get by. They'd help a bit but it's not ideal, or if I said, "Yes, I can do this, I can be the one who takes him to the birthday party but I'm going to need some time to myself afterwards to regulate and recover from it." That would still be helpful but it's not what I would pick if I were to choose from all of the options.

And I know that for some of you who are listening to this, the idea of saying, "I'm not going to take my kid to birthday parties anymore", might sound really radical. And it might not have ever occurred to you that you could do such a thing. And that's because, well, firstly, we're just socialised to do all these things and usually to be the ones, particularly in heterosexual relationships with kids, that it's usually the women who do these kinds of things. So we are kind of going against a lot of socialisation in doing so which is also why I strongly encourage you to do it.

But it's also because we're so used to just scraping by. And not even just scraping by but also being grateful for the scraps of selfcare that we do get, or that we do kind of dare to take. And this is what I see in my work with my

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clients over all the years that I've been doing this work. They will just tell me about a stressful situation that happened in their life.

And one of the things that I would usually ask is them is, "What would have made a difference?" And their responses are 99.999% of the time what I would call a scraping by form of selfcare, just enough so that they don't completely lose it. Or just enough that they don't collapse from exhaustion. It's very rare for someone to respond with something that truly takes care of the problem in its entirety and is extremely supportive to them. So often I'm telling my clients, "I think you can do better than that."

But this isn't a problem I see in men. It doesn't mean it's not there. I'm sure there are folks out there who have been socialised as male who do have trouble doing this. And I do know men who have trouble taking time off when they're ill for example. Because their socialisation has equated needing time off as being weak or having mental health issues, can also mean that they're weak. So there are issues there, I'm not saying that there aren't.

But as a sweeping generalisation the men I've been around, tend to say what they want to happen, and they just do it. Or they don't even say what they want, they just do it. They go for a run. They go for a long bike ride. They meet up with their friends. They have a lie in. And here's what fascinates me, they do it without explaining, justifying or apologising for it.

Whereas, and this is another sweeping generalisation, the people I know who have been socialised as female tend to explain, they tend to justify, and they tend to apologise for the tiny scraps of selfcare that they struggle to take. And the ones who have no issue or less issue doing it are usually framed as being indulgent, selfish. I think we can even position them sometimes as other worldly, it's okay for you in your bubble and your circumstances but there's no way that I could do that. And that's exactly what I used to do.

In the past I spent a lot of time being enraged by what the men in my life did. This was all because I was envious. And I was so busy being jealous

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and pissed off about it, so busy thinking, well, it's alright for you. But I didn't see that it was also alright for me to do that. And I wish I'd put as much energy into figuring out how it was possible for me. But instead I was just very invested in thinking, well, what about me, who's caring for me? My role isn't being respected here. Can nobody see I'm struggling?

I didn't tell anyone in a constructive way. I definitely moaned about it to female friends. But I didn't speak honestly to my partner. I was just expecting him to read my mind and just waiting to get permission from him. Instead of just being explicitly clear with myself, explicitly clear with him, and explicitly clear with others about what I needed and wanted, and just taking it from there and having that conversation. That would have been far more productive than all the other conversations I had with the people who had nothing to do with it.

But doing so, not from a place of needing his permission but instead just giving myself that permission. So my rallying cry to you today is to be daring with your selfcare. Give yourself at least double what you think you can get away with, even better, times it by 10. Go all out, be radical with it. I'm daring you to take more and without apologising, explaining or defending your choice. And also importantly, to then do whatever it is you want to do without then mentally criticising yourself for the choice that you made.

So that's it for today, folks. I hope you found it helpful. Let me know how you're going to be taking care of yourselves. Be radical, go big, dare to do it differently and I'll see 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.