

Ep #157: The Gift of Connection



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is episode 157 and as we are in the midst of holiday season, I wanted to record an episode that you can use at this time of year but also any other time of year as well. But I have a feeling you'll find it particularly useful over the holiday season. Let's get into it.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Hey, folks, we are approaching the end of the year. We're already in the holiday season. We're also on our way, well, actually I think we will be in a Mercury retrograde period by the time this episode comes out. All of which means it's a perfect time to reflect on how this year went for you and get clear about what you want for the coming year. But you will find this episode incredibly useful, even if you're listening to this in the future, and it's the middle of July.

So if you've been around for a while and you've listened to the podcast and previous episodes, especially ones around new year's, you'll know that I'm a big fan of picking power words. A power word is a feeling or a state that you want to work with and embody somehow. So I'm going to give you some examples of power words to give you a sense of what I mean. They can be words like joy, bloom, stretch, gentleness, release, congruence, courageousness, being playful, celebrating, being visible, leadership.

So the idea is that you pick a feeling or a way of being, it can be something that's quite active. And you lean into that in all sorts of situations over a period of time. So sometimes I will pick a power word for a particular day or a menstrual cycle or a season of the year or for a whole year and that's what I like to do around this time. So in the past I've picked power words like expansion, effective, uncomfortable. That was a great one to work with.

And my word for 2023 was fun, and I've had a lot of fun this year I have to say. I've laughed so much. I've experienced a lot of fun in my relationships, particularly with Paul and Nelson. I've had fun by myself. I've had a lot of

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fun with my clients in my coaching. And I've had fun with horses. And that hasn't happened by itself. I decided to have fun.

I have been intentional about experiencing things in my life as fun even when there were other options there that I could have gone with instead, but I picked, no, I'm going to have some fun here, so therefore this is what I'm going to do. This is how I'm going to be. So there really have been many, many occasions where my mindset could have been completely different, and it would not have been fun. So this is all about being intentional and deciding that you are going to feel a certain way and interact with the world in a particular way.

But there's one other power word that I love, love, love to work with and it's something that comes up a lot on my coaching calls so it's time for me to share it with all of you. But before I do that, I just want to give you some context around why this power word is such a fabulous one to work with. So those of you in the membership will already know this, but for anyone that isn't a member or has never been a member, my clients will often come to our coaching calls inside the membership. And they want to get coached on improving their relationships.

We coach on all sorts of things, all sorts of topics, but issues in relationships often come up. And the vibe of wanting to improve things is usually the lines of wanting to be happy. I want to be happy with my partner. I want to be happy with my kids. I want to be happy with my mum. And I am all for being happy with people, particularly in meaningful relationships. I want that for you. I want that for me. I want it for all of us. But when my clients set this as a goal, they're typically finding those relationships challenging in some way.

And so going from a place of struggle to a place of delight and fun and happiness may be a stretch. That doesn't mean that they can't experience that. But when it's the focus, I think you're setting yourself up for disappointment and here's why. We are socialised to think that a successful relationship is one in which you are happy, where the other

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person is happy. And together you are the perfect picture of happiness, and you live happily ever after.

And I hate to break it to you if you've got this far in life thinking that's what relationships are, but that's not how it goes. But it's what we probably all subconsciously believe simply because of all the programming that we have had. But when the focus is on being happy, when the goal is on being happy, what happens when you aren't feeling happy in a relationship? Does that mean that it's failing, that you are failing, that they are failing, that you're failing together? It can become very all or nothing, and that black and white thinking just starts to creep in.

And if you're not feeling happy, then all is lost and it's the worst and you have to break up blah, blah, blah. So I have a fantastic alternative for you. Instead of focusing on being happy, focus on being connected, connected to yourself, connected to other people, connected to the world around you and connected to your purpose. Because you can be connected to someone else and have disagreements.

You can have a challenging conversation with a member of your family or your best friend and be in connection with them and with yourself. You can have an honest conversation with your colleague and really be able to be in the conversation, speaking and listening, being present by being connected. Your kid or kids, or maybe someone else's kids can do something that pushes your buttons, but you can remain connected and be able to parent them in the way that you want to.

Can you see the difference between being focused on connection versus being happy? It's a totally different experience because it creates space for other things, whereas happiness is very conditional most of the time. When you are connected to yourself, you'll be less likely to people please, more likely to honour your boundaries. You'll tend to your need for time alone and time with others. And that's not to say that you won't ever people please ever again or that boundaries will be really easy for you.

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It's more that you'll be aware of yourself when you do those things and be able to work in and through any discomfort that could come up as you start to flex those muscles. And connection to yourself is what helps you to do that. What also helps is working with me in the membership because it's literally designed to help you actually do all of these things, and for that matter, any of the stuff that I talk about here on the podcast and I would love to help you.

But connection to others is also actually going to help you to have boundaries and not people please because we do those things in order to tend to our relationships and continue to be connected to others. Whether that's people that you're very close to or complete strangers, by being connected to ourselves, connected in that relationship, even if it's momentary rather than an ongoing one. Having boundaries, not people pleasing is in service of those relationships.

We usually think about them as things that destroy them and are the end of relationships. No, we do them in order to tend to the relationships. So I want you to think about connection being a tapestry of different threads, emotional threads, psychological, physiological ones that just all weave together to create a profound sense of belonging and understanding. We can talk about connection like being in someone's company. And yes, it is and can be that. And it's also just a deeper resonance that you can feel on multiple levels, that other people can feel on multiple levels.

And in fact, connection doesn't actually have to involve being in someone's company, but I will get onto that in a moment. So when you are deeply connected to yourself, you have a heightened sense of self-awareness. And that connection to yourself allows you to recognise and honour your emotions, your needs and your boundaries. It's like having an internal compass or inner GPS that guides you through your life, both on a day-to-day basis and the larger journey.

And that connection to yourself creates authenticity. It enables you to show up in the world as your true self without apology and with a whole lot of confidence. Now, this doesn't mean that life is always going to feel

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fantastic, but it means you can remain connected to yourself even when it doesn't feel great. So if you've listened to recent episodes, you'll have heard that I've had a rough couple of months. I'm still in that, I kind of feel like I'm coming out of it a bit now. It's my birthday today, by the way, December 8th when I'm recording this.

But I'm still in it somewhat. I've been feeling a bit down and deflated and not for any particular reason. Although if my coach and astrologer Robin is listening to this, she will be saying it is for a reason because there's something going on with my south node. And all the illnesses, injuries and not feeling like I usually do, has been going on since the south node thing happened. And basically I'm just holding on for December 16th when it finally shifts.

But all that to say, I have felt connected to myself through that. I have been experiencing doubt, anxiety. Anxiety is an interesting one for me to experience because it's so rare that I feel anxious, it's not my go to place. My tendency is towards feeling overwhelmed and shutting down. So when you hit a rough patch, when I hit a rough patch where for one reason or another, we're just not feeling great, we often end up disconnecting. Now, that doesn't have to be a problem, disconnection serves its purpose too.

In fact, we sacrifice connection in stressful situations because we move to being threat focused and we switch to being on survival mode. So there will be times when you feel disconnected, it's part of being human. The key is not to dwell on those moments and not to kind of add a whole narrative about them. And you can actually just see them as opportunities, a place for you to exist and to experience and build resilience. That means that you can learn how to be in them, navigate through them and come back to connection.

And by understanding what leads to that disconnection happening in the first place as well as your experience of it, you can develop strategies to reconnect with yourself, to reconnect with others and the environment around you and your purpose as well. This is why inside the membership, one of the key exercises when you first join and for as long as you're with

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us is this idea. this exercise of mapping your nervous system and your stress responses so that you know the kind of the way into it, the experience of it and the way out of it.

And during times of stress, which includes illness, it also includes being cold, by the way. I was having a conversation yesterday with someone and they were just talking about how cold they've been recently, especially in the conditions that they usually work in, and I was like, "Well, that's significant, that is a source of stress." So there's all sorts of things that can create stress. And during those times of stress you might lose connection to your purpose, that deep sense of alignment with who you are, what you're meant to do in this world.

And this type of connection, it's about following your curiosities, your passions, leveraging your strengths, being congruent with yourself and how you show up in the world and having an impact somehow. It's that feeling that what you do resonates with the core of who you are. But can you see, maybe you can even hear it in my voice through thinking about that through talking about that? That creates connection, you can feel connected. And a lot of the problem with how we talk about connection is that it's something that just happens and it's outside of our control. That's not true.

You can generate connection through your thoughts. You can generate any emotional state through your thoughts for that matter. Again, I teach you how to do this inside the membership. So if you want to know how to do this, sign up to get on my email so you can join the next time we open. You can also do things that stimulate connection. So you can use your thinking. You can use your actions. You can create feelings on purpose. There's lots of options here.

But embracing this approach to connection transforms the way that you interact with yourself and with the world. It can lead to more fulfilling relationships, a stronger sense of yourself, a clearer direction in life. So we can delve into all of these aspects of connection. And we have all the tools and strategies that are going to enhance your ability to connect on all those levels inside the membership.

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So now that I have covered what I mean by connection and why it's so important and how you can create and work with it on a broader scale. I want to get into your specific experience of connection as an individual because connection is not a one-size-fits-all concept. How you experience connection is different to someone else. And this is where we often stumble. We assume that everyone else experiences connection the same way that we do. And then when they don't reciprocate and behave in the way that we hope and want them to, we make it mean lots of things.

So a common scenario is that you attempt to connect with someone through your lens of connection, whatever that is. And then when they don't respond to your attempts to connect in the way that you expect, you might start thinking they don't care about me or, well, if they really loved me, they would do this, and they wouldn't do that. And because of your thoughts about their behaviour, you feel upset or hurt or rejected. So let me say that again. Their behaviour isn't causing you to feel that way, your thoughts about their behaviour is.

That doesn't mean you should change your thoughts to put up with behaviour that you don't like. But when you recognise the impact of your mindset on how you feel, you stop making other people responsible for your emotional state and emotional wellbeing. And that is so powerful because it means your feelings aren't contingent upon what other people say and do, or the things that they don't say and do.

Now, everyone has their unique ways of connecting, their own preferences, needs, desires. And my recommendation is that you come up with a guide to connection, a user manual that you could share with other people if you want to. But primarily this is something that is for you so that you can be aware of how you experience connection just so that you can be more intentional about it. So this isn't a manual that's set in stone, it's just a set of guiding principles for how you experience connection and you can update it anytime you want to, remove things, add stuff, whatever.

But when you do it, I want you to ignore what's typical. Throw away the rules and what is expected. This isn't about how you think you should be

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able to connect. It's about how you do connect. So follow your body's wisdom, tune into what connection feels like in your body. Some of you might not have much experience of connection with another and perhaps even with yourself if you tend to exist in stress responses like fight, flight and freeze. You might not have much experience of feeling connected, but we are all wired to connect so that is there.

But how we like to connect is going to vary, but we all seek out connection in our own ways. And your needs, your preferences, your desires may well vary throughout your menstrual cycle if you have one, the time of year, the astrological cycle, both throughout the year and each lunation. So, for myself, there are times when I'm way more interested and available for connecting to my work and my special interests. And times when I'm way more available for connection with others.

And by being honest with myself about this, I just make life a lot easier and that is what I want for you as well. Just be honest with yourself about what you want, what you need. Because when you do that, you will accept yourself more, be more compassionate towards yourself, a hell of a lot less judgemental, and essentially you'll stop making who you are a problem. So I'm going to share some of mine with you just to give you an idea of what I mean.

This is something I've thought a lot about this year just as my understanding of being autistic has deepened. And for a lot of autistic folks, connection can look quite different. I read this research paper that described how autistic people often do the opposite of what non-autistic people do. So non-autistic people typically create connection through small talk. And then when there's enough safety, I guess as a result of kind of circling around things, they're able to go into deeper conversations.

And this paper essentially said that autistic folks do the opposite. We tend to dive deep into conversations that are maybe based around our special interests. And then once we have a connection, we might perhaps engage in some version of small talk or maybe not at all. Personally, I have a very

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low tolerance for small talk. It's rare that I can do it, especially without masking. It's not something I particularly want to be able to do.

But the times when I kind of find myself doing it and enjoying it usually come about after talking about one of my special interests or talking about someone else's special interests. Now, another preference of mine is I like to experience connection from a distance. I have several close friends that I've never met in person, or I've only met them once or twice, and the majority of our relationship is by messages and phone calls or Zoom calls.

I am also very close with my brother. I love him dearly. I've got to get him on the podcast at some point, but we don't see each other that much. He's only a 90-minute car journey away and I can remember when we didn't see each other in person for over 18 months and we both lived in London at the time. But this is just my preference. My good friends, Leona and Mars, they both live in Margate. I talk to them. I message them fairly frequently.

I will see Leona all the time on the school run. But in the history of our five-year friendship, we typically meet up once or twice a year. I don't make that a problem. That's just my preference for connection. So connection really doesn't have to mean face-to-face interactions or touching, it can be. But it can also be being side by side or even at a distance.

I have been telling several people recently how my mum has been dead for several years now and I have the best relationship with her now. I feel so connected to her. And every time I say this I kind of want to qualify. I don't mean that in a life after death spiritual way. I mean I think about her in my head. I feel connected to her because of that. I have conversations with her, and our relationship is amazing.

I actually started to think that I might be autistic in the months before my mum died. So for all of my life with her there was something unknown going on. And from my late teens onward I really think that being autistic impacted our interactions and other things did too, for sure. But so many of the sensory and social things that I find challenging would feature in and

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around the time that we spent together. So, I've really been enjoying feeling very connected to my mum these last few months.

I also love parallel play. So that's doing things in close proximity to someone else but without the need for interaction or collaboration. So that can be me reading a book, Paul reading a book alongside each other. So we're spending that time together. There's that connection, that presence but there isn't an expectation of talking or kind of looking at each other or anything like that.

Something I've discovered this year is that I really love TikTok. I just have a lot of fun watching things on TikTok. And so I will often share TikToks with other people and it's kind of like a love language for me. But I will send them by message because a lot of the people that I share them with aren't actually on TikTok. And once a week, Paul and I have this new thing that we do that I'm absolutely loving, where we just lie down and we're kind of cuddled up together and I show him all my favourite videos from that week.

So that means that I'm in connection with him when we do that, but I'm also in connection with him as I am kind of looking at TikToks throughout the week thinking about what we're going to enjoy watching together, what are going to be the useful hacks. What are the things we're going to find funny? And so there's just all these other ways that we can experience connection.

And I just want you to, as you're listening to me describe how I connect, what my needs are, what my preferences are, is just how factual they are. It's just this is just me. This is how I am. This is what I'm available for. Yeah, not so available for that kind of thing. Totally get that that's how you connect. And maybe there's a way that we can figure that out together, but just really honouring my needs and my preferences.

I have touched already on experiencing connection through my special interests. I want to speak a bit more about this because many autistic people have a highly focused level of interest in particular topics. These can start in childhood or later on in life and they are just areas of interest that can bring a deep sense of enjoyment as well as a way for us to

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regulate ourselves. And when I had my autism assessment, I scored really highly on the questions about special interests, and I've actually made a career out of mine.

So talking about my special interests is how I experience connection. And this year you will probably know I gained a new special interest, which is horses. And recently I've actually been looking for one to buy. In fact, I found one that I fell in love with, but I pulled out of buying him. Because there were some physical issues that, I mean, they just prevented us from doing the pre-purchase vetting, let alone, whatever the findings of that vetting would be, but talk about connection.

I felt so connected to him and it was a necessary but heartbreaking decision to pull out of getting him, but it was like going through a breakup. The reason that I'm telling you about him is because throughout this process, I went to see him four times and on two of those visits I took other people with me who really know about horses so that they could cast their eyes over him and just give me some data to help me make decisions. And I don't know either of these people particularly well. They're new people to me.

One of them, I'd only had WhatsApp messages with. We hadn't spoken on the phone. We hadn't spent any time together but when we went to view this horse, we spent the whole day together. And the horse was just over two hours away, so I was a bit hesitant, a bit concerned about spending that amount of time with someone because I would hesitate to even do that with a close friend. I should say that I have friends who know this woman professionally, so I felt safe doing it, but it's just not how I would usually connect with someone.

Anyway, I needn't have worried because we spent the whole day talking about horses. And I was fully expecting after that level of social engagement to feel drained and need time alone after spending the day in someone else's company to recover. But what I've realised after my recent trip to Arizona and then these horse day outings, is that if I'm talking about my special interests, I don't need to recover after social interactions like I

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do when I'm having non-special interest conversations. This is major news to me. This is breaking news so I'm very excited by this.

My partner, Paul, also knows that he can use horses to bring me back into connection with him. So if I start to switch off in conversation and glaze over, he'll ask me something really basic about horses and it just brings my focus back to him and in connection to him and the conversation. Then he might go back to whatever it was he was saying. It's just like flicking a connection switch. So that's how I like to experience connection.

There are all sorts of other ways that I can experience connection that I may be less available for or really available for. There are all sorts of other ways, but these are the standout things that help me to be in connection. So now it's over to you. How do you experience connection? I would love to hear about how you experience connection. Let go of those societal expectations about what connection should look like and just tune into your inner wisdom and what you know of yourself at this point in your life.

What does connection feel like for you? And if how your body feels, isn't so available to you, just think about what you enjoy doing. What do you enjoy doing? Who do you enjoy being with? Even if you haven't had much experience with connection, especially if you often find yourself in stress responses, remember that we are all wired for connection in our own ways, but embrace your unique style. And also allow others the space to do the same. It's such a gift to give ourselves and others.

And your user manual for connection isn't about setting rigid rules that you then inflict on others because I think doing both of those actions, suggest disconnection rather than connection. But this is about creating a guide that helps you to understand and articulate how you connect best, share it with others if you're comfortable or you can just keep it as a personal preference that is known to you. And just reflect on your own experiences of connection.

Think about the times where you felt truly connected, what were you doing? Who were you with? What made those moments special? Understanding

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your unique connection style is not just about introspection, it's embracing your authentic way of relating to the world and honouring that and not making it a problem.

So what activities or interactions make you feel most connected? How are you thinking? How are you feeling when you are in that space of connection? Is it deep conversation, shared activity, something else entirely? How often do you need social interaction versus solitude? Does that vary according to your menstrual cycle or other things? And how does that balance of time with others, time alone, affect your sense of connection both to yourself and to them?

Maybe think about what are your limits in relationships and how do these boundaries, that acknowledgement of your limits, help you to maintain connection? There is no right way to connect. There are all sorts of small everyday acts of connection. It always makes me think of when I lived in New York. When it would snow there, people would suddenly make eye contact when you're walking past them on the street trying not to slip over on the ice.

So yes, let's think about connection in our kind of longer, more meaningful relationships, but what about just connection in everyday moments. I think for me it's so often about just presence, feeling like someone is there with you without any expectation or needs for anything else to happen.

And as we wrap up. I just want to leave you with this thought that connection is an art. And like all art, it requires practice, patience with yourself and with others, and just a willingness to explore. So as you go into this holiday season, as you go into the new year or whenever you return to this episode, think about how you experience connection and how you can nurture that connection in your life.

And remember that in the membership we explore these themes in depth, offering you tools and loads of coaching support to help you along the way. If you're not a member yet, consider joining us. It's a space where you get to learn all these skills, you get to practise them, you get to grow and test

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them out in real time, get coaching help, get feedback and connect with others who are on a similar path in an amazing community.

Alright folks, thank you for joining me today for this conversation about connection. I have enjoyed connecting with you through the podcast. Thank you for being here. I will see you next time.

Hey, if you love listening to this podcast then come and check out my membership, *The Flow Collective*, where you get my best resources and all the coaching you need to transform your inner and outer life. Sign up to the waitlist at theflowcollective.co/join, and I'll see you in the community.