

Ep #243: The Cost of Being Everyone's "Emotional Support Tights" in Relationships



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With Your Host

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This is episode 243, and today I want to talk to you about emotional support tights. Yes, tights, like Spanx or shapewear, those compression tights that hold everything in when you've got a dress on. Are you doing the equivalent in your relationships? That is the big question. 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*.

Hi, folks. I have had an absolutely epic week. Nelson has been doing less camps this summer, and the ones that he has been doing are very short days. So for most of the summer, I haven't been spending as much time with my horse. Most days it's just a case of, am I going to do some work today, or am I going to go see Buttons? And my brother and his family have been in Margate for the last couple of weeks, and it's just been really lovely to spend time with them.

So I haven't had much horse time, but this week, I have ridden five times. I can't believe it. And I've been able to do some deep focus work as well. So I'm feeling fantastic. Last Sunday, we went and did some cross-country, which is where you ride outside and you go over jumps that have been created from fallen trees and car tires, things like that. So, unlike regular jumps, where if you knock the poles, they just fall off the jump, these jumps are solid, so you really don't want to hit them.

My instructor, Julia, had put together a group of us, and we went to this amazing place that's called Den Hill. They have several fields that form a cross-country course. There's jumps, ditches, a water jump, and it was my sixth time doing any kind of jumping with Buttons, and I'm just so proud of us. We had a lot of fun. He really enjoyed himself. I enjoyed myself, and it was also absolutely mentally and physically exhausting. So it's just been a very satisfying week.

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Now, today, I am very excited to talk to you about this idea of emotional support tights. It's one of those episodes that I wrote down the idea of a while ago and just, it kept getting bumped down the list. But now it's time to talk about it. But before I do get into it, The Herd Within is now open for applications. This is my brand new 12-week small group coaching program where we'll be working with the different roles that you take on in your relationships, at work, at home, and in positions of leadership.

It is inspired by horses, but it is not about them, okay? You don't need to like horses, you don't need any experience of them. It is very much about humans. But in every herd of horses, there are different roles that are fulfilled, and they are a match for human relationships and human groups. Some of the roles are about directing and protecting. Some horses will lead the others towards novelty and opportunity. Some notice danger before anyone else, and some really take on the role of nurturing and being the glue that holds the group together.

And as I've been saying those things, you might be thinking, oh yeah, I can recognise that in my own life, either within yourself or in the people that you know in your life, because humans aren't so different. In every group, whether it's families, your work team or friendships, the same kinds of roles show up. And inside you, those roles exist to different degrees as well.

So The Herd Within is about accessing your full internal herd, instead of just defaulting to the one or two roles that you're most familiar with, the roles that you're skilled at but probably overuse and over-rely on. You default to them.

So instead of defaulting, you'll learn to bring forward the parts of you that lead, the part that protects and drives things forward, the part that nurtures, the part of you that likes to kind of watch and take note, and a part of you that also culls things and clears them and makes way for other things. Because accessing all your power requires you to have range and to be able to move in and out of these roles within yourself.

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So if you want to stop defaulting to one role and start moving fluidly between them so that you can do things like set boundaries, handle power dynamics, and create healthier relationships, you're going to want to apply.

It's a small group. There isn't loads of spots, and I'm just trusting my intuition with who needs to be in the group and what the group is about for this round. I don't know what I'm going to do with it in the future, but I was just basically desperate to get going and to do this because I feel really called to doing this work. I know how transformational it's been for me and the aspects of it that I've brought into my one-on-one work. But now I want to have this small group, an actual herd of you, to teach you this stuff and to coach you on it.

I've been sharing the link in my emails and on Instagram, but we're going to put a link in the show notes as well. Just keep an eye out for it and get your application in. I'll be closing applications when I feel that we have the group that we're meant to have.

If you've ever felt like your job in every group, speaking of herds, whether it's at work, your family or with your friends, if you felt like your job is to smooth things over all the time and to keep everyone together as a group, then you might be wearing what I call your emotional support tights. So just like actual support tights, they smooth over the lumps and bumps, but they're tight. They're uncomfortable, and you can't keep wearing them on forever. Okay, you can't keep them on forever. They stop you from moving in the way that you really want to.

Being this way looks and can feel generous and caring, okay? And it can be, but it can also be exhausting, and it limits you and keeps real resolution from ever happening because you're just always smoothing over those lumps and bumps.

But when you're first putting them on, they don't feel so bad. In fact, they can feel kind of good. So when you put on these tights, you get a little compression. There's a sense of feeling contained, and everything feels held together. It's both subtle and supportive. And that's exactly what it

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feels like when you slip into smoothing over group dynamics. You become the invisible buffer, keeping things smooth, making sure no one else has to experience any kind of discomfort. And you notice tension before anyone else and just immediately try to patch it over.

And don't get me wrong, being able to do that is a skill, and there's lots of environments and situations where that's really called for. Okay, but this we're talking about the overuse of this, where you notice tension before anyone else and just immediately try to patch it up. So you're picking up on everyone's moods, stepping in to smooth over a conflict before it gets to that point, before it happens.

So you're acting as a shock absorber, making sure no one else feels the bumps of the situation. And you're also the glue that's holding everyone together, whether they asked for you to take on that role or not. That's important.

So you're always adjusting yourself so that no one else has to feel uncomfortable. And it feels useful, like you're helping. Sometimes it is. That can be true. But just like tights or shapewear, it doesn't stay feeling supportive. After a while, it gets restrictive.

So I love wearing the Sweaty Betty power leggings. They're like an athletic wear company here in the UK. And they're a bit compressive, which for me, it can feel like wearing a weighted blanket. It's a degree of sensory input that is actually regulating to me to begin with.

Plus, the fact that they are the only leggings that I've come across that pass the squat test, as in when I bend over or squat down, they don't go see-through. And as someone who is heavily tattooed across my ass and backs of my legs, I really appreciate that. So I work out in them and I ride in them. But there comes a point in the day where I just need to get them off. And it's the same for shapewear from what I've been told.

It starts to feel too compressive, and the awareness that everything is being held together by sheer effort, that is what it's like when you're stuck being

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everyone's emotional support tights, the person that prevents everything from spilling out into the open and who smooths over things so that bigger issues don't arise. And then when you finally peel those support tights off, oh my god, the relief, the relaxation and the release of your body that reminds you, oh, this is what freedom feels like.

That's what happens when you stop being everyone's emotional support tights, when you stop holding the group together at the expense of yourself and also potentially at the expense of everyone else as well. Because the assumption here is that those lumps and bumps are bad. And actually, lumps and bumps are just the stuff of life. Okay, conversations, relationships, groups, we need them. They're how things shift. They're how we deepen relationships. They're how we go through rifts and repairs.

So, although smoothing everything over can feel like progression, and the nuance in this is that, of course, it is if you're used to more reactionary and volatile conversations. Okay, that is progression. But the pendulum can swing too far the other way, so that you end up in suppression. And what's needed is that middle ground of expression.

But that takes something that can feel very uncomfortable to begin with, and that's trusting that it's safe to let the lumps and bumps show, that the conversations you're having, the tension, that those relationships can survive without you smoothing over every little point of tension or conflict.

And in case you need to hear this, yes, there will have been times when you were asked directly or indirectly to play this part, maybe as a kid, maybe in your class at school. Maybe your friend has asked you to come along to things and act in this way to kind of smooth things over, so that it goes better.

But most of the time, nobody has handed you this job description and signed you up for it. No one's sent you a letter saying, congrats, you are in charge of making sure no one has an awkward moment at the dinner table. You just appointed yourself because tension feels dangerous in your body,

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and that disagreement between you and others or between other people is risky.

So that's when awkward silences can feel unbearable to you. So you just start filling in the blanks in the conversation and trying to manage everyone in order for you to feel okay. Let's be very clear about that. It's not for them. It's for you, most of the time. You think that you're rescuing everyone else from discomfort, but really you're rescuing yourself, because the second that you stop doing this, you have to then sit with the anxiety or the dread that's in your stomach. And you're going to have to confront your fears that people will leave, i.e., leave you, or they will implode or turn on each other or turn on you. And those things are possible. They might happen.

But I want you to consider why that might be the best thing that could happen. Okay, let's start offering other ideas to your mind so that rather than the thing you fear remaining this big, ominous, awful thing, start considering how the thing you fear could be beneficial to you and to other people.

Of course, we're not talking about violent, harmful things here, okay? We're just talking about people voicing their opinions, confronting issues, actually having conversations, because what you're likely to discover is that most of the time, the big scary thing isn't what happens. It's not as bad as it initially feels that it will be.

Because remember that the job of stress responses is to pick up on potential threats, and that means that there are plenty of times where you think there's a threat, but there actually isn't. So the tension that you're trying to smooth over isn't always real. It doesn't always exist.

If you're someone who is able to pick up on the subtleties of body language and facial expression and tone of voice and you're really good at reading the room, you'll be accurate with your read of the room some of the time, but not all of the time, because sometimes you're projecting or misinterpreting or making your own assumptions or turning things into a bigger deal than they actually are.

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And this is where over-responsibility also comes into play because the moods that you're managing aren't yours to manage in the first place. And sometimes other people are actually fine with whatever's happening. But because it's a bit of an edge for you, you make a move to fix it. And in doing that, you prevent anything real from surfacing so that it can be dealt with. And that's the deeper cost of being the emotional support tights. Nothing gets resolved.

Because when everything's being micromanaged, and I want you to see it as that, it is micromanagement, the conflict never clears. It's always being covered up. So this is where overly peacekeeping prevents resolution, and it's exhausting taking on this role. So if you're not driving right now and it's safe for you to do so, I want you to just place your hands on your thighs, not in a forceful way, but just gently push against them. So just a gentle application of pressure, enough for you to get a sense of containment, like the support tights.

Now imagine sustaining that for ten minutes or an hour. Okay, the length of a conversation or a meeting. This is what you're doing the equivalent of in your conversations and meetings and dinners, and family days out. And then when you finally stop doing it and you let the shapewear go, you realise just how much pressure you've been under. And you get to experience the release that comes from letting everything come up to the surface.

So the work here isn't to make you more tolerant of compression. It's to grow your capacity to let things exist as they are, to let those lumps and bumps be visible, to be okay with conversations hitting a bit of a snag, to let people feel awkward. And when I say people, I of course mean mainly yourself. And to not swoop in to smooth things over all the time.

And that takes building a felt sense of safety within you. Not the kind that comes from managing everyone else's moods, but the kind that comes from knowing you can take care of yourself through this experience, that you can feel that edge of discomfort within you and stay in it, that you can

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let other people have their reactions and just remind yourself it's not your job to smooth things out for everyone.

And when you practice this, you will start to notice something surprising. The world doesn't fall apart. People don't implode in the way that you're worried they will. And sometimes the tension will just pass on its own without you having to do anything.

Sometimes the silence will give way to something that is refreshingly honest and really beneficial to the group, to your relationship. Sometimes the conflict will resolve because you've given it room to be aired and to breathe.

And this isn't about ditching the skill of being able to notice what's going on in a room, to be able to help people to connect and to regulate things. Those skills are really valuable. It is valuable to be attuned. But you're not doing yourself any favours or the group a favour by smoothing everything away. So let's just be really clear that when you do that, you're managing your own discomfort.

But think about what it would be like for you to stop being everyone's emotional support tights. Just consider that. Think about the places where this shows up and think about what it would be like for you to not have to do this, to stop taking responsibility for moods that aren't yours to manage in the first place, and just building that felt sense of safety within you.

Okay, I've got some coaching questions for you to reflect on. I am loving giving these to you every week, and I've started putting them up on my Instagram as well, so that you've got them written down so that you can discuss them in the comments. Let me know your answers to them. And of course, if you're in the membership, if you're inside Powerful, then you can bring these topics to get coached on.

Okay, question number one. Where do you slip into your emotional support tights? What lumps and bumps are you afraid of? Where might you be protecting yourself rather than helping others? And what would it be like to

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let a conversation get a bit bumpy? And that's actually your mission this week if you choose to accept it. Let one conversation get a bit bumpy. Because this is a skill, and it is one you can start practising today. It will change how you show up in your relationships, your work, your leadership, everything.

This is something that when you've been socialised as female, we seem to just take on this role. I'm struggling to think of a client who doesn't do this in at least one aspect of their life. And this is exactly the kind of work that we're going to be doing in The Herd Within, taking off the support tights, reclaiming your full range, stepping into other roles, and learning how to show up without smoothing yourself and everyone else into exhaustion. Applications are open now. I cannot wait to read yours.

That is it for this week, folks. I will catch you next time. Have a good one.

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