

Ep #206: Rewriting the Holiday Script: Boundaries, Balance, and Joy



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is episode 206 and I am back with part two of our holiday season episodes. If you haven't listened to part one, make sure that you do because these episodes are where I'm offering coaching on the common themes that come up at this time of year. So let's get going with part two.

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*.

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening. Wherever you are listening from, it is wonderful to have you here. Last week's episode was a juicy one. It was all about family and social obligations, dealing with the other humans in your life over the holiday season. And in today's episode, I'll be covering topics like feeling lonely, how to switch off from work and be present, how to not end up spending excessive amounts of gifts and discovering what you actually enjoy at this time of year versus doing what's expected. So, let's dive right in with question one.

Question one is, how do I not try to fix a family member's mood? Oh, how I resonate with this one. I am very accomplished in the field of managing other people's moods and fixing them. And I'm pleased to say that I've come a long way. I can do a whole episode about this actually. So, I'm going to add this to my list of podcasts to record in the future. Also, this has been a big thing for me, and I think a big thing for the majority of my clients, so it probably resonates with many of you listening as well.

So, for this, start with understanding and appreciating why you have done this in the past and up until now. It's likely been a form of protection and may well have been a really wise move on your part to do so. So, acknowledging this is one way to just negate any self-criticism you have for doing this. So that way, we're just immediately reducing any judgment that you have towards yourself for doing this. But now you're deciding to do things differently and that also needs to be celebrated even before you actually do anything.

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You could have gone your whole life continuing in the same pattern, continuing to do this with all the consequences that it has but you're not and that is a big deal. So, we want to make sure that we really give ourselves props for deciding to do that.

Now, for family members in bad moods, I actually coached someone on this the other day in the membership and I pointed out to my client that it's not their job to manage their moods. And it was just so beautiful to watch them receive that simple sentence and to see the impact of being told that. Because so many of us are raised like it is our job to do that, and it has been our job, this is our role. This is our part in the theatre show that is family at Christmas and probably the rest of the year as well, but now you're stepping out of an old role and into a new one.

So, imagine that every holiday season in your past has been like a play in which you've been cast in a role that you didn't actually audition for. That they were just like, saw you around the theatre and were like, "oh, you're perfect for this role." And you're like, "Who me? What? What am I doing? Oh, okay." And then you just get going with it and then you've done it every year ever since.

You've been the mood manager, the peacekeeper, the cheer spreader, whatever it is. Always just micromanaging behind the scenes, making sure everyone else is content. But what if this year you chose a different part? What if you decide to be in the audience instead? You don't have to just pick a different active role. You can just decide to be the audience and just observe and not engage in every drama because the audience, they also have a role.

So, this shift is about reassignment. It's about deciding that you are going to enjoy the show or be there for the show at least without feeling responsible for how it unfolds. You're not the director trying to control every scene. You're not there in the role that you've been doing for years and decades. Instead, you are a discerning audience member who gets to

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react, you get to participate and you get to engage at whatever level feels appropriate to you.

When you step back like this, it allows you to see the broader picture of your family dynamics without being caught up in the minutiae of emotions and reactions. So, it is very much like watching a play and realising that you can empathise with the characters and what's going on, but their choices and moods are not yours, and they are not yours to manage. So, you can have empathy, you can appreciate and understand what's going on without becoming part of it.

And in this new role, how about really giving yourself permission to experiment with your reactions and interactions? It might be setting boundaries more clearly than you have before. It could be finding humour in the probably very predictable scripts that your family play out. It could also look like choosing which scenes you want to be part of and stepping out for a breather when the plot gets too intense.

Or you just decide, actually, this isn't for me, and decide to leave. That can be a really positive thing, and it doesn't have to be a dramatic exit either. It could actually be very straightforward and even easy. So, by viewing the holiday gatherings as a theatre production, you can remind yourself that what's going on is temporary. It may even be performative.

I mean, it is performative in that people are just in their roles that they're used to being in and they kind of have their holiday characters. But those characters don't necessarily represent all of themselves just as your role in managing moods doesn't represent all of you and it doesn't define you. So, what we're talking about here is adopting a perspective that gives you a bit of distance so that you can be part of the holidays, but in a less burdensome way.

And just remember that stepping into this new way of doing things, this new role, might feel really awkward at first and remember, stepping into this new role might feel awkward for you at first. So, give yourself some grace that

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this is just your first go at practicing and a different way of doing things. And you get to experience what's going on in a different way. Just imagine the freedom and the space that could create for you and even for everyone else that is part of this production.

Okay, question two, how to respond in an empowered and regulated way when someone leans in for a hug and you're a no. Okay, question two, and by the way, just remember, these are questions that you've all sent in to me via Instagram so, I don't have any context on what's going on. But as I said last time, I don't need it. I'm just going to offer coaching based on the sentences, the questions that you have asked me.

So, question two is, how to respond in an empowered and regulated way when someone leans in for a hug and you're a no. So, I love the idea of this being something that you do without feeling some arousal of a stress response. It's also okay if you do experience that. So yes, it'd be wonderful to not have that, I'm sure, but I'm going to say that it's actually a good thing that you do experience some what we could call dysregulation or that you have a reaction because your body is flagging up that a boundary is potentially about to be crossed.

So that kind of arousal, that activation inside yourself is a good thing. I think I understand what you mean in terms of wanting to respond in an empowered and regulated way, but I just want to make sure that we're not demonising this kind of activation that happens inside yourself because that's appropriate if you don't want to be hooked.

So, I'm going to model some examples of what you can do so that you can borrow them, try them on for size. You might come up with something else that's better in terms of an approach for you. Make adjustments to them, but I think it's sometimes useful to hear what some options are, especially if you haven't had those modelled to you by anyone else. So, you can bring in some humour. If someone went to hug me, I might say, "Hold your horses, partner," or, "Not so fast, buddy."

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So, you can bring in some humour or you could just say, “I’m much more comfortable with handshakes.” And have your hand out already because that’s going to create a bit of a physical barrier. But with both these options, you’re really just stating the facts. So, make sure that you think about it that way instead of thinking that you’re awkward or fussy or different or, I don’t know, whatever your brain comes up with. No, not that at all. You’re just not up for a hug with this person or perhaps any person and you’re just letting them know the facts. You prefer handshakes.

I like to ask people, “Are we hugging? Are we doing this?” And give them a chance, only with people that I feel that’s appropriate, and I want to. And I kind of get a bit of a sense that they might like to. So, part of this is creating space for a yes or a no. And a hug that’s being consented to is so much more enjoyable than one that you are unsure of whilst you’re doing it and maybe the other person is unsure as well. So just make your boundaries clear from the start. It’s perfectly okay to express your preferences upfront.

So, when someone moves in for a hug, you can just confidently and kindly, kind to you and kind to them, state, “I’m keeping to handshakes today. Thanks.” And if you’re worried about their reaction, remember that your comfort is just as important as theirs. And when you are clear about this boundary, you’re respecting your personal space and you’re teaching other people to do the same. That’s a wonderful thing for all of us. You can also adjust your body position to make it harder for them to hug.

So, if they’re coming directly to you as if they’re going to hug, you can just turn your body, I don’t know, 45/90 degrees, just so that you’re off kilter to where they’re approaching from. You can kind of make your body a bit bigger and put your arms out, literally kind of forming a physical barrier of some kind. It might feel very weird to do. This is why practicing these things is useful so that it feels more normal to you, but it’s okay for it to feel weird. You can also take a step back.

You can take a step forward with your hand out so it’s very clear what’s happening. That’s, I think, what I tend to do thinking about it, if I don’t want

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to hug someone is, I go forward with a handshake so that I am being clear upfront about what's okay. You can also put both hands on your hips. All of these physical adjustments just give you a bit of a barrier around you and it just makes it a bit weirder to hug. And for some people, it is enough to make them pause and change what they're doing.

But there are some people who will be completely oblivious and still go to hug you. I have had that happen. And that's where you can say something or if words fail you as that will happen too, it's happened to me, happens to all of us when we're caught off guard in the moment. Then just start prolonged, rigorous coughing. It works. When someone goes to hug you, just start coughing, a hacking cough helps here.

But however, you want to approach things, just practice them just so that they're a bit more normal to you and you have a bit of muscle memory of saying the words, of moving your body, of positioning your elbows before you're in the actual situation where you might deploy them. And I hope you don't have to, but I mean, I kind of hate that we need to be thinking about these things, but I guess it's part of human life and good to be talking about it at least.

Okay, next up we have a few questions that are on the theme of loneliness, which is a big theme at this time of year and also being alone because what I want to point out is that these two things are different. So, we often conflate them, but they are different. By that I mean you can be in a room full of people that you know and feel lonely. You can be in a room full of people you don't know and not feel lonely. You can be alone and feel utterly connected to other people and therefore not feel lonely and you can be alone and feel lonely. There's all the variations here.

I have several really good friends of mine that I've never met in person, and I feel incredibly connected to them, whether we're in regular contact or not. So being alone and being lonely are different and of course they can also exist together. So being alone during the holidays doesn't have to translate to loneliness. If you find yourself without company and wanting some, find

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ways to participate in community events that are happening. This is where we do see the impact of lack of community, I think it's really highlighted. But connecting with others in meaningful ways can greatly alleviate feelings of loneliness.

So now let's get on to the specific question. So, question three is about being alone because the kids are going to their dad's for a few weeks. So, I'm not quite sure exactly what this is about, it just says being alone. So, this situation might feel particularly poignant if it's the first time it's happened or if it's part of a challenging co-parenting arrangement of some kind.

Friends of mine who have separated have told me that when they're with their kids there are times when they're just desperate to be alone and have time for themselves. But then when the kids are with their other parent, they really miss them, and I imagine that's really amplified when it's for several weeks rather than a few days at a time. So how about we just make some space for that because I'm sure you don't need me to tell you that this can be an opportunity to do things that are for you. Things that are challenging to do when the kids are around and just take some time for yourself.

I mean all those things are lovely but to me that's just such a basic response is actually patronising. And as I said I'm all for you doing those things, wonderful. But this question is about how, well, my interpretation of this question is, how do you honour the depth of what you're feeling, the nuances of it, maybe the paradox of it? And then I think when you do that, when you're making space for it and you're connecting to yourself, to your feelings, to what's going on for you. Then that is actually a way that opens up connection to others whether you're with them or not as is the case with kids.

And then because you're in that state of connection, that's when you can come up with creative ideas, watching movies in sync, opening presents together, sharing daily experiences somehow. These small rituals can help

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maintain that connection. Create a space for really amazing conversations even when physically apart.

This is something that I do with Nelson most days. Occasionally we forget to do it but most days at bedtime or at dinnertime we do our high low high. Where we both share a high, a low and then another high with each other. And it's just great because it's a way for him to talk about things that have been wonderful for him. But it also means there's dedicated space where he can talk about things that haven't gone so well and that's really an opportunity where he kind of opens up to me about things that are going on at school or with friends.

Or even, it's, I think, a really safe space for him to talk about something that he's upset with that has to do with me because we've created that space for that kind of conversation. So, I'm sure it's not easy. I'm sure I would find it challenging but I am kind of on this side of it where I'm not in that situation, but that's kind of what I had to offer about it.

Okay, question four is about how to handle the grief and feeling alone without blood family. Yeah, the holidays can really magnify feelings of loss whether it's due to the death of a loved one, could be a parent, it could be you know your dog died this year. You could be estranged by choice or by someone else's choice. There could be geographical distance. It might be your first holiday season without a parent if they died this year or if you're not in contact with them.

If you have had fertility challenges or a miscarriage this year, then there's the grief of not having the child that you longed to have over the holidays. You might be not just geographically far apart from loved ones and blood family but also emotionally far apart. So, this is definitely when feelings of grief and disappointment and sadness and anger come up. And although that can feel crap, those feelings do have something to say and they're there for a reason. So, I think it becomes about how you accommodate them, how you make space for them.

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You could also think about creating a space to honour loved ones that you miss. That can be a powerful way to include them in your celebration somehow even in their absence. So that could look like setting a place at the dinner table. Writing a letter and putting it under a tree if you have one, sharing stories about them with friends and family, lighting a candle. There are ways to honour that you are not with them if that is what you want to do.

It could also be about how you create new traditions that honour your memories whilst also making room for new joys. And this example I'm going to give isn't specific to Christmas but very relevant, I think. So, the day that my mum was cremated was the day that I had my first horse riding lesson as an adult. It was quite a random thing to do but I just wanted to do something different, something memorable, something that was for me but that did involve a connection to my mum.

Because when we were little, my brother and I lived with her in the countryside probably when I was three to six years old, something like that, so horses were around. We lived on a cottage on a farm at one point and the hunt went past the end of our garden. The farmer's daughter had a pony, horses were around. And I was able to do a handful of pony lessons at that age. So, there's something about horses that does connect me to my mum.

And I had no idea when I signed up for that lesson that horses would become such a big part of my life and that I would end up getting my own. But the fact that it has become that, has really increased my connection to my mum since her death and it gives me a continued way to both grieve her and connect with her. So, think, it could be just you doing something that's very different and that is for you to really celebrate who you are and what you want this holiday season.

Community is really important here and the holidays do highlight lack of community. One year when I was feeling really lonely over the holidays, I joined the ramblers which is a walking association here in the UK because

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they have all sorts of group walks happening across the country. And going on those walks got me out of the flat, it got me into nature. I was moving my body. It was good for my mental health. I was meeting other people, tick, tick, tick.

Did I stay in contact with anyone I met on that day? No, I did not, but did I have a great time? Yes. And I actually went on quite a few walks over that holiday season, and it was really wonderful for me to do. And actually, it ended up leading to me signing up in the new year to do the Caledonian Challenge which doesn't run anymore but it was a 54, I think it's 54, 50 something mile walk over the West Highland way in Scotland done in 24 hours, which I then did in the June.

So yeah, two weeks I hadn't realised both days were examples of me doing something that was for me that actually led to something much bigger than it appeared when I started. And by the way that holiday season when I was doing the walks with the rambles, I was in a long-term relationship with someone, and we were living together but I felt really lonely and kind of alone even though we were living together. So that was a really positive thing for me to do.

So, think about what would feel supportive to you this holiday season. Is it time outside? Is it doing a specific activity? Is it connecting with people online? There's no right way to do this, but what would be some helpful parameters and a starting point?

Alright, question five, how to find your own joy when you feel lonely? When I think about loneliness, I consider what the antidote to it is. And for me that's belonging, it's connection and awe, feeling awe. Because all of those are feeling states which means we have influence over them through our experience of ourselves internally and externally, And we can create those feelings through the thoughts that we think just as we can create more loneliness through the thoughts that we think.

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And awe involves feeling like we are part of something greater than ourselves. When we're feeling awe, we really shift our attention away from existing as individuals. And it helps us feel more connected to others and to the world around us. It increases altruistic behaviour, as in it can result on us being more generous and cooperative. And it just boosts our mood, it feels good, and we have that sense of satisfaction.

Think about when you feel awe and that sense of connectedness. That really boosts our creative thinking, it broadens our thinking, it broadens our actions as well, the things we do. So how about taking an awe walk where you observe all the details in your neighbourhood or somewhere else and just notice how amazing life is. That's something that we can all do in some way. But also, what do you love doing? Some of you might have things that you know you love. Some of you might struggle to answer this question.

For the longest time my answer was work. My work was essentially my sole source of joy as well as Paul and Nelson. I feel I have to add that caveat in case it wasn't obvious. But my job was also my hobby because it was my special interest. So, I would love working over the holidays and not having an issue with it. Other people might have though. So, I'm going to get onto that in a moment, but what did you love doing as a kid? Is that a route to help you find your own joy at this time of year?

You can look back at past holidays or even nothing to do with holidays and just any point in the year and just identify the moments that genuinely made you feel happy and experience joy. Was it a quiet morning with a cup of coffee, playing games with friends, doing a puzzle by yourself, going through all your clothes and organizing them? It could be anything. So just go with what works for you and what truly brings you joy rather than succumbing to external and internal expectations of what you should be doing.

Question six is, how to discover what makes you truly happy at this time of year rather than just doing all the stuff. So, this is a kind of a continuation of the previous question, but to that I would add, just stop doing all the stuff

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and see what happens. Create some space for a different experience to come in. That's going to be hard if everything's just full and you are doing all the things, then there isn't the space for a new experience.

And just experiment, maybe you can take one thing out of your diary in order to create some space, maybe it's three or maybe you keep a certain number of days free, they're in a row or at different points. There's all sorts of ways that you can approach this.

So, there's that, creating some space. But also, what would you do this holiday season if there were no rules and everyone around you was fully supportive and celebrated all of your decisions about what you're going to do and not do, what would you do then? I reckon you probably already know. And if you don't know then again, just create some space and experiment and see where you go with things.

Quite a few of you also asked questions about taking time off and being present, doing the bits of work that you need or want to attend to so let's get into those questions.

Question seven is how to switch off but still work on the bits that you need to do. Be intentional about what you're doing, know why you're doing them and make your peace with it. There's no point doing the bits and bobs if you're holding it against yourself the whole time. Same if you're with your loved ones whilst doing work in your head. Just being intentional about what it is that you're doing. And a lot of this is actually about letting go of the impossible expectations that you have for yourself.

When you are thinking about switching off, and I think you can just also just decide in advance and that can be either now as you're listening to this, or it might be on the day. Then you're clear with yourself about what's happening. So rather than not think about it and not make decisions and then you're just kind of taking it day by day, that's when things can get really murky.

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But when you decide in advance, then you're clear with yourself about what's happening. And if you feel the urge to work when you said that you wouldn't, then what's that about? Are you perhaps using work to try and avoid uncomfortable emotions that come up? Would you just rather be working and that's just your personal preference? Are you avoiding situations that might be challenging for you in some way? Again, no judgment here, we've all done it. Just be clear with yourself about what you're doing and why.

I am taking three days off where I'm completely off. Then there's going to be some days where I'll be answering questions in Ask a Coach inside the membership, but I won't be doing anything beyond that. And there's also going to be some times when I'll be spending time thinking about my vision for 2025. I'm planning things out in advance and coaching myself on who I'm going to become in 2025. So that for me is how I like to work over the holidays because actually December tends to be a season or a month, rather when I like to get going with things.

And I do find it useful when I've stepped out of working inside my business to actually work on the business in some way and that's not just something I do over the holiday season. It's something that I do periodically throughout the year.

Question eight, how to enjoy the moment instead of stressing over all the other stuff. Again, it just comes back to focusing on connection and feeling a sense of space. I really believe that they are the opposite of stress. And what is the stress about the other stuff, is it about what other people could potentially think or say or do if you don't do them? And if that is the case, how could you let go of that somehow? It doesn't have to be entirely, we just want a starting point, just enough to create some mental space.

The other thing I would say here is don't rush because that will definitely shift your experience. And just keep coming back to the question of, is it more important to be in connection with yourself and others or is it more important to get things done? Because when we're rushing or in a stress

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response, that takes us out of connection. It's really important to understand that. When we're stressed, we sacrifice connection in order to protect ourselves somehow.

And by the way, there's also a way for you to get things done whilst being in connection with yourself, even if you need to do it quickly and efficiently but there's a difference between that and rushing. So, you can get things done whilst being in connection with yourself, with other people and the world around you but that won't be available to you if you are rushing and getting caught up in stress responses. And then they're just accumulating as the day and days go on.

Question nine is, how to be present. I get distracted with planning in my business during Christmas and New Years' time. Me too as I just shared. So, I do this, but I don't call it a distraction because for me it's very intentional and I just know that this is how I tend to do things at this time of year. So, my question to you is, why is this an issue? Why is planning in your business during this time of year an issue and for whom is it an issue?

Because I know that time between Christmas and New Year's is when I love to work on my business, not in my business. I like to dream big, come up with all sorts of schemes and ideas. And the last couple of years I've actually taken two days to think about the coming year and do everything that I've already mentioned. And I like to come up with goals. I really enjoy doing that. I'm very present when I do that.

And of course, that means that I'm not present to my family at that time but that doesn't have to be a problem. It might be a problem if I haven't communicated that in advance and discussed it and figured that whole thing out. But it's not a problem for me that that's what I want to do. And by that point to be honest with you, I think we're all usually wanting some space from each other and looking for other sources of connection and entertainment and enjoyment. So, if this is who you are, if this is what you want to do, then just do it and don't make it a problem.

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Finally, we have question ten which is about how to not give into the pressure of spending excessive money on gifts and this could also go for social occasions, all sorts of things. So, decide your limits in advance, know your numbers. And then once you've decided that, you are going to experience the urge to spend more, that is it. That's the coaching, decide your limits and then experience any urges to spend more, see those urges out and not spend, that's kind of it.

But beyond that we can think about what thoughts do you have about spending money on gifts, what do you make it mean about you that you do or don't spend X amount. And if you spend less, what are you worried will happen? And practically you can also just communicate openly with friends and family about gift expectations in advance. That way you kind of mitigate any potential misunderstandings, but I bet some of them will be relieved and grateful to you for initiating the conversation.

We make giving and receiving gifts so complicated and it doesn't need to be. And some people might be offended that you didn't spend enough on them. Fuck them. If someone told me that I hadn't spent enough money on them, you know what I'd say either internally or externally to them? I'd be like, "You know, I'm so glad you've told me because now I can see that our values are really different when it comes to gift giving and spending money."

And I'd also just be thinking, well, this person clearly doesn't meet my standards for a friendship or relationship. And maybe I'd express that to them too, who knows, depends on the situation. But I would be shocked if someone like this had infiltrated my list of loved ones. But if someone did take issue with what I'd spent on them, well, that is really their problem. I am not going to make it mine. It would literally be a case of, well, thanks for showing me who you are and what you care about.

And if that's what matters to you, that's what matters to you but we're in very different places here, so no thanks. You're just not for me, I'm probably not for you.

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These episodes have been so fun to do. Thank you for all your juicy questions and requests for coaching. Let me know how it all landed with you. Let me know what coaching you loved, how you're going to use it, tell me how it goes. I want to hear all of the things. That is a wrap on our handling the holidays podcast episodes. They have been so much fun to do. Enjoy your holidays. I will catch you on the other side.

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.