



EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

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Maggie Reyes:

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the Marriage Life Coach podcast. I am so delighted to bring you a very special guest. She is my friend, she is my client, she is my peer Coach. She serves a lot of roles in my life, and we're going to talk about roles on the podcast. I think it's really awesome that we have a lot of roles in each other's life.

But my guest today is an amazing, amazing, brilliant Coach. Her name is Sara BybeeFisk. She helps women eliminate the people-pleasing and perfectionism that is in the way of the life you thought you'd be living by now.

The life we thought we'd be living by now, but in the way is very often perfectionist and people-pleasing. I love how she describes herself. And I'm going to ask her about this description, because it's amazing.

So she is a born again feminist, a humanitarian, a wife and a mother to her favorite humans. Although she has lots of favorite humans because I declare myself one of them. I'm just going to bold and shameless. Welcome, Sara. So first tell me about this term born again feminist.

Sara Fisk:

Thank you. I've looked forward to this for so long. So I grew up in a religious tradition, Mormon, that really had this negative view of born again Christians. And so now that I no longer practice Mormonism, I just feel like there's all these terms that are now available to me to explore and do I like born again something?





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Actually Maggie and I took... It's called The Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching with the brilliant Kara Loewentheil. I felt like born again. That was the first time I really felt that label applied to me. And I'm like, I'm a born again feminist. There are people born again Christians. I love it. Do it. Yes. All the things.

Maggie Reyes:

I love the idea of being born again. Like, refresh and renewal and just really deciding the life you want to have and committing to something, whatever it may be. Whatever your spiritual path or your values guide you. I think that's such a beautiful, beautiful thing.

And years ago in my life, I legally changed my name for anyone who's curious. So when I was born, my name was Margarita Maria Lara and I changed it to Maggie. Literally it's two syllables now. And it was that moment of being born again. Of choosing who I wanted to be in the world and deciding that's just who I wanted to be.

And it was incredibly liberating and meant so much to me. The narrative that I told myself about that decision was very empowering to me. So I love whatever is on your mind for everyone listening, where you really want to commit to something you can just be born again in this moment. You can just commit now. Right?

Sara Fisk:

Absolutely.

Maggie Reyes:





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And I think that's a beautiful tradition of Christian faith where you can just commit now. It doesn't matter what happened in the past. You can just commit now. So whatever faith or values or path that you're on, you can commit now.

Okay. So Sara is also a member of the current round of The Marriage MBA. As we record this in 2022. I always think about the people listening in the future and I'm like, hello, future people. Everyone listening in the present, hello, present people.

So she's a current member of the current round. And I asked her to tell us a little bit about, first of all, one of her favorite things we've covered so far... we haven't even gone through the whole curriculum yet... so just one of your favorite so far, and then a little bit about being in a group setting. So let's start with, what's one of your favorite things that you've learned in the program?

Sara Fisk:

It was something that you said in an offhanded, just moment of Coaching and it wasn't even Coaching me, but you asked a woman in our group, "Does this need to be a thing?" And if that's an official Maggie question, then I'd never heard it before, but it's like that.

Sometimes you just open up in a different way. And there's a question and I just really like that. And I have taken that and I have run with it because I just ask myself all the time, does this need to be a thing? And it gives me the chance to slow down and think of like, what are my reasons for this being a thing?





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Do I like those reasons? And what are my reasons for not making this a thing? And it's just been really helpful because in my mind I could tell that I was thinking, "If I don't say something, if I don't make this a thing, then it's going to happen again and again and again and again."

But actually the opposite is true. The less I make it a thing, it just evaporates much more quickly than us having to have a big discussion about the thing, the thing, the thing. And so it's just given me a space to like, stop.

Maggie Reyes:

I love that. So it's a theme I Coach on often and I ask it in a variety of different ways until it lands. And for everyone listening, we'll link in the show notes to a podcast episode called the Anger Scale, which is where I talk about thinking about upsetness of any kinds.

Like we use the word anger, but it could be annoyance or even resentment, anything like that. Where we think about it as an on-off switch, like I mad, or I'm not. Versus a dimer light, which is how mad do I want to be about this thing? Am I going to give equal madness or upsetness to the socks being on the floor to like, oh, we forgot to pay the mortgage or something. Right? Like some big... whatever's big to you in your world.

What I have found over and over again is when we learn to calibrate that, wait, this is a thing, but this is not a thing. Like what's little and what's big? What really matters? It doesn't matter all that much. That is a question for all of us to ask ourselves all the time about all the things.

I find that in my own journey... I'm in a nutrition journey and I'm learning to feed my body





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differently. I'm in that question of like, wait, this day I just came back from our vacation. And while I was on vacation, we went to this place that had like freshly made donuts and ate two donuts in one day, and I felt like such a scandalous human. I don't drink, I don't smoke. There's a lot of things that I don't do.

But I had two donuts in one day and I enjoyed every minute of it. So I feel no guilt about it at all. And also the next day I was like, well, how much do I want to make this matter? I just get up again. And today I'm going to make different choices. I love that so much.

So you mentioned that I was Coaching someone else, and then you heard me say that, which is a great segue to talk about. And I know it's something that a lot of people who are thinking of doing The Marriage MBA, or who are thinking about doing any kind of group work together might consider, how has it been for you to be in a Coaching group about such a tender topic when we're talking about the love and our hearts and our partners?

Sara Fisk:

First of all, you are a brilliant space holder. And so I feel like even when I am not the one being Coached, you're pulling everyone in with questions and notice this. And you remember from week to week what somebody brought up two weeks ago and this might apply to you.

But what I have been surprised the most about is just the tenderness with which we all hold each other's experiences. I have been in some Coaching containers where I didn't feel like I could speak up and where I felt like it was just safest to listen and learn.





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I think the surprise for me has been there's age differences, relationship style differences, engagement style differences. You have people who are like, get in there and work it out and wrestle and pull it apart. And other people who are maybe a little more hands off in terms of their relationship style.

I've learned from everyone, every single person. And sometimes I'm learning like, oh, I see that and I don't want to do that. And other times I just see qualities or something about a person that I want more of.

I love being in a container with women where we celebrate each other's wins. You're also really good at helping us celebrate the small things. I've gotten much better with myself and with my own clients as well. We're going to celebrate the very, very small, the smallest little noticings and wins.

Maggie Reyes:

That's what the big things we made of. It's so important. As Sara mentioned earlier, we were both colleagues and students together in The Advanced Certification of Feminist Coaching that we did last year.

And when we're socialized as women, there's a socialization around discounting our contributions at a societal, cultural narrative level. And when I say discounting our contributions, it's like everything that we might do at home, everything that has to do with child rearing and so many other things.





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And then at work, I've literally been in meetings... I literally will never forget, I was in a meeting with the director of HR who was a female and a CFO who was a male. We went around the table, she made a suggestion. Everyone kept going and said nothing, gave no feedback about it all.

Then the CFO said the exact same thing, and everyone was like, "Great idea. We should totally do that." I could not believe my ears. I just could not really process that happening in front of me. So the idea that we're taught in many ways to discount so many things, and then we feel like we don't do enough.

Sara Fisk:
Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:
But we're doing a thousand things, but it's not enough because we're not counting any of them. So you come into my containers, whether it's the podcast episode or whether it's The Marriage MBA or any other programs that I lead and I'm like, "Oh no, no, no. You woke up today? You get points. You made it out of bed, you made it to the call? Points. You didn't freak out something that most people would freak out about? Double, extra points, ultra points."

Sara Fisk:
Yes. What I love is that when I look at it that way, there's so much to celebrate and it just takes up way more time than looking at what I might still think is going-

Maggie Reyes:





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

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Building on your strengths and really focusing on cultivating and harnessing the things that are working as opposed to constantly troubleshooting the things that aren't. That shift in perspective can be so massively powerful.

And I've seen it happen so often that now I'm just like, "No, this is what we must do here." It's true that we want to troubleshoot and check things and all that. I always say nuance is real and we have to address it, but it's so incredibly powerful. And we usually don't spend enough time on our strengths. So I love that that has been something that has resonated for you.

Sara Fisk:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

Thank you for sharing that. So one of the things that I see in depth in The Marriage MBA is something that I have now coined Stress Cycle Awareness because I feel we're in stress cycles. We walk around this earth having natural nervous system responses and we don't even know what the heck is happening.

And very often we judge ourselves for the responses that we're having. And then we make ourselves wrong again. So it's like just being aware that this is a natural nervous system response. Nothing has gone wrong. You're just a human being human. It's okay. It's something that we really talk about in depth.

Obviously I'm very passionate about that topic and it just so happens that our guest Sara Ivy





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Fisk is one of the world's experts in Coaching on people-pleasing. And people-pleasing, we could think about it as a thing, but it's a trauma response. It's a nervous system response that helps us survive that we do naturally.

And I want to know everything that Sara can teach us and share about on a podcast episode. For everything else you can follow her on Instagram and we'll link to the show notes and all the things. So first of all, tell me why people-pleasing? When you chose to specialize in something, and I know you're super passionate about it, why did you choose to specialize in this?

Sara Fisk:

It was a hundred percent autobiographical and I was in a master Coach training program and I could not move forward because I saw myself so paralyzed by, "What does she think of me? What do they think of me? Am I a master Coach? Do you think I'm a master Coach? Do you think, do you think?"

And looking outside of me, it's almost like the pot finally boiled. It had just been heating up and heating up and heating up. And in this particular container, it was right in front of my face and I didn't know what it was. I had been trained. We are all trained to look to outside of us. I mean, if you think about us as little girls, little Maggie and little Sara, we have big people in our lives and they take care of us.

And very quickly it is our biological wiring to notice what they like by the response they give us. You clean up your toys and mom or grandma, or the caregiver, gives you a big smile and a good job. And of course that reinforces that behavior.





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

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So when I talk about people-pleasing, it's from the point of view that it is how we are all taught to get our needs met. We all learn to exchange certain types of behavior for rewards, whether it's love and connection, whether it's a hug or a kiss or a good job, or the gold star at the top of our paper. Or our name on the top of the chart in class, where everybody's scores... can you believe we used to do that? We used to literally write everybody's scores up on a chart for everybody to see. And that's how it is.

So people-pleasing isn't bad. It's how we get those needs for connection and love and friendship and belonging and being part of a group. That's how it happens. The only issue is we're never taught how to stop. We're never taught how to recognize when that trading of the behavior doesn't serve us anymore.

Maggie Reyes:

This is so important. Everyone just listen with intent to apply as I like to say. This is so important. The idea that sometimes we demonize or villainize people pleasing and say, "Oh, I'm a people-pleaser." And then we feel shame around it.

First of all, we take it on as an identity and then we feel ashamed to be identified in that way. What you just said is there's nothing inherently bad in it. In fact, it's a survival mechanism that works. We survived, we made it this far.

I always think about when I used to work in HR, I was in a lot of situations where I didn't agree with a lot of things we did. And I knew that I wanted to pay my mortgage every month. And





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

I knew that there were certain things that I had to do in order to keep my job. And I willingly agreed to those things.

So we don't want to villainize people-pleasing because we want to see it as a response that is appropriate in many contexts. And the place to learn is when have we gone too far? When is it too much?

And I wish I knew who said this, but I know it was a doctor who said it somewhere. When we have too much of something and that happens in our body, we call it cancer. So it's okay to have some people pleasing in your life. It's just like, has it become cancerous?

Sara Fisk:

Yeah. That's such a great way of saying it because there are situations in which you can see two women doing the exact same outward action and you don't know if it's people-pleasing or not. Because what I teach my clients to look for is it's all about the internal experience that you're having as you're doing it.

And sometimes I want to people-please, I want to do things that I know please other people and make them happy, make their life easier. I want to do that. But I also am having the internal experience of wanting to do it for them and choosing it.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

Sara Fisk:

Of my own free will and choice-

Maggie Reyes:

So we'll link to the episode called Advanced Emotional Weight Loss where I talk about this. You find the place in your heart where it's true. So one of the things that I teach and talk about a lot is the idea of no pretending. So many of my clients have come to me and say, "My partner has no idea I feel this way about this thing."

I'm like, really? You think so? Maybe they do. So pretending is not the most useful thing to do in any context, in any relationship. You either find the place in your heart where it's true where I genuinely want to bake the 64 cupcakes. I want to be a part of this experience. I want to do the thing. Or you speak from your highest truth, not your wound.

So I was hearing Sara talk one day about what she teaches in her program and what she teaches her students. She has this concept that I got tingles... I'm having tingles now. I haven't even said it out loud yet. I got tingles when I heard it the first time and I have tingles talking about it now.

I was like, "Sara, I need you to come on the podcast and tell everybody on earth." Because in my imagination, everyone on earth listens to my podcast. But I need everyone who listens to my podcast to know about this.

I'm going to tell you what it's called and then Sara's going to take us step by step through this.





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

It's called roles, rules, and rewards. So walk us through, what do you mean when you talk about roles, rules, and rewards?

Sara Fisk:

So going back to little Maggie and little Sara and everybody who's listening imagine your little self. That little self is being taught in our family, this is what we do. In our cultural group this is what we do. In our religious group this is what we do.

Every group we belong to has rules because that's how you know who's in the group and who's out of the group. And those kinds of rules have been around for forever. You have teams that put on different jerseys. You have people that create different kinds of concepts that make a distinction between our group and other groups.

This very survival mechanism that has been built into humanity shows up in the way we live every single day. For example, in my family, the rule was you got good grades. That was a rule. You overlay family rules with religious rules, with cultural rules, with community rules, with the rules of your country, the rules of your gender. All of these rules seep in over time and they are hardly ever explicitly taught.

So you don't sit down one day and mom and dad or caregivers say "Maggie, Sara, these are the rules of our family." You learn them by osmosis, by being with those people, which has opportunities and also challenges.

The challenge is whatever is unexamined still is running around in your mind. It's like the





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

software controlling the program that you never take a look at. So let's say one of the rules is I get good grades and that's just controlling my stress level at school.

It's controlling my hyper vigilance about where my name is on the chart with all the other kids. It's controlling how I interact with other students. It's controlling how I interact with the teacher and other authority figures.

I remember getting a B-minus on a test and going to the teacher and arguing and arguing, and finally like wearing her down and I got a B-plus. It was because that rule was, I can't take a B-minus home to my parents. It has to at least be a B-plus. The benefit of slowing down to examine the rules in our life-

Maggie Reyes:

This is so important.

Sara Fisk:

Never do it.

Maggie Reyes:

What's coming to me now is often as women, one of our unconscious, unspoken rules is we don't speak up. The idea that you don't make a scene. And throughout millennia, women have been penalized in a variety of ways when they do.

I had an experience, I was just on vacation, as I mentioned, and we went to get a massage. We





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

had a couples massage and my husband and I were in the room together. There was a woman doing his massage and a man doing my massage.

And I told the man who's doing my massage I wanted it to be medium to soft. The first thing out of my mouth is I want it to be medium to soft. I've had deep tissue massages before. I didn't want to have that experience in this particular time.

And he said, "That's all right. You'll just tell me as we go." It was an 80 minute massage and I kept telling him softer. I told him like six times. And when I left, I realized that social conditioning. I talked about it with my husband, my husband was in the room with me.

And he was also like, "Why does she keep having to say that?" But we're so socialized around, you don't make a scene. I could have just gotten off the table and said, "This is just not working for me." Should it ever happen to me again it is what I will do. I'm sharing this story very intentionally for everyone who's listening to hear Sara and I talk about this. We're Coaches. We're experts. We teach these kinds of concepts for a living.

And we also swim in the same ocean that we all swim in. We've been socialized the same ways. And we're still in our own journeys, around little places. Because when I came home and had the debrief with my husband, I'm like, "I speak up all the time in my life in so many ways about so many different things. I really have to do that on the massage table too?"

I'm also tired. I just want to share that idea that the rules that become ingrained in us, even in the tiniest, what seemingly are tiny moments of like once I'm on the massage table, can I just





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

stand up and say actually it's not fun anymore?

Sara Fisk:

Yes. I had a really interesting interaction with my mom that revealed an... just because I've been training my brain to look at what is the rule here that I'm trying to keep? She invited me to go to an event that I didn't want to go to. She texted me, it was a text. So I made plans with another friend for that same time and then texted my mom back and said, "I can't, I'm sorry. I have plans." So funny, right? Rather than just saying, "No thanks."

Maggie Reyes:

Plans with yourself are plans. Right?

Sara Fisk:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

I've done this too. I just want to say to everyone, your plan, my plan could be I'm going to watch Bridgerton for the 17th time. Plans with yourself are plans and count. We talked about counting things. You told us about rules. Tell us about roles and rewards.

Sara Fisk:

Roles are the roles that you have either taken on or have been put on you.

Maggie Reyes:





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

They've been put on you, but you've agreed to them. This is really important.

Sara Fisk:

Yes, yes. But sometimes they were put on you before you could agree. So for example, I'm the oldest of six kids. My mom had six kids in 10 years. Muchos ninos. Lots of kids. So I was the helper. She would ask me to do things to take care of other kids.

When I was old enough, I would babysit, I would cook, I would help. I was very rewarded for that. So now we're kind of getting into the reward as well. She would tell me, "Thank you so much. I don't know what I would do without you."

And I got her attention. I got her love. I got her appreciation as the rewards for taking on that role. Of course I did it. I loved her attention and her and the rewards that I got. But as I got older, now I'm the one who helps everybody. I'm the one who everybody else is sitting down to dinner and I'm the one rushing around getting all the last minute things on the table.

That's just one role. I have lots of different roles as you think about them. The value is in stopping to ask, "Do I want to continue to do this?" It doesn't matter how long I've done it. It doesn't matter who likes it and who doesn't like it. Do I choose it for me? Why would I want to continue doing this? Why would I not want to continue doing this?

And it's not just on or off. The dimer switch applies here too. Are there times when I want to step into this very loving and helpful persona? Yes. Are there other times when I might want to let someone else work it out and handle it on their own? Yes. But it's about bringing those roles to





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

an awareness, a consciousness, to where you can interrogate them and challenge them so that role serves a better place. It serves you rather than serving.

Maggie Reyes:

So the role serves you rather than you serving it. You just have to say that again. That's so good. I love that so much.

Sara Fisk:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

Tell us a little bit about when we bring that awareness to the roles, the rules and the rewards... we talked about the rewards, we get a lot of validation out of it. We get celebration, we get acknowledgement. Sometimes literally we get promotions. If I think back to my time in corporate, I was the one who always took on the extra projects. Then I was the one who would also get a bonus or something. That is part of those rewards for those roles.

Sara Fisk:

Absolutely. Sometimes for people-pleasers, the biggest reward is the easing of an uncomfortable emotion. So someone asks for something from you: more time, more something, and you don't really want to give it, but you feel very guilty saying no. You say yes and that guilt eases.

But it's not really a reward because now you're giving up more of your time or something else





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

that you didn't really want to give. In terms of recognizing is this really a reward for me? Is it really a reward to ease my guilt if now I have to spend all this other time doing this thing?

What we come around to is that it's uncomfortable either way and you have to choose the discomfort that best serves you at that moment. Sometimes it is just going to be to relieve your guilt. Absolutely. Other times it's going to be to feel the discomfort of feeling guilty about something and really interrogate why that's happening and feel the guilt.

Maggie Reyes:

I think the guilt 90% of the time is false. It's socialization, and stories that we believe, and narratives that we accept. The reason we're feeling the guilt in the first place, we want to check in on that because very often when we dig a little deeper, it's like, wait, I feel guilty only because I have this story that I'm supposed to do everything. And if I don't, then I feel guilty. What is that?

Sara Fisk:

Yes. Absolutely.

Maggie Reyes:

Then when you said that the image that came to my mind is when you say yes to something to ease an uncomfortable emotion, it's like the junk food of relief. It feels good in that moment for like the first five minutes, but then there's no nourishment underneath.

Versus when we have whole, delicious, nourishing foods that feels good the whole way through. So I might say no and feel really uncomfortable about it, but then I feel great about it the rest of





EPISODE 110: PEOPLE PLEASING - RULES, ROLES & REWARDS WITH SARA BYBEE FISK

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/110](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/110)

my life. Versus saying yes in order to appease that moment of guilt, but then I feel bad about it the rest of my life.

Sara Fisk:

Yeah. Sometimes it takes several times of really choosing the kind of discomfort that moves you forward. And it doesn't feel good right off. It takes really learning to process emotions and learning to be with the duty and obligation and guilt and worry and fear and anxiety that we're just so used to feeling.

Maggie Reyes:

I know people are going to want to hear more about this. So Sara, how can people find you after this podcast episode?

Sara Fisk:

I am on Facebook, Sara Fisk Coaching. Instagram at Sara Fisk Coach. And I have a 16-week program that I take women through to help them lovingly identify where they are people-pleasing-

Maggie Reyes:

I love that so much. Follow Sara on Instagram and on Facebook. We'll put that in the show notes so you can hear all about roles, rules, and rewards. Thank you so much for being here, Sara. It was a pleasure to have you. Bye everyone.

