

Low-Grade Annoyances In Marriage



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Natalie Bacon

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Welcome to Mom On Purpose, where it's all about helping moms overcome challenges and live their best lives. My hope is by being here, you are more inspired to become the mom you are made to be. I'm Natalie, your host, a wife, boy, mom, dog mama, Chicagoan, and former lawyer turned professionally certified coach. If you're here to grow, I can help. Let's go.

Hello, my beautiful friends. Welcome to the podcast. I'm so happy to be here with you today. Oh my goodness. In my personal life I have been using these tools so much. We had a season of sick kiddos again, and then found out that baby Jack has some allergies to foods that we were not expecting and had to navigate the kind of acute health concerns of having a severe allergic reaction and then also thinking about long term and care for him and just everything that comes with finding something out in terms of health that you don't expect.

And I say it in the membership all the time, and I'll say it here, there is not a day that goes by that I don't use these tools. Like I cannot imagine going through what we've been through recently without the tools I use. I know for myself that, but for these tools, I would have been catastrophizing. I would have been spinning in a lot of worry. I would have been very, very anxious and freaking out, and it would've taken something that yes is a challenge, and yes is something that I'm thinking about and paying attention to and you know, will be hard potentially, and it would've made it a thousand times worse. And so it's not that these tools remove all of challenges from life. I wish that they were that powerful, but of course that's just not how life goes. That's not how it's supposed to be.

It's not that they remove the challenges, it's that you show up so much more empowered through the challenges. So instead of spiraling, instead of feeling frazzled and frantic, instead of feeling anxious, instead of worrying and then also catastrophizing and making it this big thing about his life, I'm able to name specifically what the problem is. I'm able to work through it so that I'm not fueled by anxiety or worry and I'm still able to support him and myself and work through it in like a really productive,

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connected, confident, and certain way. And I think that when we find out about a diagnosis or something that we weren't expecting with respect to health, part of the anxiety is that unknown element that creates so much uncertainty for us. And when the brain experiences uncertainty, it does not like it. And so for me, being able to create the internal certainty and not freak out about the external unknowns has been so helpful.

Oh my goodness. And it's taken something that is going to be a challenge and is a challenge for both Jack and our family and made it so much more manageable just from being able to manage my mind around it. And so I said it at the beginning, I'm going to say it right now I keep saying it, there really isn't a day and certainly not a season that goes by that I don't use these tools. If you do not manage your mind, life is so much harder. Oh my goodness, it's so much harder. And I think a health diagnosis or something along those lines where it's a circumstance that you didn't choose and you wouldn't choose for yourself or maybe for a loved one is a perfect example of how these tools can have a profound impact on your life. Because I'm not spiraling, I'm not freaking out about worry.

There's like a little bit of low grade worry and a little bit of low grade anxiety, but so much more manageable because I'm able to manage my mind at the highest level because I'm choosing my thoughts intentionally. Okay, so of course we are not here to talk about that today, but I just thought I would let you in on what's going on in my life. And of course, make sure you're on my email list, momonpurpose.com/subscribe as well as following along on Instagram at [mom.onpurpose](https://www.instagram.com/mom.onpurpose) because I do include life updates there as well. Today I thought it would be awesome and so fun to talk about low grade annoyances in marriage. The reason that I want to talk about this topic with you is because of how we often don't even see these low grade annoyances as a huge problem. There was a question that was written into me inside the Mom On Purpose Membership in the Ask a Coach forum that asked me to talk about one of the low grade annoyances.

Of course she didn't phrase it that way, but that's what it was that she was experiencing in her marriage. And then another question came in about

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something else that was similar, and I was just thinking about how kind pervasive this is in really great marriages and so much so that often we don't think it's a big problem until it turns into a big problem. And so I want to talk with you about the question that came in specifically and then how to think about low grade annoyances, what they are, the problem that I see with respect to how we try to solve them, and then what to do instead. So I got a question from a member inside the membership that perfectly sums up what we were talking about today. The message said this "I love my husband, but I get so irritated at the little things like leaving dishes in the sink or ignoring my text during the day. I try to talk to him about it nicely, but he doesn't really listen. Then I get annoyed all over again. I feel petty for even caring, but these things build up. What do I do?"

This is so common, especially I think for high achieving women who are used to things being a certain way, like having high standards, which is something I'm a huge fan of and have in my own life, we then can project that onto other people in our relationships. And I like to think of like productivity in relationships as sort of being opposites. Like it requires a different type of energy for you to connect in your relationships than it does in producing something and getting things done. And when you carry over that energy into your marriage, it has the impact of disconnection because a relationship isn't something that you do, right?

It's, it's someone who you are with. You are being with someone. So you managing the home, the kids work, you know a million other things you're constantly thinking about right now and about the next 10 steps. I think that when we think about our spouse as part of the management, the household management, we create more work for ourselves and we create disconnection. And that's where that frustration creeps in. So here's the cycle that I think most women are in and just don't even realize. And I am not speaking from my ivory tower here. I for sure have been guilty of this and these tools have been so helpful for me. So the pattern is you notice something your husband does, you know or doesn't do, and then you feel frustrated and then you think that that frustration is because he did or didn't do the thing.

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So you think the problem is him and you try to solve that problem by talking to him about it maybe gently at first, maybe not so gently, maybe passive aggressively, maybe sarcastically, whatever your kind of cup of tea of choice is, you try to get him to do it differently. He doesn't do it differently. Even if he says he's going to, regardless of how the exchange goes, ultimately the result is that it's unchanged and you continue to get frustrated or annoyed or irritated over time that compounds and fuels resentment and more disconnection and sort of like rinse and repeat. It could be anything, right? It's all based on how your brain is perceiving something as annoying. So it could be something as simple as not helping with unloading the dishwasher. It could be leaving a cup in the sink when the dishwasher is empty. It could be being on his phone while you're trying to talk with him.

It could be that when he comes in, he doesn't say hello to you and the kids making eye contact. It could be he puts his shoes somewhere you don't like. It could be literally anything, right? Like we know ourselves and what creates those annoyances based on the stories that we're telling ourselves. So it doesn't matter like what the thing is. I know some of us tend to think like, well, this really matters because X, Y, Z, but those are all thoughts. It's just your opinion about why it matters and why it's important. And I'm not to say, I'm not saying that's invalid. You can keep that if you want, but what I want you to see is what it's creating for yourself and for your marriage because you end up creating disconnection and feeling annoyed in your body. I'm just using annoyance, but it could be frustration, it could be irritation, just like this low grade buzzing negativity.

So if you really slow down and just think about something that you get annoyed with with respect to your spouse, like how does that feel like? For me, it's like, oh yeah, there's like a tinge of disconnection. There's a tinge of like tension. Maybe that's frustration. Like what is it for you? Tinge of annoyance. And by tinge I just mean like a small amount. And I think that's the, the point here that I want to make more relevant and really emphasize here is that because it's small and you know, not "a real problem", I think we don't work on it and I think we don't clean it up from a thoughts perspective, and we don't do thought work on it, and then we continue to

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feel disconnected. And it does compound into resentment. It could go even further than that. Or it could just be that your marriage has a lot more disconnection in it and you have no idea why. And it's because there are a ton of these little micro moments of low grade annoyances that you haven't explored yet.

And then, right, it's like, okay, you feel disconnected, you start pulling away maybe physically, maybe emotionally, or maybe you lean in and maybe you're more critical. You just, you know, say things like you feel unseen, you feel alone, even though you're technically in it together, however it manifests and presents to you will be specific to sort of how you prefer to respond to being disconnected. So for some of us, it creates more of a push-pull dynamic where you're leaning in more. For others of us, it's we're going to lean out more. And so notice that. Notice, okay, when you feel this low grade annoyance, how do you show up? There's no way you show up more as the wife who you want to be. There's no way you show up connected and loving and flirty and open and positive, you will show up worse. And by worse, I just mean not you as the person who you want to be in your marriage.

And it's all happening unconsciously, and I think the reason that it happened, of course, yes, it's because your brain isn't managed, right? You're not managing it in that moment. But I think it's because as women who are doers and achievers, we are in that productive energy so much, and that's awesome. But then we put that productivity hat on with respect to our spouses, and then we're scanning for what's wrong because of the brain's negativity bias. And so of course we're looking for what's wrong with our spouse and trying to "fix it." Well, guess what? Your spouse is not something to fix. He is not something to change. He is there for you to love. And I think that's by design, that is why marriage is a growth journey, just like motherhood.

So if you can just see what's actually going on, then you can own all that is yours to own, which is your thoughts and your feelings and your actions and reactions. So your thoughts always create your feelings. You think it's

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your husband annoying you and frustrating you, but it's not. Your husband has agency to think, feel, and act however he wants. And then you have agency to think, feel, and act however you want. You are on default creating frustration and annoyance based on the story that you're telling yourself. So for example, husband puts his dishes in the sink instead of putting them in the dishwasher when the dishwasher is empty and you feel annoyed when that happens, it's not because he is leaving them in the sink and not putting them in the dishwasher. It's because you have the story in your mind. The thought, my husband is doing it wrong, my husband should be putting his dishes in the dishwasher right away. That's the right way to do it.

Understanding this changes everything because if you are the one creating your annoyance and your frustration, then you can change it. Because guess what? You can't change your husband. You already know this. You've already tried. And yet you still continue to create those feelings because there's still a part of you that doesn't see how you are creating those thoughts and feelings. Now, as you know, I've talked about it on the podcast. I talk about it in my programs extensively. I'm all for you making requests. It's like, Hey honey, if it's the same to you, could you put your dishes in the dishwasher? The difference between a true request and you trying to control your husband is the end result for you. If you feel calm and connected regardless of what he does, then it's a true request. If you hang your emotions on whether he does that thing or doesn't do that thing, meaning if he doesn't put the dishes in the dishwasher, you feel frustrated, then it's not a true request.

It's you trying to control your husband and listen, if it worked, I would say have at it, but you know it doesn't work. It makes you miserable and it has a negative impact on your marriage. So let's just clean that all up. You can be whoever you want in the world. I want you to put those dishes in the dishwasher right away, but your husband gets to do that too. And so how do you want to think and how do you want to feel when husband just is who he is? I love thinking thoughts like, oh, I have no idea how my husband should be with respect to running a home. I have no idea how he should

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put his shoes in the home. I have no idea how he should lead his life. This is my husband's job to figure that out. And that means that some of my belief systems need to change. Meaning if I think the right way to do things is to put all the dishes in the dishwasher, I want to be wrong about that. I thought that was the right way, but apparently my way is not the only way. And that I think is the part that requires the most work. It's being willing to be wrong, but it's for your sake, this isn't doing the work for him. It's doing the work for you. Because feeling annoyed, feeling frustrated with your spouse does not feel great.

So instead of trying to parent your spouse, instead of trying to micromanage him, instead of trying to control him, control your thoughts and feelings, that is plenty my friends, right? It's, it's it's work. It's called work for a reason. It is work. It's not difficult, it's not challenging. We're not, you know, doing brain surgery here, but there is resistance to it because I think just because we're not taught to watch our thoughts and feelings from a young age. So for most of us, this is a new skill and it's not a new skill to try to control other people because we've, you know, seen our parents do it and teachers and family and the educators and people who we've grown up through our families and school systems, we see other people try to control other people all the time. And so that's modeled to us.

It is not modeled in the same way to watch your thoughts and pay attention to your thoughts and to change your thoughts. And so you are doing this work by yourself without examples. And that's not to discourage you or to say that this isn't possible. It's totally possible. And I have freed myself from so much frustration and annoyance and anger, and gosh, my life is so much better because I just let go of what I think I know. I'm like, oh, I thought this is how you load a dishwasher. Nope, not, not true not true at all. There are so many different ways, I have no idea how dishwashers are supposed to be loaded. And the reason that this is powerful work is because it will create so much more connection in your marriage when you let go of those thoughts. But you have to be willing to be wrong about the thoughts.

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And I'm still all for you making requests. But the difference between a request when you've cleaned up your side of the street and your thoughts and feelings is that the delivery will be from connection and love and respect. And regardless of how your spouse responds to that, you get to feel like you showed up as the wife you want to be and create more closeness in your marriage because you're coming at your spouse, you're talking to your spouse, you're approaching your spouse from a place of true respect. It's like, Hey, I love you so much and I know that my way isn't the right way and this is just something that is important to me. And if it's not important to you, I'd love to hear why, and can we talk about it? And if it's the same to you, could you do X, Y, and Z?

It's a real conversation, it's respectful. I think at the core of this is deeper work about trying to control the world. It's like we think we know what's best and that feels very safe and secure. The problem is we are just one person with our thoughts, feelings, and actions. And the same is true for our spouse and for everyone else in the world. And so how can you reconcile that? And the way that I do it, the way that has been so helpful for me is to get to a place of believing that I have no idea how other people should be. And I'm not supposed to be married to my spouse and my spouse isn't supposed to be like me, and I'm so wrong with respect to thinking that, he's supposed to do things the way I want them done. Like it would be awful and so boring to be married to myself.

And yet so much of what we are annoyed by in our minds is people doing things different from us. I did so much work on this with respect to really believing that people are supposed to do things different from me. That it continues to increase connection in my relationships, my marriage and otherwise, because I remind myself, oh yeah, they're supposed to be different. Oh yeah, they're not supposed to do things my way. Oh yeah, like my way isn't the one way, right? That's like when we center ourselves. And again, it's just like the primitive brain seeking safety and security and certainty if it knows how things should be. And that's helpful for survival when we're talking about loading the dishwasher or where the shoes go or anything else that's really small in our modern world, not helpful, creates a

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lot of disconnection. The upside to doing this work, my friend, is like just incredible.

You will feel so much lighter in your marriage. You will not feel like you are parenting your husband. You will not feel like you're micromanaging him. It does require safety and vulnerability and openness. If you are in that productivity doer energy with your spouse, you are blocking connection and true intimacy, emotional intimacy in your relationship, that feminine, that flow, that openness, she is available to you, but you have to let go of those low grade annoyances. So my friends, you think that the problem is your spouse and your spouse is creating these low grade annoyances. It's not actually the problem. The problem is the story that you're telling yourself about whatever he is or isn't doing. That story is creating a lot of disconnection for you. And again, make requests all day long. But when those requests go unanswered and your spouse doesn't change, that's when this work is really powerful because you can't control your spouse, but you can change your mind, you can change the story.

Oh, I thought that dishwashers were meant to be loaded right away, but like, where did I learn that? That's obviously just one way of doing it. Maybe dishes should go in the sink for like a really long time and then go in the dishwasher like, I don't know, someone just made up all of these rules and like you're just opening up yourself to being wrong and not even so that you have to do it differently., In this example, we're going with the dishes in the sink, but just so that you see that for someone else, it's totally fine and reasonable for them to do it differently and, and you might not even be able to get to reasonable, but I guarantee you, your spouse thinks that how they're acting is reasonable.

So reminding yourself that you are not supposed to be the one in charge of your spouse's agency and you are supposed to be the one in charge of your thoughts and feelings is so important. So often we are fixated on controlling our spouse so that we can feel better, but we don't even realize that that's why we want it. So all of this is really about awareness and seeing the actual problem for what it is, not the perceived problem that we

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can't control. Can't control your spouse. You can control what you think about your spouse. And if you zoom way out and you think about your spouse and your marriage and you think about the wife that you want to be, is she someone who gets annoyed at the little things? Like, I don't want to be that person. And I love that this work gives me the opportunity to be someone who isn't annoyed by those little things.

I have to tell you, like beyond even just my marriage, I have become someone who isn't annoyed by much. And that is not my natural disposition because again, first boy type, a high achiever having high standards, I think the natural disposition would be to be bothered by the little things and try to control and try to micromanage. And I've been there and it's not helpful at all in relationships. And I've got to so much more peace and freedom and therefore connection with myself and with other people, including my spouse and other relationships from letting it go. And really, again, it comes back to that dial of turning the dial up and down on either like productivity or relationships on doing more and you know, getting all the things done and being in more of that like masculine energy versus turning that down and just being, and connecting and being more in that feminine energy.

And so whichever lens you want to do the work through, I think for some of us, the masculine and feminine energy really resonates for others of us. We're like, yeah, no but I do think for all of us, it's probably useful to think about it in terms of there's like the productivity on the one side of the coin, and then on the other side that's like the connection and the relationship. And oftentimes the low grade annoyances are coming from the productivity. It's like we think things should be done a certain way, whether it's dishes, whether it's shoes, whether it's, you know, scrolling on your phone. It's like we want to control how things are, and that is in that sort of masculine doer energy and it creates disconnection in our relationship. So if you can turn that dial down, manage your mind intentionally, you know that in the Mom On Purpose Membership, I coach you on this.

And I also offer you specific journal prompts as well as a specific journaling course so that you can proactively do the work outside of the moment. So I

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always like to say it's 20% of the work in the moment. Meaning if you feel frustrated, process that without reacting to it. But 80% of the work, my friend, is out of the moment. You have to do the work out of the moment. And that's what I teach you how to do in the Membership so that you show up prepared, right? It's like you've gone to the gym and now you can lift up the heavy thing. It's like you've gone to the mental gym so that now when you see something that you don't naturally like, it's actually something that doesn't even bother you because you've shifted the way that you are thinking about it. It will not happen on default, and that's okay, but it very simply can be reprogrammed into the way that you think you can change your beliefs.

It just isn't something that happens automatically. So to stop feeling such low grade annoyances in your marriage to increase connection, to be more unbothered and feel more feminine, and therefore again, show up as the wife who you want to be, it requires doing the inner work for yourself. And I, I just love that because yes, it has the impact of improving your marriage, but then also you become someone who is also changed and different in the very best way. Keep on doing the work, my friends. That's what I have for you today. I'll talk with you next week. Take care.

Thank you for being here and listening. Now, head on over to momopurpose.com/coaching to learn more about the Mom On Purpose Membership, where we take all of this work to the next level.