

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Maisie Hill

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

This is episode 241, and today I'm talking about being low-maintenance, why you were taught that this was a good thing, why it's not, and how to start wanting more, asking more, and being more. And if you're ready to take this work deeper beyond the podcast, beyond the theory, then I'm inviting you into something that I have wanted to offer you all for over a year.

On August 28th, applications will be opening for my new small group coaching program. This is not part of the membership. It's certainly complementary to it, but it is very different. It is a completely new 12-week coaching program with me, where I'll be teaching you a brand new framework. And then I'm not just going to be teaching you it, I'm going to be coaching you through it. And if this is sounding like something you're interested in, it's your next move, then make sure you're on my email list or send me a message, and I'll make sure that you have the link so that you can apply.

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*.

Hi folks. My mouth is feeling very weird. I had a tooth unexpectedly pulled out last week, and I tried recording this a few days ago, but it just, it really didn't sound right because I couldn't move my mouth properly. Now I can talk and I'm not in pain, but my mouth feels different.

So before we went on holiday to Greece, we were just away for a week, I had already had two dentist appointments for this tooth. And then we got back from holiday, I went back to the dentist, expecting them to just do the little bit of work that was left to do, which was their plan. But the dentist took a look at it and was like, "Yeah, this needs to come out."

So I've got a pretty high pain threshold. I'm pretty good at working with pain, but the sensory stuff of going to see the dentist is harder for me. So

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

the sounds, the vibrations, the bright lights, all of those things. And when I first went in for my emergency appointment, I was in a lot of pain from the tooth. It was also a Monday, and I had been around people all weekend.

So my capacity between the pain and the peopling was quite low, and I had a meltdown in the chair because of the sensory stuff. But then they tried to comfort me by touching me, which for me is just really unhelpful, especially when that's what's going on. Anyway, we got through it. I told them, "Please don't touch me. I know you're trying to reassure me. It's actually unhelpful."

But the dentist had actually suggested pulling the tooth out right away in that first appointment because he didn't think I'd be able to handle everything that was involved with the root canal, which that was his preferred treatment strategy. But I was like, "Don't worry, on the day I will come equipped." And when I said equipped, of course, I was meaning like internally preparing myself, but I also meant other things, which I don't think the dentist was prepared for by the look on their faces when I walked in the room. Because I had brought a podcast for me to listen to with my headphones. I'd worn sensory friendly clothes, but I'd also, I also took in my absolutely massive weighted blanket, which they were very surprised to see. But I just covered myself up with it, doubled it over because it's huge, and just had all this weight on top of me, which really helped.

And this is a very practical example of exactly what I want to talk about today, which is how to stop being low-maintenance and actually tend to your needs. Because I know some of you are convinced that you're easygoing and you pride yourself on being low-maintenance. You don't make a fuss, you just go with the flow, and you say all good, even when it's very much not all good.

And on the surface, it might look like confidence or flexibility or maturity. And other people might perceive it that way, and you might tell yourself that it is. But is it? I want you to really question that. Because if you're proud of how little you need from other people, then get ready for a loving wake-up call, okay? Because a lot of what gets called like "chill" is actually emotional

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

shutdown, because although there will be things in your life that you're genuinely not fussed about, what I'm talking about are the times when you are bothered, but then you suppress that.

So this episode is a gentle and a bit of a spicy intervention for the parts of you that confuse numbness with peace. Because it's essentially like an elegant emotional shutdown. And I see it a fair bit. It's something I've worked through myself, so I get it.

And if this is the kind of thing that you struggle with, please make sure that you're on my email list because there's going to be a new way to work with me very soon. The applications will open on August 28th. So let's talk about what I have observed in myself in the past and what I often see in my clients.

They don't want to be a burden or to take up space with their needs or their wants, their desires, and their preferences. So they've learned that it's safer to keep things easy and manageable, or just like make yourself really smooth for everyone else. Save everyone else the bother. Keep yourself safe by not ruffling their feathers and upsetting them. So in doing that, you stop naming what you want and you make your needs so tiny and quiet that they're barely noticeable.

And then we get praised for that, right, for being adaptable and easygoing. Maybe your parents or your teachers, or your manager, have said things like, "Well, at least I don't have to worry about you. I can really depend on you." And with all the adapting and contorting that you end up doing for decades, you end up in a place where you believe that asking for something would be awkward or too much or put other people out.

So the idea of saying, "Actually, here's what I'd like to happen," you have this idea that in doing that, you'd be putting other people out or enforcing your will on someone, and that would make you a mean, bad person. And you might even tell yourself that you're fine with being low-maintenance and try to convince yourself that you are at peace and that this is all good.

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

But if we look under the surface at what's going on, we would see a lot more and that actually it's not all that chill or peaceful. It's just that there's an absence of expression, a stagnation.

So here are some traits of how this can show up. It can show up in you not asking for much, saying that you're good, even though you're not, and downplaying your preferences, your emotions, and your needs. Sometimes it can look like finding big expressions of emotion from other people uncomfortable or a lot for you to deal with. And it's not that you should be able to withstand someone behaving poorly towards you, but is it really uncomfortable for you when other people express their feelings anywhere in your vicinity?

You might feel proud of being unfazed or unbothered because being the stable one has felt safer and more acceptable, or you've received explicit praise for being that way. But at the same time, you're resentful, but it's the kind of resentment that you might not be able to see why you're feeling that way without exploring it, or it's just very pervasive. And maybe you spend quite a lot of time, ask me how I know, secretly wishing that someone would just get you and understand what you're thinking and feeling without you needing to say anything.

So, because of this, you can end up in relationships that feel very one-sided. They might be your romantic relationships, your friendships, even at work. And just generally there's this sense of repression, of silencing yourself and squashing your needs and desires down, which then means that every time you do that, which is likely to be multiple times a day, all the time you're doing that, you're reinforcing the belief that it's not okay for you to have needs and desires.

And on a bodily level, this can show up as any of the stress responses, but if fight or flight are involved, then it's possible that rather than utilise those stress responses, you'll move into functional freeze or fawn. So with functional freeze, there's a collapse and there's a shutdown, but other people might not be aware that's what's going on within you because you

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

look, quote-unquote, “normal” from the outside, and you're still kind of, you're functioning, but the freeze is still there. That's what functional freeze is.

And then with fawn, you'll make yourself palatable and agreeable and just non-threatening in order to survive a situation that feels threatening. And it may actually be threatening, or you're perceiving it to be threatening. So that's where you're imagining that it is when it isn't. And the example I like to give of this is seeing your boss frowning whilst they're vaguely looking in your direction, and then assuming that they are cross with you. But actually, maybe they're just trying to remember something or decide what to have for their lunch.

And this kind of behaviour is often linked to avoidant or disorganised attachment styles, in which you've learned that expressing your needs is going to result in you being rejected, misunderstood, punished, or abandoned in some way. And remember that feeling of abandonment doesn't have to mean just physically. It can be emotional too, possibly because the other person was in their own stress response. So, because of all of this, you trained yourself not to need.

This is especially true when you've been socialised as female. It will be true if you're neurodivergent and anyone raised in systems and environments where being too much is pathologised. And you were probably rewarded for being competent and calm and low drama. So you internalise that identity.

Most of the time, this version of being low-maintenance didn't start out as a conscious choice, okay? It was a protective one. Some of you learned that being low-maintenance made you more likeable and easier to be around. You're just so practised at handling it that it can feel wrong to do anything else, or like it's going to be a big deal to do anything else. You might have grown up in homes where having needs or emotions came with consequences, or just felt like too much work for the people around you. And for me, that started young.

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

So my mom was effectively a single parent, okay? She worked as a cleaner, money was tight. She would have done anything for me, by the way, and she did. But I didn't want to add to what she was already carrying. I could sense her stress. I was aware of her exhaustion. And even though I now know that it wouldn't have actually created more stress for her, at the time, I was convinced that it would. So I made it my job to need less, to not ask for much, and I kept things to myself in an attempt to make her life easier.

There are some autistic folks that don't experience a strong sense of their own emotions or other people's. I have always been the opposite. I am highly attuned. I take on the emotional world around me very quickly. And that's certainly lessened over the years as I've built the skills that I teach all my clients, but I was and still am judicious with what I watch or what I read because I feel everything that the characters are going through.

And back when I was a child, a teenager, when I was growing up, I had no idea how to manage that level of emotional absorption. It just ruled me. And when I hit my teens, and this is in the 90s, and for those of you who weren't there, this was the era of lads' mags, lads' magazines, and casual misogyny. And I got the message loud and clear that women are high maintenance, women nag, women are demanding. And if you want to be desirable, if you want a relationship to work, then you'd better not be any of those things.

And I feel, oh, so disgusted and enraged when I think about how many men have told me, "Oh, you're not like other girls. You're not like other women." Actually, I don't think any of them have said women, even when I was a grown adult and a woman. They've still always say girls. "You're not like the other girls. You're so mature and independent, and you don't nag." And this felt like the biggest praise ever to not be like other women. I mean, there's just so much to unpack with that one. I have lots of thoughts on it. And by the way, what was being described as demanding behaviour from women was just women having standards.

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

So, between what was going on in my home and then just the cultural soup of the 90s and the noughties and whatever else, I learned to be low-maintenance and to avoid inconveniencing anyone. And of course, this comes at a cost. You de-prioritise your own needs to the point where you don't acknowledge that you have them, or you're so quick to dismiss them and apologise for them. And then the relationships you end up in don't nourish you. And not necessarily because the other person is unwilling to meet you in that kind of relationship. They might be very willing and able to if you were able to allow yourself to have needs and standards and to bring them to the relationship. They just don't know what's going on. They don't know that's what you want.

And in work situations, you will end up being underestimated or over-relied on because you are the steady one, the uncomplicated one and the invisible glue that holds everyone together. And that can lead to a lot of resentment and also exhaustion, not just because of how much you end up doing for others, but also because you're suppressing parts of yourself that need to be expressed.

So this is really very costly. This is something to work on because the result of it all is that you're emotionally undernourished. People don't know the real you. They know the agreeable version of you who's polite and unbothered. And that means that there is an inherent lack of connection in your relationships. There has to be, because you're holding yourself back from connection and joy and also risk and visibility and things like creativity as well. When you're more focused on potential threats, you're not going to see opportunities right in front of you, whether they're professional ones or personal ones.

There's also another cost to all of this that I have to talk about because it's huge. You end up confusing lack of conflict with relational health. And I raise my hand up here because I have been in relationships where I took great pride in how we never argued and got on so well. I thought that constituted a good relationship. I wish I had been taught these things when

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

I was 20 because it doesn't. Okay, because I was certainly arguing in my head with these people. It's just that I wasn't saying those things out loud. There's a big difference there.

You can also end up just like waiting for other people to notice what you're not saying. And let me tell you, that expecting other people to read your mind is futile. It's not going to happen. Again, ask me how I know. If this is you, then please let me help you. I spent years and years and years waiting for people to magically see what was going on with me. And of course it never happened.

So much unnecessary pain and mental bandwidth was taken up with this kind of thing. What a waste. Wouldn't it be great to go from, "No, don't worry about me," to just saying, "Well, here's what I need." To be able to express your needs and preferences instead of just bottling them up all the time, and just being able to say what matters to you without it being a big deal, because it's not a big deal.

That doesn't mean you have to start bursting into rooms with megaphones and like declaring your needs to everyone. It can be that. I'm here for it if it does. But there's all sorts of versions of you doing this. You can start small. The so-called small things are actually often the most massive. So just start off with noticing when you override yourself. Practice naming one need, one preference. Pick one place where you've been playing the low-maintenance, checked-out role and make a micro shift of some kind. That might mean that you tell a friend what you do want to do or what you don't want to do. You could share your preference at work. You could make a request for help without apologising for it in some way.

And then, what comes next? Are you ready for this? I want you to be high maintenance. Have standards, have needs, have desires, be hard to please. You can have all of those things without being quote-unquote "selfish" and self-centred or a bitch. I actually just reject all of those negative descriptors anyway. Be fussy, be extra, be selfish, be a bitch, and

Ep #241: Why You Shouldn't Be Low-Maintenance and How to Ask for More

be self-responsible and generous and be grounded. This is a very grounded power that I'm talking about here.

If you're noticing yourself in this episode, I've got some questions that I want you to answer. It is worth taking the time to answer them. What are you pretending not to care about? Where have you been making it easier for everyone at your own expense? What do you wish someone would ask you? Where have you been mistaking silence and lack of conflict for maturity? And maybe the most confronting one, where have you made being palatable more important than honouring all the parts of yourself.

You can go back and listen to those. You can also get the questions on the transcript for this episode. There's one that we do for each episode on my website where you can get the entire transcript. I will be also posting about this on social media. I'd love to hear your answers. And get ready for August 28th when applications open for my small group coaching program. I can't wait to read them. I can't wait to invite you in. It's going to be really something. Okay, folks, I will be back next week. I will catch you then.

Hey, if you love listening to this podcast then come and check out my membership, Powerful, 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 maisiehill.com/powerful, and I'll see you in the community.