

Ep #291: Embracing Tough Days with a Hard Day Protocol



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is episode 291, Embracing Your Tough Days. So, let's do this.

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*.

Alright, folks, welcome back to the podcast. It's taken me a while to be able to record this episode this particular week because I came back from our holiday in Sicily and lost the ability to talk and this happens to me once in a while. It hasn't happened in a while; I think it was almost a year ago.

But it's basically my version of what's known as an autistic shutdown. I have spoken about these before on the podcast, but autistic folks can have meltdowns and shutdowns. And a meltdown is an activated nervous system state. It's known as sympathetic state where you go into fight or flight mode. And of course folks who aren't autistic also experience these reflective nervous system states because we're all born with the ability to have them and they're what keep us alive so they're not bad. They're very helpful.

And a shutdown is dorsal vagal. This is polyvagal nervous system theory. So a shutdown is dorsal vagal aka collapse and withdraw, and disconnect, and literally shutting down. And sometimes I get flack for talking about this this way from other autistic people who follow me on Instagram. But when you understand the nervous system like this it's really obvious that that's what autistic meltdowns and shutdowns are. And it's really important and I think really helpful to understand that all humans whether you're neurodiverse or not, experience these different states.

They're not unique to those who are neurodiverse though of course the reasons why we have them, our experience of them, and how long we have them for and I'm sure other things as well, those things are likely to be different. But the way I see it is that that they are all flavours of the same thing. And me losing the ability to talk, it's nothing to do with being ill or a

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problem with my vocal cords or anything like that, it's simply me going on energy conservation mode. It's highly protective. That's how I choose to see it.

It used to freak me out, frustrate me, confuse me, all of these things but now I'm like, "I've just done way too much human-ing, being away with my family for 10 days and I need to be alone and there be zero expectation that I reply to anyone about anything." And now that I've done that this week now I'm able to talk, no problem, I'm back. So I've been coming back online as the week's gone on. That's my nervous system I mean, not the internet. So I've been coming back online in myself.

And now I'm ready to deliver this episode to you and I know it's going to be one of the most impactful episodes I ever record. And it's actually very related to my experience this week of having a hard time because today I'm going to be telling you about hard day protocols, what they are, why they're so important, and how to come up with one for yourself.

So you're getting a little bit of what we do inside the membership here today because I really want you to have this. I'm just so passionate about this. I know it's something that has the potential to change all of your lives and make your shit days infinitely more doable. Because this is something that I came up with when I was helping my clients who were experiencing mood changes, typically in relation to their cycle, but not always. Some of them had chronic health issues. Some were neurodiverse. So many reasons, parents with young kids, older kids. It's just so applicable for everyone.

But when I was working with my clients at this particular time in my career, it was really obvious to me that what we typically refer to as self-care wasn't available to them when they were having a hard day. And that might ring true for you as well. I'm sure you have experiences of having a hard time and all the things that we're told are good for us and that would help things. We just don't necessarily have the capacity to do them when we are feeling that way. And of course, that makes so much sense.

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It's not the easiest option when you're feeling like crap. And my clients were really experiencing so much shame and self-loathing because of this. And I knew that was what we had to stop. If we could just introduce a circuit breaker to stop that shame spiral of doom, and the self-criticism, and the judgement, then that's the thing that would make a difference. And that's how the hard day protocol was born. So let's get into what it is. So are you ready for this? It's so simple.

A hard day protocol is simply an action plan that you implement when you're having a hard day. But this part is really important so please hear me when I say this, it is not a list of self-care activities. It is not a list of some bullshit, perfect list of what you should do to feel better.

Sometimes my clients will come up with hard day protocols and they will share them in the community. And they'll include things like cooking a nutritious homemade meal, processing their emotions, self-coaching, breathwork, moving their bodies in ways that regulate their nervous system and shift how they're feeling. Taking supplements and all amazing things like that because they sound amazing. That's definitely a list of things that I can get behind and that I might actively teach my clients to do some of these things, plenty of them in actual fact.

So yes, yes, yes to all of it. But this is not a hard day protocol. And I don't want you to confuse the two. The list that I've just shared of amazing things is what I would describe as a self-care protocol. I really don't like that as a name, the whole self-care, I'm like okay. But we're just going to roll with it for the purposes of this conversation so that we can differentiate between the two. So a list of things like yoga, and self-coaching, going for a walk, they all belong on a self-care protocol. For 99% of you they don't belong on a hard day protocol.

And this is why, okay. A hard day protocol must only consist of things that you already do when you feel like shit. It's not a perfect self-care routine that's Instagram worthy. It's a list of things that you already do when you feel like crap. So here are some examples. Snapping at your partner,

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eating a packet of biscuits, lying in bed, watching six hours of Netflix, giving your kids unlimited access to screens, ordering takeaway. These are things that belong on your hard day protocol, cooking a nutritious meal.

Doing yoga, concocting a blend of aromatherapy oils, meditating, these things don't belong on a hard day protocol unless you genuinely already do them when you feel like shit. Because the whole purpose of a hard day protocol is to reduce any judgement, criticism, and shame that you experience in addition to already feeling like crap. Because there's feeling like crap and then adding to that with all your self-judgement about yourself when you're feeling this way.

So we want to reduce the latter as much as we can and that's why we make the behaviours that you are likely to judge yourself for, the actual plan. That way when you raid the freezer for ice-cream or you argue with your sister, you can just say to yourself, "Oh, well, that was actually my plan for today." If you're lying in bed watching Netflix all day, it's not a problem, that's also part of the plan which means that you're doing everything exactly as you're meant to, no judgement necessary.

A hard day is already hard enough without you berating yourself on top of it. So this is all about easing up on yourself because we're very quick to assign moral value to our behaviour. We do this anyway but particularly when we're already feeling like shit. And a hard day protocol is all about accepting where you are and loving yourself through it, having self-compassion, letting yourself be in it. And then from there that's when we can look at self-care and doing things like thought work, and nervous system regulation, and movement, and all of those things.

But a hard day protocol is what you already do when you feel like shit. A hard day protocol is so easy, and it will make the biggest difference. So please, please, please if you do one thing today let it be this. Just write down your hard day protocol and use it whenever you're having a tough day, whatever the reason for it is. You might not even know the reason, you're just having a tough day. Implement your hard day protocol because

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you're already doing it anyway, but this is just all about reducing the judgement for those things.

So I activated my hard day protocol this week and I'm going to share it with you in a moment along with some examples that I've pulled from my clients in the community but they're anonymous, I won't be sharing any names. So here is mine. Offload parenting to Paul or arrange for Nelson to play with a friend. Be irritated with Paul and Nelson. Stop talking to people. Lie in bed all day. Scroll on my phone. Watch Gray's Anatomy for hours and cry lots. Eat all the biscuits. Drink coke. Snack instead of eating meals. Don't eat with my family.

Eat dinner in bed or maybe even skip it. Don't make eye contact with anyone. Cancel or postpone work calls and meetings. Avoid people. Open the curtains. Be in the garden but don't look above waist level in case our lovely neighbours are out, and they want to say hi. They really are lovely. Now, for some people those last couple of things might actually belong on a self-care protocol rather than a hard day one like going outside, opening the curtains etc. Your hard day protocol might be not open the curtains.

But for me being in the light, that's easy and it's essential because I get light thirsty. So I know that even on the hardest of days I'm going to do that, so that goes on my list but that doesn't necessarily mean that it would go on yours. And by the way, with most of the self-care stuff, it's not that you won't do them. You might but it's not the plan. You want to consider these things as bonuses. If you can do them, great, amazing, so good but if you don't do them that's okay because that wasn't the plan. They're not on your hard day protocol. That's not what we're activating here.

So just remember that this is all about reducing shame, reducing self-judgement and self-criticism. That is the goal. The goal isn't to feel better though it's likely that by doing this you will feel better in some way. That's the feedback that I get, that's my experience of this.

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Okay, I'm going to read out some anonymous examples of hard day protocols so that we can bring this to life and give you some ideas for your own. Some of these really crack me up because they're just so good and the things that are listed, I just get so much. So I may laugh as I read some of them out, but I hope you'll know that I'm not laughing at anyone. I'm really kind of just laughing at myself really and the times in my life where I have done this.

Okay, so this first one is shouting no and fuck off repeatedly to myself whilst driving. Oh my gosh, I have done this. Ate a flapjack and coffee mid-morning, I don't snack usually. Wore my sunglasses and greeted no strangers on my walk. Sat by the sea, looked at photos of my dog, had a nap, walked barefoot in the sand, cried, and asked for hugs. So good.

Alright, this next one, eating ice-cream, watching Netflix in bed with a cosy blanket and the air conditioning on, patting my dog, crying, not talking about, or thinking about how to change, improve or fix my life. That one is key. I love that one. Letting my daughter watch lots of TV downstairs, not doing any work, including checking emails. And this person also commented, this worked great, by the way. I did not experience the guilt or shame that I usually do. And that's the feedback that I always get for this. This is why I'm so excited to share it all with you today.

Alright, next one. Get pissed off with the dog. Oh, I just get this so much. We don't have any pets. I have had pets in the past. I'm actually really allergic to animals now, but I get this. And I have a friend with a cat who gets very pissed off with her cat when she's having a hard day, so I get this so much.

Alright, not one to cook. Do the bare minimum at work. Love that one. Scroll on my phone and get angry and despair about the state of the world. Avoid housework, not shower, or get dressed, drink coffee and alcohol. Keep telling myself I don't care about anything and what's the point, and I look rubbish in everything, and I have no friends. Lie on the sofa in a hole.

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Alright, final example. Call in sick, and ignore or push back on any work requests that might come in. All of this is becoming easier the more I do it, as I am fully aware my bosses will never encourage me to take a sick day if I'm unwell. So I've got to take them for myself. Yes. Congratulations on that to this person.

Okay, ordering from a restaurant instead of making food, or ordering snacks so I don't have to go out to get feel-good food. Eating whatever I want and not worrying about how it might affect my cycle. Yes, so good. Lazing in front of the TV, I love this next one, being moany about life and feeling sorry for myself. Genius. Making it clear to my partner that I feel crappy and I'm wallowing in self-pity. Yes. Avoid housework even if it's bothering me that things need doing. Avoid people by not going outside.

If friends message, let them know I'm having a rubbish day and absorb the sympathy that they send. These are such good examples, I love them all. And I hope that's given you a nice, well-rounded view of what kind of things could go on a hard day protocol. But again I just want to remind you, a hard day protocol are the things that you do already when you are having a rubbish day. And we're just going to turn them into the plan for when you're having a hard day because you're already doing them.

So now we're just going to make them the plan so that you don't judge yourself for doing them. And then I'm trying to think, have I heard of a time where this hasn't worked? I haven't had that feedback yet, but this is just going to make those hard days so much easier. And even if we can reduce that by 10%, even 1%, it gives us a way in. And that's what we want, we want a way in, and we want to stop the doom spiral that happens on those days. Okay, so that's a hard day protocol. I cannot wait to hear from you all what you are putting on your hard day protocol so let me know. Alright folks. Catch you next time.

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