

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

**The Maisie Hill Experience** with Maisie Hill

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Okay, folks, this is episode 205. We are creeping towards the holiday season. I'm kind of feeling it already, by this time this episode comes out, I imagine it'll be even more. So, this month we have some specific coaching calls in the membership that are for you to get coached on the themes that come up at this time of year and there are plenty of themes that come up.

But I wanted to make some podcasts for you so that those of you who are in the membership, get your first layer of coaching through the podcast and then we can go deeper on our calls. And also, so that those of you who aren't members yet can also receive my coaching. So, this is Handling the Holidays, Part One. Enjoy.

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*.

Hello, hello. Holiday season is here, and I am excited, I think not so much about the actual holidays. I'm more excited because I love this time of year for coaching because one, it is a ripe opportunity. A lot of juicy stuff to get coached on comes up at this time of year. Two, my clients really get to see how much has shifted for them compared to previous years. It's a really good barometer of the transformations that they've created for themselves.

And often the issues that were there in previous years, maybe for decades, just aren't as big a deal for them anymore. And they have the skills to handle things in the past that they avoided or found stressful, got overwhelmed by, etc. For instance, when it comes to boundaries and people pleasing and handling awkward conversations. And then third, last of all, you can see the areas that you would like to focus your attention on in order to create more shifts, more transformations.

So, you can kind of clock, wow, those things don't bother me anymore. I'm kind of really nailing it there. I know how to do those challenging things. I know how to navigate them. But also, you might be like, "But I notice this is still coming up in my relationship with my siblings or my mum or I'm

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

noticing that actually switching off from work is really quite challenging.” Or you just start to spot all these things.

So, I have actually had a list of themes that you all have sent me on my Instagram stories. And I was just like, “This time of year, what do you want coaching on?” So, all of these are very short sentences where you’ve just told me what you want help with. So, I don’t have much context, but I actually don’t need it. I’m going to read out the message that I received and offer coaching just based on what you’ve shared. And you’re going to hear part one today and part two next week.

So, today’s episode part one is all about the stress of commitments, family celebrations, and either not taking part or what the hell you do if you’re actually going to go. How to handle people and situations that you struggle with or maybe even a bit triggering and basically how to survive. So, I suspect the coaching is going to have a bit of oomph behind it, so, buckle up.

If the question and coaching feels relevant to you, make sure you press pause and make note of the questions I ask, the things that I say. So that you can then really reflect on how the coaching and questions apply to your specific situation. Take the time to answer them for yourself. It is worth doing this on paper or a screen of some kind. And you can also get the transcript for this and every episode of the podcast on my website. Just go to [maisiehill.com](http://maisiehill.com) and head to the podcast tab and each episode has a transcript and any other relevant details.

Alright, let’s do this. So, kicking off, we have question number one, which is how to manage the stress of commitments. So, what’s stressful about the commitments? Really answer that. What is it that’s stressful about the commitments you have? There’s a few avenues we can go down here. You might have some general answers to that question that are more of an overarching theme. So, if that’s the case, let’s go with that. What is it that you’re worried about?

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

And I like to both entertain the wisdom of the worry and also offer a counter argument. So, what is the wisdom of you internally flagging this up as a potential issue? Note the word potential. We're not saying it is an issue. It's definitely going to happen because it could be just your vivid, wonderful imagination but what could the wisdom be? And this could be about all sorts of things.

It could be that this is your first Christmas being sober and you're worried about being in certain environments where people drink a lot. That's your inner wisdom being like, "Maybe we want to think about this. Maybe we want to have a bit of a plan or a protocol for handling situations like this." For me, it could be about doing a lot of peopling and not having adequate time to recover. Or being in environments that just aren't suited to my sensory needs, which is something that I really do consider and kind of make decisions around.

So, most of the time I would probably opt not to, sometimes I might choose to, but with kind of certain guidelines for myself. So that's a wise thing to think about. And some part of you is flagging these things up as things to be worried about. And that can be a good thing. It's not inherently bad. It's worth listening to, worth investigating. And don't worry, we are going to get on to what to do about all these things with some of the other questions. So that is the wisdom of the worry, which you have now duly listened to and explored.

And now that voice can sit back down because it's done its job, and we have listened and now we can prod a bit at what else is going on. And this is where you're going to make the switch from being general to specific. And it's useful to write out a list of all the things that you have on your calendar, personal and professional that are coming up. I mean, you can also look at it, but I think it's good to just write them down and actually see them on paper and ask yourself what is stressful about each of these events and what is the specific thing?

Maybe you're going to be visiting your partner's family. What is stressful about that? Write down all your reasons, even if, and especially so if there

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

are 20 reasons, so be it, just good to be clear on these things. That's actually 20 opportunities to step into your power. So rather than think, oh my God, there are 20 things that are going to stress me out. I'd be thinking, wow, there are so many points of influence that I have in this situation. And that is about managing yourself. It has nothing to do with them having to behave a certain way in order for you to feel better.

So that list of things is good information. And when you focus and get specific, you stop doing the mental equivalent of running around like a headless chicken, which is what happens when you're just thinking, the holidays are so stressful, I already feel overwhelmed with all the stuff that's planned and happening. Thinking that way is not going to get you anywhere, it just perpetuates the stress and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. So, this is about avoiding that happening.

And once you have your list of specific concerns, you can look for commonalities among them. You can also interrogate your thoughts. Are they true? Are they likely to happen? Could there be an alternative way of looking at things or doing things? How might someone else approach the situation? Just go ahead and imagine for those stressful things, what might I do?

Think about what would Maisie do? And it's not necessarily that that's what I would do, but it's helping you to tap into yourself in a kind of sneaky way, let's say. So, these are always to explore the grey area instead of just getting caught up in black and white thinking.

So, question two, how to go to family celebrations you don't want to go to and don't get drained. Don't fucking go. I mean, seriously, don't go. Really just sit with that for a moment. How does it feel? How do you respond to the idea of not going? For some of you, it might feel like a great relief and the best thing ever. Some of you might realise that underneath your frustrations and your resistance to going that you actually do still want to go. And it can also be a blend of both of those things and plenty of others.

## **Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence**

And you might also come up with a list of reasons as to why you can't skip family celebrations. Your brain is just going to be like, well, lovely idea Maisie, but I simply can't because blah, blah, blah. And that list of reasons is worth being aware of and also worth exploring. I mean I could coach on this stuff for days if you can't tell. But whether you do or don't still want to go, make sure you write down your reasons why. And if I was coaching you directly, I'd probably explore your reasons with you.

If you're in the membership, make sure you bring these answers to our calls and to Ask a Coach where you can get as much individual written coaching as you want and need throughout the holiday season. Now, if you don't want to go and you decide to still go, that is your choice. It is your responsibility. You can't be getting all pissy and resentful because you made the choice to go and didn't honour yourself. It is not about everyone else, that is you. If you go, it is on you to manage your mind.

It's also on you to manage your mind if you don't go and you have some thoughts and feelings about not going. But if you are going, what's your protocol going to be? What will you do to take care of yourself? I love, love, love having protocols. I have a hard day protocol. I have a going on holiday protocol. I have a going up to London protocol. I have all sorts of protocols, and a protocol is not anything complicated. It is a simple set of things, a process that you follow when you do a certain thing. So please don't overcomplicate it.

If you're visiting family or friends, your protocol could be that you don't stay with them, or you'll stay with them for one night or however many. And that you will go for a walk every day to have some time to yourself, to get away from the group dynamics. Even when it's lovely and amazing, you just might be someone like I am who just needs some time on their own. It could be that you'll bring your own food if you have specific requirements, or it could be anything, just think about what will help you. Could be practically, emotionally, financially.

It could be to do with communication, need for space, need for connection, etc. Now, a little side note for you, at Christmas, I don't actually spend time

## **Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence**

with my family as in my family of origin. I spend it with Paul and Nelson, but I don't spend it with my brother or my dad. And when my mom was alive, I didn't spend it with her, and I haven't done so since I was 15.

Of course, I was still living at home at that point with my mum, but as soon as I was old enough to be working, I worked over Christmas, including Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The money was great. The old folks in the home I worked in loved the energy that I brought to the day. And it meant the staff who wanted to be home over Christmas, with their kids and things, could be. And then after that point, I was living in Denmark, then New York, or I'd be on holiday to somewhere hot.

In fact, I recently suggested meeting my brother and his family in Germany between Christmas and New Year's because that's where they will be. And he was just so shocked at the idea of seeing me over Christmas, it was hilarious. So, my family are used to that. The humans in your life are probably used to you spending Christmas with them or whatever the family celebration and traditions happen to be.

So, when you don't go after all these years of going, it is okay for them to have some thoughts and feelings, and they likely will, but they might not all be 'bad'. They might share their thoughts and feelings with you or not. And it could just be your wonderful imagination coming up with all sorts of ideas about how they're going to think and feel. So, I just want to emphasise that it's okay for people to have thoughts and feelings about you changing the plan because they have expectations, which is something that we all tend to have.

And it's okay for everyone to have an adjustment period, but you get to decide what people having an adjustment period means to you. And you don't get to have strict control over the humans, I'm afraid. You get to have standards, you get to have boundaries, but not control. The humans are going to human, including you and I.

Alright, question three is, how to handle tricky relationships or triggering situations with parents. Now, of course, I am a coach. I'm not a trauma

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

therapist. That is not my specialty. If you are working through triggers and PTSD or complex PTSD, then you definitely want help from someone who is licensed and qualified to offer that kind of support.

What I'm about to say is based on what I would describe as activating or reactionary things because I prefer to keep the word trigger for when we are talking about trauma and mental health conditions specifically. Plus, I just don't know how useful it is to be talking about how everything is a trigger or it's triggering to you. Because although that way of describing things can be initially useful in terms of acknowledging and naming things and their impact on you, it can also then confound the issue in unhelpful ways, especially when it's used as part of your ongoing daily narrative.

So, we're going to stay focused on how to handle tricky relationships and situations. And what do I want to say about this? Decide in advance how you're going to handle it, and I don't mean a kind of convoluted endless flowchart of, well, if X does this, then I'm going to do Y. But if this happens, then I'll do that and blah, blah, blah. I just mean more of a goal that's based on what matters to you. That could be about your values. It could be about that you're going to have a personal goal where you are just going to be responsible for yourself and not be over-responsible for everyone else at the table.

It could be just you're going to let the adults be adults or that you're going to work on your capacity for discomfort without forcing yourself to enjoy anything harmful, of course and you can have a protocol too. If you don't like your mum's behaviour after X number of drinks, decide in advance that you'll leave before she hits that threshold. So just really think about because dynamics, histories with families and loved ones, there's multiple layers. There's all sorts of complications and nuances. So how can you make this be straightforward?

Straightforward and simple is the way to go. It doesn't mean it's going to be easy. But I think sometimes these more challenging situations, if we can come up with a simple way of handling them and responding to them, then that kind of takes away it being complicated and challenging. If we can



## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

make it simple and perhaps it's going to be a bit challenging or very challenging, then that's going to be easier for us to do.

Okay, question four. I am loving these questions. How to handle being around people who don't like you and/or misunderstand you or are just rude and mean. Okay, just don't, why on earth would you choose to be around someone who is mean, rude and doesn't like you? Just don't do that to yourself. And of course, we all encounter people like this, but we don't have to remain in their company. And there might be times when you are in the same physical space, in the same environment with someone like this, but you don't have to be around them, you get to decide what access you are giving someone.

And as for people who misunderstand you, that is something I for sure experience as an autistic person, even in a relationship with someone who isn't autistic, and indeed other relationships. And some people, regardless of neurodiversity or not, some people are just determined to misunderstand you. So, just let them, if that's what they're going to do, that's what they're going to do.

If they are determined to have a certain view of you, there is not much you can do or say to persuade them otherwise. And I don't actually think it's a great use of your energy and mental bandwidth and that can suck, there can be consequences to that, but what options do you have? Work with the stuff that you can.

And second part to this, how do you know they're being mean or rude or whatever it is? What's your evidence for that? And me asking this is not meant in any way to dismiss your experience or discount your inner wisdom. Sometimes that inner wisdom isn't fully describable, but it's useful to differentiate between the facts of a situation and your perception of those facts. Because we are good at convincing ourselves of things on very flimsy evidence. This is just what our minds do.

We just add narrative to someone else's behaviour, whether that's something that they're doing or something that they're not doing, we can

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

come up with a whole thing. And decades later, you find out that was never the case at all. So just look at both ends of things.

Okay, moving on to question five, how to survive social obligations. Well, what do you need? Do you need to ensure that you're not rushing through the afternoon and then arriving at a social event all really stressed, having rushed throughout your day, just necking back a glass of wine because you're stressed and/or nervous. And then it hits you quickly because you didn't have a chance to eat because you were rushing. Do you see where I'm going with this? So, is it about needing some food in your belly? Is it about not rushing?

Is it about going for a specific amount of time and then exiting? Do you need to ease your way into the environment? Do you need to figure out an outfit that you're happy with in advance so that you don't have to figure that out right before? There's a reason why I'm focusing on these environmental things, by the way. Environment matters. And all these are ways that you can make yourself more physically comfortable, which has a positive impact on your capacity to deal with the other stuff that's going on around you and that isn't necessarily within your control.

So, I can give you a great example of this. Our family tradition has become that we have a big dinner on Christmas Eve where several other families come over with their kids, everyone brings a dish, and I love it. I have a great time. I love all the people coming. It's just lovely. And it is challenging for me. I struggle with people coming into our home. That's quite an autistic thing.

And there's usually 10 adults and six boys under the age of 12. So that means multiple conversations happening at the same time, plus the kids charging around, yelling, laughing, having a great time, bickering, and plus all the food that Paul and I make between us. So as much as I love it, I still need a protocol. So, here's my protocol. This is what works for me. By the way, I usually, I don't think I'm going to do it this year.

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

But I usually cook this really delicious Persian vegetable tart. It's delicious. So, I'm going to put the link and the recipe in the show notes, as well as something I'm definitely doing this year. I did it last year, was this roasted Brussels sprouts and fennel salad. It was amazing with a tahini dressing. I think it was. I will definitely put those in the show notes for you. So, part of my protocol, bearing that in mind is that I have learnt that if I can do all the chopping and prep in the morning or the evening beforehand, then I'm not having to worry about everything that needs to get into the oven because we have a tiny oven.

Oh my gosh, next year is going to be the year that we get rid of our oven and get a proper oven. It is literally the same oven that I grew up with on a council estate. Those of you in the UK might know what these ovens look like in the kind of 80s and 90s that are tiny. You have to squat down to use the grill, tiny oven. Anyway, we've been able to do wonderful things with it. And this Christmas will be the same and hopefully the last. So, if there's lots to go in the oven, then any prep I can do the night before or making sauces and accompaniments, then that's helpful.

When people start arriving, I busy myself in the kitchen, even if there isn't anything to do. I will do the dishes or just find things to organise and sort out because that way I can mentally adjust to people being in our home. I can get used to the noise and the shift in energy without being part of it.

And our friends always offer to help, and they come into the kitchen and want to help, but they all understand now that I do not want help under any circumstance. They are welcome to offer if they feel they have to for social nicety's sake. But they really respect my no, and they all get that it is really best if they stay out of the kitchen and then I can emerge when I'm ready. I also have to do the dishes after. The process of dishwashing is really soothing for me. Again, I do not want your help. Thank you very much for offering.

I almost elbowed a friend this year who kind of went to do something that kind of mucked up my process that I like to follow. And it's just really

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

regulating for me, and it also means I have a way to step away from all the activity and the noise and just take some time to reset.

I also like to start off the evening wearing something that's a bit dressier than I usually do. But once we've had dinner and dessert and we're just sitting around chatting, I go upstairs, I get into my PJs and my dressing gown, and I come back down and hang out with everyone. It is not a cue to get people to leave. It is solely about my sensory needs and me taking care of myself so, I feel really good about doing that. And you can apply this kind of stuff whether you're autistic or not.

It also applies to social situations that you're looking forward to and enjoy. This isn't always about surviving something that you're dreading, although it certainly applies there as well.

Okay, last question and this one is a good one to finish on. How to not feel guilty about wanting a family free Christmas? Well, here's the thing, deciding to do your own thing at Christmas is a big deal. It is probably really significant for you and when we do something like this, there's often an underlying expectation that because it's so momentous and represents such a shift for you that you're going to feel fantastic. Sorry to say that's not actually how it works as is the case with this question where you've made a choice, you've taken action, you feel really great about that. Good for you.

But guilt has also come along for the ride. So, what is your guilt about? What thoughts do you have about doing this, about having a family free Christmas that are making you feel guilty? Generally speaking, feeling guilty is wrapped up in societal expectations, familial duties, a sense of obligation, and often our own internalised beliefs about what the holidays should look like. And we can get into being a good girl, being a good daughter, being a loyal friend, blah, blah, blah.

This guilt isn't inherently yours, but perhaps something that you've inherited from societal or familial norms and by the way, your mum might feel sad that you're not coming. Your dad might be angry, and they're entitled to feel that way. They get to have their feelings the same as you do. They could

## **Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence**

also feel absolutely delighted at the idea of you not coming. It might be a great relief. They might have other plans. Their thoughts and feelings, they get to have them, but they are their responsibility, just as yours are your responsibility. We don't have to put it on other people and blame them.

So, if you're worried about how your family might react, just address it head on. Honesty can really pave the way for understanding. You just might say something like, "I really love our time together, I really value it, but I've realised I need some time to myself this holiday. I want to recharge. I want to enjoy the season in my own way." There's all sorts of ways of communicating it. You might explain that while you love your family, this is just something you need to do for yourself.

It doesn't have to be overcomplicated. You don't have to over-explain. You don't have to make it a thing that it isn't even in the first place. And as you're coached in this situation, I would also love to ask you why you want a family-free Christmas and just to check in on your reasons. So, I have some clients doing this. I have some friends doing this. Maybe it gives you some peace, some space to recharge. Maybe you just don't want to be travelling all over the country or to other countries at this time of year. You want to explore the joy of doing things your own way.

Sometimes it can be about desires and what you want for yourself, but it can also be about avoiding things that feel challenging to you and it's useful to be clear about that with yourself. So, what is it that you're avoiding? And why does not seeing your family seem like the best solution to you? I'm not saying that it is, or it isn't, again, it's just good information for you to have. So, if you're in that camp, make sure you bring your answers to our coaching calls and Ask a Coach in the membership.

Now, finally, just to finish off this episode, remember we've got part two coming next week. I just want to give you a general piece of coaching for you all that I think is good to receive at this point in December so that you can look ahead to the rest of the month and what's coming up. When you consider this holiday season, I want you to fast forward, go through it, and

## Ep #205: Navigating Holiday Stress with Confidence

then be on the other side of it. What would your future self be grateful to you for putting in place now?

So that future version of yourself, what words of wisdom do they have for you now? You, come January, what are you going to be grateful to yourself for arranging here in December? That could be arranging something, rearranging something, cancelling something, putting in a protocol that is going to help support you and maybe support others if that feels appropriate.

How could I arrange some things for Nelson now so that he has enough opportunities to see his mates, move his body enough, etc? That's going to make a difference to his holiday season, but it's also going to have a huge impact on mine and our family's. So just think, what does your future self want to take care of now or want you to take care of now so that this holiday season can be less stressful and more enjoyable?

Okay, folks, that's it for part one. This has been an absolute blast. I'm looking forward to doing part two. Have a great holiday season.

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