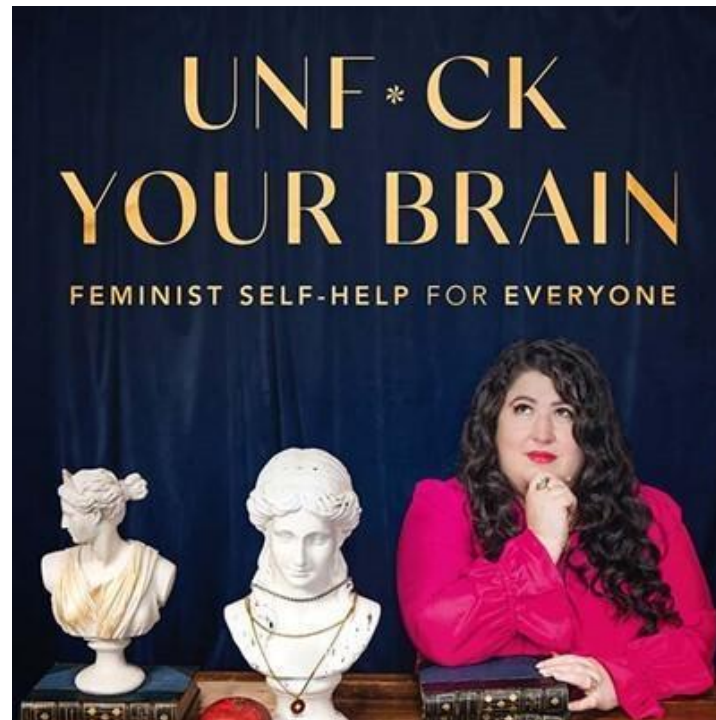


UFYB 126: Anxiety and Control



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Master Certified Coach and founder of The School of New Feminist Thought. I'm here to help you turn down your anxiety, turn up your confidence, and create a life on your own terms. One that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

Hello my chickens. How are you guys doing? I know it has been a couple of weeks of a lot of thoughts and feelings, and me too. I have never ever been so glad to know how to manage my mind. I truly have always, of course, believed that these tools are essential for everyone, but living through this time of change and crisis and fear, we have a physical pandemic but we also have a mental pandemic of panic going on.

I have never believed more in how important these tools are, and I can see around me the difference between my coaching colleagues who have these tools and use them every day, and the people who don't have these tools. And that's not to say, of course, we're all human. Negative emotion, including fear or anxiety or sadness or loss, it's all a part of life.

So I'm not saying that I'm not having any of those or that you shouldn't be either of course. But I do see such a difference between people who are able to use these tools and manage their minds, and people who don't know them. So I'm just even more convinced about how important it is to share this work with everyone, especially during this time, just how many people need it.

Now, that doesn't mean go coach your friends without permission. No force coaching. That will not feel good for you or anyone else. But it does mean you need to coach yourself. You need to be applying what I teach in the podcast. If you're in The Clutch, this is the best time to be using those tools. If you didn't do the self-coaching course, to go do it, to post in the Facebook group, to get coached on all the bonus coaching calls I'm doing, to really be taking care of your mind.

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My teacher said the other day we're all washing our hands but we're not washing our minds. So true. We need to be doing both. And if you want to share this work with other people, and just want more and extra support yourself, I want to be here to serve and help you all in this time. And so that's why we'll have already started once you hear this episode, but I'm doing a special limited series for the next few weeks called Turn Panic into Peace.

It's going to be these short podcasts that are a bonus couple times a week that really give you a bitesized nugget to listen to, to help you manage your mind and I'm making sure that they are always, of course, valuable for those of you who have been following this work for a long time and are doing it in The Clutch or on your own.

But also, so that they're accessible to maybe your friends or loved ones who are interested in getting some support right now, but who aren't kind of already in the flock. So I want to be sure that I am sharing always content that will help you all, but also that there's content and teaching and coaching and love for people who maybe didn't happen to have that much anxiety in their life before.

Now, me and all of y'all, we already had some anxiety. We already had some runaway brains, so we got this. We're used to this. Obviously, we have new circumstances we're thinking about, but this ain't our first rodeo with learning how to manage our minds. But for some of our loved ones, it really is.

They haven't had this reaction before. So that's what that bonus series is going to be for you, but also for anyone who needs some support and sort of we have to start from the beginning with thought work for them in this time. So I've made that partially so that you have something to share if you want to with people, which is going to feel better for you then trying to coach them against their will.

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Because I asked all of my Clutch chickens, I'm doing some bonus Facebook Lives in the group and asked them like, what problems or challenges they were having, and one of the big things that came up was I really want to help all the people in my life who don't know about thought work and don't know how to manage their minds. Everybody is so freaked out, but it's not a good time for me to try to coach them without permission, I don't know how to talk to them about it.

And so this should help, and I think they'll help all of you all also. Again, you know this work. It can sound simple and it can be very deep. So I think those episodes will be helpful for all of you.

Alright, so that's what we're going to be doing. You may have already listened to a couple of them, but I just thought I would - if you've been kind of skipping over them because you weren't sure what they were, now you know. So I am actually recording this right now from an old farmhouse upstate. And it's just reminding me of kind of how long human history is and how many generations of people have lived through troubled times and peaceful times.

The world keeps turning and life comes and goes as it always does. I think seeing ourselves as part of that cycle of nature - you guys may be able to hear the wind chimes here at this farmhouse. Seeing ourselves as part of that cycle of nature, to me is so grounding. The earth turns, species come and go. The earth has no investment in us particularly.

We are always part of a cycle of life that is birthed and that dies. Always. And the trees turn over, the seasons turn, the animals come and go, the humans come and go. So remembering that I am part of that, for me, it takes me out of this focus, this sort of lower brain animal focus on just myself and my own survival, which is so anxiety producing, and helps me reconnect to what is the truth of life, which is that it is beautiful because it is impermanent.

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It is precious to us because it is a limited resource. So today I want to teach you about one of the main ways that I think we block ourselves from being at peace with that impermanence, even though that impermanence is the true state of any life.

And that is when we try to control what is beyond our control. That is the best way to fuck up our peace in any given moment. And one of the paradoxes I see in how we kind of think incorrectly about the world is that we think that we don't have control over our own thoughts and feelings.

We think outside circumstances control those. And so we run around trying to control things outside of us. Other people and external things, which are what we actually can't control. So why do we do that? It's so counterproductive, it doesn't work, it's exactly backwards. Why is it so seductive to us to try to do that?

Why do we get so sucked into that? And I think there's a couple of reasons. The first is because we think we know what should happen. We think we know how life should be. We think we know how other people should act. And we think that if life would just be the way we want it to be and other people would just act the way we want them to act, then we would feel okay.

We're always just trying to have a feeling. If you read a news article about people not behaving the way you think they should behave about the pandemic or anything else, of course your brain has a lot of logical reasons and even principled reasons about this, but on an emotional level, all that's happening is that when you see them doing that, you have a thought that makes you feel anxious or afraid or sad or whatever it is.

And then you think, "Well, if they would just stop doing that, I wouldn't have to have this thought." Of course that's true because if they could be doing it and you didn't know, you wouldn't have any thoughts about it. You are creating your own negative emotion with your thought about whatever other

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people are doing and then you just want to get rid of that emotion and so you think, if those people would just stop, then I could feel better.

But the opposite is true because when you want life to be something it isn't, when you want other people to be and act differently than they are, when you want the world to be different than it is, you are creating so much suffering for yourself. You are resisting reality. You are resisting what is.

Byron Katie says - I'm paraphrasing. This isn't the exact quote, but it's something like you lose when you argue with the universe, but only 100% of the time, which I love. Now, of course, I am not talking about not having a vision of a world that you want to create, that you want to take action or change to create.

I'm not talking about not wanting to show up yourself in a certain way to try to make changes in the world. But when you are emotionally resisting that the world is not already the way you want it, it's almost like we feel entitled to the world being the way we think is best, which is so wild.

Because you can't get people to agree on anything about how the world should be. From the most macro to the most micro. We can't agree on what the global political system should look like and y'all can't agree on how I should run my business based on the emails I get. We can't agree on what to have for lunch, we can't agree on what we should do with the world.

Humans do not agree on this stuff. And so when we think we're entitled for the world to just already be the way we want it to be and we resist the reality that it's not, and I'm talking about the global health conditions or the way your boss is in the office, at any level. When you're emotionally resisting reality, you're believing that you know better how things should be.

And that causes so much suffering because you don't. There are millions of humans on earth with millions of ideas about how things should be. And we're never going to get the ultimate checklist that tells us who is right. And

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the problem with thinking you know how things should be is that it's so painful then when the world won't cooperate.

And unfortunately, normally, the world will not cooperate. It usually will not be the way you want it to be. And so believing that it has to be for you to feel okay is why you feel so crazy. Giving the outside world the power over your feelings is going to make you obsessed with how the world should be different.

The truth is it's your own thoughts that are causing your feelings, and in fact, it's your resistance to how the world is that is causing the suffering. That's the paradox. If you stop believing the world should be different, then you don't need to change it to feel better. You'll feel better already. You've changed the premise of the thought.

This is also true when it comes to trying to control how other people think or feel or act. I think we're often so convinced of the righteousness of our own beliefs and we genuinely believe that we're looking out for other people's best interest. And we believe that their lives would be better if they just did what we told them to do.

I think we believe that bullshit, that we know. And that's at any scale. We can be mad at everyone we see in the news and on the street who we don't think is doing social distancing right during a pandemic, or we can be mad at our partner about how they're handling a conflict with a colleague at work.

There's no situation of other people's actions too large or too small for us to get emotionally invested in and think that we know better about. But whenever we believe we know how things should be or how people should act, we are setting ourselves up for so much suffering because again, they almost never comply because they have different thoughts than we do. I know, it's very rude, but it's true.

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Think about when you have a thought about a situation that you think is the right thought. You have a situation in your life or in the world and you have a belief about it and you are convinced of your own rightness in that belief. How receptive are you when other people try to change your mind or tell you what to do? You're not too receptive probably, and that goes both ways.

So even if you could know you were right, even if we could get you a certified letter from the universe, it would still just create unnecessary suffering to believe that you're right and other people should agree with you because we all have human autonomy and we all get to have our own thoughts and feelings and actions.

Most of us, we want autonomy for ourselves but we don't want other people to have it. But then that's how all of us feel. It doesn't work that way. We all get it or none of us have it, and the truth is we all have it. So the faster you can stop believing that you know for sure what other people should think or feel or do, the less stressed out you will get about not being able to control them.

And it's so important to remember that you want to control them because of how you think you'll feel. I know you probably have a lot of high-minded sounding reasons that your brain tells you. It's for their own good, it's for the good of the family, it's for public safety, whatever your thought is.

But whatever we want, it's because of how we want to think and feel. So we want our partner to handle his work problem the way we think will solve it, so that he will stop being stressed about it so we can stop worrying about him being stressed. Or she or they, however that person identifies.

Or we want everyone to participate in social distancing exactly the way we do, at the exact level of accommodation we've decided to make between safety and risk in our brains because then we think we will feel safer and more in control of our health or the health of our loved ones.

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We want our kid to stop acting out at school or at home. A lot of them are at home now, right? So we won't have to worry about their future or think we're a bad parent. Whenever you are trying to control someone or something outside yourself, it's always because of how you think you would get to feel if the world or the person just cooperated to create the circumstances you want.

And that's so important to know. Whatever your cover reason, whatever your brain tells you about why it's very true, sincere, and factually better way for people to be the way you want, it's always because of how you think you'd get to think or feel in this moment if the circumstance was the way you want, or the person acted the way you want.

It doesn't matter if your brain says no, it's really about the future. It's always in this moment, because of how you think you would feel if you could have a different thought. But the good news is that you can have a different thought by choosing a different thought on purpose.

And the paradox is that the more you try to control people or situations around you, the more out of control you will feel. I'm sure you all have noticed this. If you tell yourself the truth, nothing feels more out of control than trying to control something or someone that you can't control.

The harder you grip, the more it squirms away, the worse you feel. It feels desperate and scary and terrible. I do not recommend it. I recommend focusing all that energy and brain power on what you can control, which is your own mind. The best news I can give you is that you are wrong about what needs to happen for you to feel better.

Other people do not have to change what they're doing. The external circumstance, no matter what it is, does not have to change. And I'm not saying feel better as in feel happy all the time. That's not the point of life. But to stop feeling this out of control experience that you have when you're trying to control things you can't control.

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What has to change is your thoughts. We want to control things and people so we can feel safe. But safety is an emotion created by your thoughts. It's not created by what other people or the world do or don't do. You can imagine someone who becomes paranoid about their safety and their life gets smaller and smaller by increasing degrees.

They don't ever get to the point where they feel safe, by just taking more and more actions to try to be safer. Instead, what happens is they train their brain to always look for danger, and then they just keep finding smaller and smaller threats to be terrified by.

I go into this in detail on the episode on fear and safety, which you guys can listen to. It's in the back catalogue. So you can't control your actions or other people as a way to feel safe or free or happy or peaceful. But you can achieve those feelings by relinquishing the idea that you can or should be able to control anything outside of yourself.

You can certainly take actions that you can predict might make certain outcomes more or less likely, as far as you can see, but you still can't control all of that, and your perspective is limited anyway. So much is unforeseen or turns out differently than we wanted, or ends up being exactly what needed to happen.

So what if instead of trying to control other people and things around you, so that you could feel whatever you want to feel, you looked for how you could feel that by releasing the attempt to control. And I call it attempt to control on purpose. It's not about releasing control because you don't have control and you never did.

It's releasing the erroneous belief that you have control. When you accept that you can't control other people or the world around you, you will feel so much freer. And then you can ask yourself a much more useful and important question, which is how do I want to show up?

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Knowing that I can't control other people or the world, who do I want to be in the world and in my relationship to those other people? What kind of thoughts do I want to think? What kind of feelings do I want to create? What kind of actions do I want to take? What kind of results do I want to create for myself?

Those are things you can control. And focusing on who you want to be and how you want to show up in a world full of people and things you cannot control is the most empowering thing you can do. So that's what I encourage you to think about the next time you find yourself trying to control the world or other people or being mad that you can't.

How can you flip that mirror to see yourself more clearly and choose who you want to be on purpose? Today and every day. Have a beautiful week, my chickens. I will talk to you next week.

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