

Ep #57: How I Parent



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

Period Power with Maisie Hill

Ep #57: How I Parent

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.

Welcome to episode 57 of the *Period Power* podcast. I am recording the podcast a bit later than I usually do in the week. So it's Friday afternoon and I've got to tell you, I am all fired up. I have just got done with personal training. Paul and I have a session together every Friday lunchtime with our trainer, Emily. And today's one was hard. Oh my gosh, I think because I'm going away, she wanted to make it extra hard, but I was up for it because it's day 11 of my cycle.

The sun is shining, it is the most beautiful winter's day here in Margate which is very unusual. It's grey and windy and drizzly a lot of the time. But today the sky is blue, the sun is out, and even though we're here in winter, it's mid-January but I just have – I can feel the undercurrents of spring coming through. And where we work out is in the park and I could see crocuses and plants just starting to come through the soil. And I can really feel that in myself as well today, just that sense of waking up which is just such a great feeling.

And it's Friday, so I'm about to finish up work. This is the last thing I'm doing today. Then I'm off to pick Nelson up from school. And then it's all about hanging out with him and packing because I'm flying to the States on Sunday morning, assuming all goes well with my test tomorrow, my COVID test. So basically, I'm very excited and I'm going to have to simmer down to do this podcast because literally energetically I'm out of the door already.

So today's podcast is all about how I parent because over the years I have got quite a lot of questions about this because sometimes I mention something just briefly on the podcast or in The Flow Collective. And I always get requests to hear more about that thing. So that's what I'm going

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to get into today. And I put a post up on Instagram. So I'm just going to be going through some of the questions that I received there and answering them. But there's a few disclaimers I want to give before I get into this.

And the first is that I'm not a parenting expert, just to be very clear with everyone. I do think I am an expert in parenting my child and I'm really happy to share what's worked for me and for us as a family in case it helps you. I'm not saying it's the way to do it because the things that worked well for us may not work so well for your particular circumstances. And I think the other thing is, this is also going to be great evidence for Nelson to take to his therapist in 20 years' time when he's having conversations about how I messed him up.

So in the spirit of all of that, this is what today's episode is all about. But another thing I want to make clear is that there are times when I do parenting that I'm not proud of, where I get annoyed, and I get angry, and where I yell or say things that I really wish I hadn't. So don't go thinking that it's all picture perfect over here and that I get it 'right' all the time. Please hear me on that. Don't use what I'm sharing today against yourself. Don't go beating yourself up thinking that I do it perfectly because I don't and it's not even possible to. There is no perfect parenting.

What I would say is most important is the compassion that I have for myself when I'm like that, when I don't do great parenting, I'm able to forgive myself. And I'm also able to apologise to him and talk about how I didn't handle something in the way that I would have liked to. And I have that conversation with him if he's up for having it and ask him about what he's thinking and feeling because all human relationships experience ruptures. And what's important to me is that there's a repair that happens after it, a rupture and then a repair.

And his nervous system gets to know that this happens and that it's okay, it's part of being in a relationship with someone else. And it might feel uncomfortable, it might feel awful but ultimately, we come through it and we're still okay.

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So the first question. In one of your podcast episodes you mention a type of caregiving called the Pikler approach and that it brought in lots of things that relate to consent. Could you please elaborate on that? So yes, I can. The Pikler approach is a type of caregiving that was developed decades ago, I think in Budapest, I definitely should have looked this up. You can tell that I am moving into the summer phase of my cycle because I have not looked this up in advance.

But Doctor Pikler developed this type of caregiving, and it was based on being very respectful in caregiving in terms of, so if you are about to pick a child up, whether it's a baby or an older child, that you let them know that you're going to do that, and you communicate it with them rather than just picking them up and moving them. You would just say, "I'm going to pick you up in a moment and we're going to go into the kitchen", or whatever it is. And as you go to pick them up, you're like, "Okay, I'm picking you up now. How does that feel?"

And you're just checking in with them and having this conversation, and this is before they can respond verbally. But what you see from – literally the new-born stage is that they do respond. And you do start to get signals from them about what is okay for them, and what they are ready for, and what they are not ready for. It's really fascinating. And just for us, it created such an amazing relationship. So that brings in consent from a very young age because you're just asking, "Are you ready to be picked up?" We often think of consent as this big thing but really it's about all of these little moments.

And it also comes in with things like hair brushing. So, Nelson, my son has very long hair and so he'll often tell me to stop because it hurts, and I do. And then we agree that I'm going to start up again. So just simple things like that.

It's the same with tickling. I have a kid who loves to be tickled. My history, I hated being tickled, I was just over-tickled and when I said, "Stop", people didn't stop. And that was really not very nice for me, and I think has had significant impact on me in terms of consent and feeling able to say no and

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trusting that someone is going to stop. So when my kid tells me to stop when I'm tickling him, I always stop immediately. And it's the same I think in teaching him consent with others is that he listens to when people tell him to stop and that goes for me.

When he's interacting with me, touching me, when I say, "I want you to stop that, I don't like how that feels", that he does that. And I was able to have conversations with him, from again, from a very young age when he was playing with other kids, meeting a kid at the playground. And them playing together, I would start to look and see, "I'm not sure this little person is okay with what you're doing to them." So I would just say, "Do you want to check in with them and say, is this okay?"

And what would be really frustrating is then when they have a parent that goes, "No, don't worry, he's just being nice, he just likes you." I'd be like, don't undo everything that I'm trying to do here. That's not the point. So there's these various ways that have started to bring in consent and that that particular type of caregiving and of parenting really lended itself to talking about consent.

Other ways that this also came in is not putting him in positions that he couldn't get into himself. So we didn't sit him up before he could sit up himself. We didn't help him to stand, and we didn't help him to walk. We just waited until he could do those things himself. And it's really fascinating now looking at how he moves his body. And I don't know, there's just something for me when I read that, when I heard about it, I was like, "That makes so much sense." Why are we in such a hurry to sit children up before they can do it themselves?

Why are we just not letting them be with what they can do physically and waiting for their bodies to be ready to be in these positions and to undertake these types of movements? So following on from that we also wouldn't help him to do things that he couldn't do himself in terms of using something at a playground. If he wasn't big enough to climb up it then we were like, "Well, that's not something for you to be on because you can't be on it safely."

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The same with climbing trees and things. It's like, "Well, can you get up there on your own? Great, if you can, I'm all for it but if you can't do it then I'm not going to help you because that's a sign that it's not safe for you to be up there. You're not ready to be up there." And what was wonderful about that is that when you do things this way you don't need to say, "Be careful", all the time. And this is something that I just hear parents saying all of the time, and caregivers saying all the time, "Be careful. Be careful."

And for me I find that infuriating because these kids just aren't having the opportunity to fall over. My kid, he knows how to fall over and he's okay with falling over. And he can fall over in a safe way. I think it's good for them to be falling over and to be experiencing that. So I think probably quite a different way of doing things, but it really worked well for us.

Okay, someone else also asked, how do you approach sex education? So again from the moment he was born, because we were talking to him and talking like I'm talking to you, we've always spoken to him like this, as if he was an adult and can understand everything. We use the actual terminology when we're talking about bodies. And it's the same for genitals. So we'd say penis, testicles, vulva, vagina etc. And how we incorporated this is if we would be wiping him, washing him, changing his nappy that we would be talking about his body parts in this way.

I talk about my body parts in this way. And I think what's really key is just we've never made it a big deal. We just chat about it on an ongoing basis and just don't make a fuss out of it, it's just very normal to do. And he actually asked me about sex recently and he said – maybe he'd been having a conversation with someone else or overheard something. But he came to me and said, "Is when grownups lie down together, and the penis goes in the vagina?" He was just checking with me.

I said, "Yeah, that is one way sex can happen. And it can also happen in other positions. And a penis doesn't have to go in the vagina for it to be sex. It's really all about enjoying how someone feels and how you feel with them." That was that. That was the end of the conversation and we probably moved on to talking about Lego or Ninjago or whatever else. So

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it's just I think providing opportunities for these conversations to happen and also being aware of what our kids are letting us know they're ready for. And if they're asking questions, they're ready for it.

And if they stop asking questions or change the conversation then they're letting you know, okay, let's move on. So there's a really great book that I love recommending and it's called Making a Baby by Rachel Greener and Clare Owen. And we bring that out once in a while to just look through and talk about some of the stuff. But it's very inclusive and it's very diverse. It talks about all the ways in which babies are made and families are created. And I just highly, highly recommend it. I love it.

So we also have conversations about how someone can have a penis and not be a boy and that not everyone is born with body parts that are in line with their gender. So we have conversations about that. And we talk about sexuality, gender and I think my intention with all of it is to create a space for him to be whoever he is. And his understanding as well of other people and relationships. And when we talk about gender, I tell him that I'll always love him and accept him. And if he told me that he isn't actually a he then that would be okay, that would be fine.

And he's got to the age where, I don't know, it's so weird, and I can't believe it's happening already at this age but there's some chat about having a girlfriend at school occasionally. And when he was talking about the girlfriends and the boyfriends in his class I asked him if any of the boys have boyfriends. And then he said, "No." I was like, "Oh, that's a bit weird, isn't it?" So just kind of planting seeds here and there that it's not all boys and girls and boyfriends and girlfriends.

And we also have conversations about masturbation because kids masturbate from a very young age, they do it to self-soothe and because it feels good. And I don't want him to feel any shame at any age over doing that. So sometimes we just talk about how that helps people to feel relaxed. But also, I just don't comment on it a lot of the time.

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And we do talk about unsafe touch. And we talk about consent and how sometimes other people do things to children that that child doesn't want to happen. And we kind of just talk about in quite a casual way what he thinks he would do in certain situations. And I don't want to give the impression that I'm over here putting him through imaginary drills. But it's just more like, "Hey, if this happened, what are some ways you could respond? What do you think could happen?" Because what was I saying to him recently?

I was telling him about how sometimes someone might behave in a way that he's not happy with. But then they might say to him that he would get in trouble with me if he told me. And that I would be upset and angry with him if he told me. So I was saying, "If you tell me things that you're not happy with in your life, I'm never going to be angry with you. I'm not going to be upset. I just want you to know that you can tell me whatever it is you want to tell me. You're never going to get in trouble for these things."

So I was just making that clear. And I said to him, I'm laughing, you're going to see why I'm laughing in a moment, okay, bear with me. So I said, "If someone said that to you, how do you think you'd handle it and what do you think you'd do?" And he said, "I'd say to them, 'Get out of here you filthy animal.'"

It was just the best response ever. And also completely hilarious and entirely appropriate. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I would love it if", well, to be clear, I'd hate it if he was ever in that situation, but I mean I hope that that's the way that he is able to respond.

And in case it's lost on you, that's a line from Home Alone. And he really loves that line. So we just bring in these conversations every once in a while just to not normalize it, normalize the conversation, not normalize it happening because that's not something we want to be normalizing. But it is very common for kids to experience things like this. And in my line of work I hear about those stories from adults all of the time. So I know the importance of having these conversations with kids from a young age and not just having them once.

Okay, next question. How do you explain to your kid your needs as an autistic person and how do you cope with guilt? Interesting. So I don't cope

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with guilt because I choose not to have it in the first place. That's going to sound really radical. And I just want to be clear that I do experience it as an emotion because there's a kind of a misconception that autistic people don't feel guilty and that's not true. I can feel extremely guilty. And there are some occasions where I experience guilt in relation to my parenting.

But before I had him, I have a background as a doula and helping lots of people in their parenting journeys. And so I'd heard a lot about mum guilt. And I just decided I wasn't up for it experiencing it. We just talk about it all the time as if it's a given and it's part of being a mum, part of being a parent. And I was just like, fuck no, that sounds awful. I do not want that to be my experience of motherhood, so I just have that boundary with myself.

When it comes to talking about being autistic, I don't think he's wrapped his head round that yet. I have said to him a few times that my brain is special, and it works differently to how a lot of other people's brains work. And that means that there's certain things it needs in order to work best. And there's certain things that I struggle with.

And so he hasn't really got the whole autistic thing yet, but he does understand what sensory means. So that's the term that we tend to use. So I'll say to him, "I'm feeling sensory, can you please turn that down." Or "I'm feeling sensory, so I just need to go and be on my own for a bit." And Paul will also say, "Mum's feeling sensory, let's play downstairs." Now, that doesn't mean I will get time alone, a lot of the time I will. It's not a guarantee. But that's how I communicate it.

And I'm also really not opposed to using screen time either. If I need time to regulate myself, I will definitely bring out the iPad to make that happen and not feel guilty for doing so. Another thing is when I'm feeling dysregulated, I really struggle with being asked questions, so I'll just say, "I'm not up for questions right now, please don't ask them." Or I'll say, "Go and ask your dad. You have another parent go and ask him."

Other little things that make a difference are that as soon as I ovulate, I trim his fingernails. I have a very low tolerance for the sensation of nails and

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particularly in the second half of my cycle. So in my previous career doing reflexology and massage I always had to have really short nails. If you've ever had a massage or treatment from someone and you can feel their nails, you will know it's not a pleasant experience. So I just got used to having really short nails and I don't know, with age and being autistic and things I just don't like it.

But I do really love holding hands with him. So as soon as I ovulate, I'm like, "Okay, let's trim your nails", because I don't want to be flinching when I'm holding hands with him. So there's just things like that that I just make sure I'm tending to. And it's just like a reminder in my brain, I've ovulated, let's take care of this, let's make sure I've got some time alone. Let's arrange some playdates, I hate that term, but you know what I mean by it.

Similar to this, one of you asked for tips or advice on managing sensory overwhelm. You said, I have three young kids and when everyone's at home it gets to the point of feeling unable to cope with all the noise and demands and I just want to lock myself away on my own, which isn't always possible. Okay, I've got a few things here to say.

First of all, this is so relatable, I have 100% had this experience too. Here are my thoughts on it. Sensory overwhelm and nervous system dysregulation as a result of what's going on in your environment is a very real experience. And we want to make sure we're tending to that. So we also focus on the acute situation. And this happens with the cycle as well. So we focus on the days that call our attention because they feel crap in some way and that's necessary, it's helpful.

But we also want to be looking at the rest of the cycle and what's going on there. And it's the same with you being regulated, the same with me being regulated. So we want to care for ourself during those moments when we are dysregulated and struggling in some way. But the more you're able to care for yourself the rest of the time, so the time outside of when you're at home with everyone, the more capacity you'll have to take care of yourself in those moments. And it's the same with me.

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So I have noticed the more I'm able to really accept and care for myself in a really deep way throughout the day the more able I am to be at home with everyone. For sure I have these moments too. I'm like, "Okay, I need to remove myself from this and be on my own." And sometimes that's doable, sometimes it's not. But all this being said I want you to watch out for the thought, I'm unable to cope. Is there a thought that you can have that acknowledges what's going on in an honest way, that acknowledges that you're having a hard time, but also helps you in that moment and after.

So just to give you an example of this. Instead of thinking I'm unable to cope, I would choose to think something like, I need to remove myself from this and take care of myself. Can you see the difference? Can you feel the difference? And then of course practically speaking you could look at things like noise reducing earplugs. I use those Loop ones. They were just advertised to me on social media, and I'd heard they're meant to just reduce the decibels that you hear.

And for a while I was using them, and I was like, "I don't really get these. I don't think they're working." And I realised I'd been putting them in incorrectly. So that was an improvement. But also, I would say they're not the best for if you are going to be eating or drinking because you just hear your own noises. And I really struggle with the noise of other people eating. So I could do with something to use when I'm around the dinner table, that would be helpful especially in the second half of my cycle.

But I've looked at noise cancelling headphones, but I struggle with the sensation of things around my head, I don't wear hats. So I'm not entirely sure how I will get on with noise cancelling ones. But I would also say along with the earplugs and the other practical suggestions, just having conversations with your family and really educating them and being upfront about what you need and want and taking things from there. The more you can do that the better. Again, we can't control the other people in our lives, would be wonderful if we can, but you do what you can.

And they will do what they can and then sometimes you just have to be okay with knowing that you need to walk out of the door. You'll come back

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but you need to walk out of the door and have a bit of space, and to be able to ask for that, and to state that, and to take that for yourself.

Okay, next question. I find it very hard to be patient with my kids around day 19 and 20. I also get aggressive and loud, and I don't want to. Any tips on how to avoid that? Okay, this is also very relatable. This used to be a really tricky point in my cycle too. And similar to what I was just saying it all comes down to – well, not all but a lot of it comes down to how able you are to take care of yourself all through the cycle.

So yes, let's look at days 19 and 20 and how you can support yourself, things you can put in place that are going to make that a bit better for you. So that might be at the start of your cycle looking ahead and thinking, okay, days 19 and 20 are typically a struggle point for me. Let's look at the diary for this month, what can I get in place to make that better? So that might be arranging that your kids go to someone else's house. It could be, for me it makes a big difference if we're outside.

So on those days, things are so much better for me now by the way, they tend not to be a problem in the way that they used to be. That's a point in my cycle when I really enjoy being outside. And if we're having a bit of an adventure of some kind, but again so often this is happening because the rest of the cycle you're kind of – I mean I don't know you, whoever submitted this question. So I apologise if I'm weighing in with a kind of analysis of your life that is not true.

So, commonly when people are struggling around this point in the cycle, whether you have kids or not, one of the reasons for it is because you're doing too much the rest of the time and kind of holding things in, not processing your emotion, not tending to your nervous system, all of the things that I've spoken about previously on the podcast.

And then there's this build up and this pressure that kind of is suddenly revealed when your hormones get to a certain state or relationship with each other, or a certain level, they suddenly – it's like they just reveal all of the issues that are always there. But when your hormones are different, like

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in the first half of the cycle and you have oestrogen peaking, you have testosterone and maybe life's feeling quite good, you kind of gloss over all of the other stuff.

So my tips are really to just put things in place for those days that are going to take care of you but also look at what you're doing the rest of the cycle. And is there just this tremendous build up that is all coming out on those days?

Alright next question. In your birthday podcast episode you mentioned that you are proud, you have raised your son with emotional awareness. I would love to hear more about that. Okay, this is so important to me. I'm really less concerned about him being happy, and more interested in him being able to experience a wide range of emotions. Now, of course I love it when he's happy, and excited, and having a good time, of course, I do, I love that. But I don't want him to grow up thinking that he's meant to be happy all the time.

And I want him to build the skill of being able to experience and process his emotions, whether that's joy, or disappointment, or frustration. And I take this very seriously. I see this as one of my key job responsibilities as his mum. I don't expect him to do it all by himself. Paul and I both support him in experiencing his emotions and give him that coregulation as he's building these skills. But this to me is really key.

I don't think – well, I know I wasn't great at regulating my own emotions, that wasn't something that was taught to me. It's not something that's taught to most people. Certainly it wasn't taught to my parents. So there's a history here through the generations that I want to address. And so I'm proactive in that. There's also times where I'm very human and struggle with it.

On a similar note the next question is, how have you supported your little one to be able to understand and communicate his emotions? So firstly, I model this to him. I talk about the emotions I feel. And we do this thing every day called, high low high, so we ask each other, what's your high low

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high? And we share a high from our day followed by a low and then another high. And that's a really great opportunity to bring in emotions.

So I might say to him, "Well, my low is that something took longer than I thought it would and I felt frustrated about that." Or "Well, I feel really proud because I failed at something, but I was willing to give it a go." Or "Well, I really messed something up and that felt awful because I didn't want to mess up like that."

I also ask him how he feels. The car is great for this, kind of a bit less confrontational. Or if we're walking to school together, he might share something. And I'll say, "Well, how do you feel about that? How does thinking that make you feel?" Or I might say if he's sharing an achievement of some kind or something like a struggle that he overcame or met in some way then I'll say, "Are you proud of yourself for that?"

So instead of feeling proud always coming from me, I typically might say, "I'm really proud of you for that." And I do say that to him, but I always make sure I'm balancing out with, "Do you feel proud of yourself?" Because I want him to be able to generate that internal validation as well as receiving it from us.

Okay, final question. I'm not sure if I interpreted this one as it was intended but I've given it a go according to how I think this person has asked it. So this question is, I am interested in parenting an only child. I struggle with my son only wanting me at the moment and not his dad and wonder if you have experience of this too? So yes, I do have experience of this. And here's what I wanted to offer for this.

So any time there's something going on, whether it's something that we could deem as positive or negative I like to ask, how have I created this result? Where am I responsible for this? It's very easy when we're talking about parenting and particularly if you're female and your partner is male, just as a sweeping generalisation. It's quite easy to say, "Well, I carry the emotional load, the mental load, you don't see things, you don't do things. I am the one who's doing so much." And there is truth in that.

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If you know me, if you know my work, if you've read my books, you will know that I am onboard with that being a very real thing and I agree with it. But I also want to see, well, how have I created this? So when I reflected on this happening in our family dynamics, I realised that there were times when I was unwilling to let my kid and my partner figure it out because it was uncomfortable for me to leave them with it because it was bringing up my own emotions related to my own childhood.

So because of that I would always be jumping in unnecessarily. They didn't actually need me, but I was just running the self story that I'm the only one who can do this, so therefore I am going to do it. I would also have thoughts about the way I parent being better or the right way. So then of course I would jump in because I'd have a low tolerance of another type of parenting, which by the way, was also great parenting. But I just had this thing in my head, my way is the right way, my way is the best way.

And if you can't parent the way I want you to as a co-parent and partner then I'm just going to do it. And putting all this pressure on parenting and his childhood. I would also ask, "Is it true that he only wants you?" And there may be times that he only wants you, in which case stop arguing with reality. If he only wants you then why fight it? It will cost you more physical energy and mental anguish to fight it. So in those moments I just try to remind myself that there will be a time when he doesn't want me at all.

And that usually helps me to connect with him and whatever's going on and parent in the way that I want to. And I also remind myself that this is what I wanted. I wanted a kid. This is the result. I'm now living in the result that I wanted to create and having a problem with it. Now, of course within that I don't diminish my experience and the difficulties that I'm having. I'm not going to gaslight myself and I don't recommend that you do. But I think it's just an interesting area of parenting to explore because you're just like, "Is it true that he only wants you?"

Where are the places that you are responsible for this? And what could shift, how could this be different?

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So that's it for today. There you go. I hope that that has been helpful for you whether you have a kid, whether you don't. But it's just been an interesting one for me to reflect on. Nelson is now five, close to being six. And it's been interesting to look back on our journey as parents and how we have evolved, how he's evolved. And there's one final question I got, I forgot about this one. I was about to say, I really love parenting. Of course there's times when I'm like, "Oh, this is hard. Why?" And I have a bit of a moan.

But I'm also, I have a word with myself in those moments, but someone did genuinely ask me, do you hate it? So my answer to that is no, I don't hate it. There are times when it's hard, but I really wanted this. And for a long time in my life I didn't think I wanted a kid. I was unsure. And then I decided I did, and we were fortunate, and we were able to. And I really enjoy it. So there you go. I will be back when I'm back from Kentucky and I'll let you know how it goes. Have a wonderful week and I will catch you later.

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.