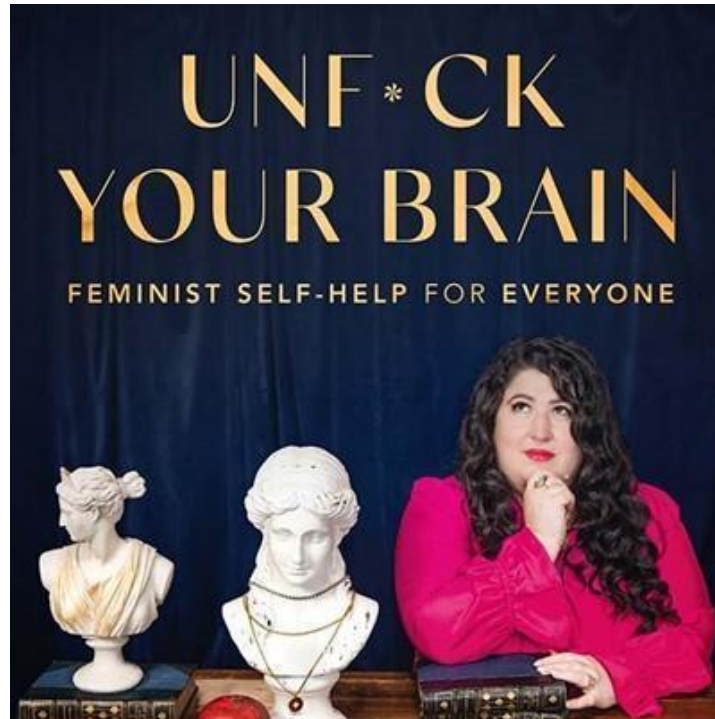


UFYB 158: Giving Yourself Permission



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? It has been a wild week over here at Unfuck Your Brain headquarters, let me tell y'all. The other thing we did last week, which I was super proud of is we launched The Feminist Mindset Revolution Fund, which is a scholarship program that I set up and I am funding to give grants and scholarships to make these kinds of Clutch College events, these more in-depth programs more accessible.

And so we just awarded about \$20,000 or \$30,000 in scholarships to these two events, and I'm so excited for these women to get to take this work deeper and blow their own minds. And I'm so excited to make The Feminist Mindset Revolution more accessible.

And because I like to do all the things at once, part of expanding The Feminist Mindset Revolution, we started an early bird interest list for the advanced certification in feminist coaching that I'm going to be opening up later this fall. That's going to be 15 or 20 spots, and I think we have 400 people on the early bird interest list already, which is really craziness.

So if you are a coach who's been certified by The Life Coach School and you want advanced training in the kind of feminist, social justice, anti-oppressive form of coaching that I do, this is the only way to get trained to do my kind of thought work with my tools that I've developed and be able to coach other people using my work.

So all of that happened in the last 10 days, and I signed the lease on a new apartment. I can't remember if I talked to y'all about that. It has a gorgeous terrace, and it looks out into these old growth trees in a park uptown in

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Manhattan. And it almost makes me feel like I'm in Paris, which is important because at this rate, the way this country's going, I don't know when I will get to go to Paris again.

So if any of you listening happen to be a smart and handsome and age-appropriate French man who wants an American wife for some reason, I really can't imagine why you would right now, let me know. Because I miss Paris.

We don't always have to change negative emotions. I've given myself permission to just miss Paris. So that brings me to what I want to teach you all today, and that is what it means to give yourself permission and how powerful a tool this is.

And you'll notice I didn't specify what exactly you're giving yourself permission to do or think or feel. That's because this tool is kind of agnostic. It doesn't have to do with a specific subject.

I'm going to talk in this episode about some of the things that I think a lot of women struggle with permission around, but everyone's brain is different and you have to pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings to see where it'll be useful for you.

And so I'll talk a little bit about how to do that in this episode as well. So let's back and talk about the social context and why women have a hard time giving themselves permission in a broad sense.

Women are taught that there are a lot of different ways that we're supposed to be. We are supposed to look a certain way, we're supposed to eat some things and not others, we're supposed to care about some things, mostly other people and not others, mostly ourselves. And that's just three of 100 things that we're taught we're supposed to do or be or how we're supposed to spend our time.

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We're supposed to spend our time making sure the house is clean. We're supposed to spend our time making sure other people are happy. We're supposed to spend our time cooking and exercising and cleaning. We're supposed to spend our time being productive.

And all of us are also living in a relentlessly puritan, capitalistic society where we are taught another additional set of things we're supposed to be. We're supposed to be productive all the time. Some ways of spending our time are virtuous and allowable, and some are slothful and sinful. And we're supposed to care about success in certain external things.

Women in particular are socialized to never trust their own opinions. We're told that we need magazines or doctors or celebrity influencers to tell us what we're supposed to eat and not eat this year. It changes all the time. We need fashion shows and style bloggers to tell us what we're supposed to wear or not wear, what's flattering or not flattering, so we can look closest to how we're supposed to look.

We need experts to tell us how we're supposed to have sex and how much sex we're supposed to have and how many hours we're supposed to sleep and how we're supposed to parent and who we're supposed to want to date and what kind of relationships we're supposed to want and when we should text and how long we should wait to sleep with somebody and on and on and on.

Women are constantly being socialized to undermine their own authority and look outside of ourselves for direction. And that's because we're taught that we're not inherently worthy. That our worth is something we have to earn by being fuckable enough, by being productive enough, by being self-sacrificing enough.

And if you're not inherently worthy, you don't trust your own authority. And you want someone else, quite naturally, to tell you what you're supposed to

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do. What you're allowed to do, when and how you're supposed to or allowed to do any of it.

Women are relentlessly socialized to give our authority up to pretty much anyone else in the world and to take on their opinion as more important than our own. So I want you to think about this scenario. If a total stranger came up to you in a store and told you that they hated your hair and it wasn't flattering and you should change it, a lot of us would stop and actually think about whether that was true.

We would actually consider that that opinion might be right and that we were wrong about our own hair. You might think that you wouldn't care about this, but I bet many of you would at least tell a couple people that story and be kind of secretly hoping that they would agree that your hair is great to reassure you.

That's insanity that a random person's comment on our appearance we would take more seriously than our own opinion. But that is how intensely women are socialized to care about what other people think and to trust other people's authority over our own.

I cannot tell you how often I hear women who are experts in their fields doubt themselves because someone, usually a straight white dude, let's be honest, has opined on the subject with no knowledge whatsoever. But because women are socialized to trust any other authority, especially male authority, they immediately doubt whether they know what they're talking about.

And then on top of this socialization that all of us get, some of us also had childhood or family experiences where we got in trouble a lot. Maybe there were a lot of rules that you were always breaking, or maybe the rules seemed inconsistent, or maybe you got in trouble for normal human things like eating or having emotions or whatever else.

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So by the time we're adults, we're consumed with anxiety and we constantly think that whatever we're doing, we're probably not supposed to be doing. And sometimes this is an obvious screaming in your brain that you're very aware of, but sometimes it's just kind of a low unconscious hum.

Just this low hum of anxiety and discomfort and kind of guilt that's always nagging at you that doesn't even seem attached to anything in particular. Just always feeling like whatever you are doing is not the right thing, or you should have done something differently, or you're not being good enough in some unspecified way.

So here's what I want you to experiment with. I want you to practice giving yourself permission. And I like to do this really literally. I do it for anything where I feel any kind of guilt or unease or discomfort or I have a thought that I should be doing something different.

So for instance, if I'm eating something and I feel that little low-level hum, I'll say to myself, "I have permission to eat this." Or sometimes I say, "You have permission to eat this." Like sometimes I use the second person. I use both. You can use one or the other, you can play around, see how it feels. No right or wrong.

But it helps take a big picture concept, which I do believe that I have general permission to eat whatever I want because I have human autonomy, and bring it down to the specific moment to combat the old pattern of thinking that may be kind of still operating in the background and causing this low level sense of doing something wrong or not making the right choice.

I also use it for resting or I use it for watching TV for instance. I was raised in a household without a TV, and so my brain always thinks that watching

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TV is lazy and bad and I should be improving myself by reading Dickens. So I will literally say to myself, “I have permission to watch TV right now.”

I use it for resting, for not doing anything productive, or taking a nap. I say to myself, “I have permission to rest. I have permission to spend this day however I want. I have permission to watch this movie instead of work on my business,” or whatever it is.

And what I find really wild about this practice is that it works, even when I haven't fully changed a thought pattern. So for instance, on one level, I truly believe I have permission to spend my time however I want. That is a thought I believe. But I also still somewhat believe my old thoughts that some of those ways are more valuable than others.

I'm on the struggle bus with it, in the sense that I'm in between thought patterns. I now do believe I totally get to choose, as opposed to thinking there's a right or wrong or should or shouldn't, but I still also believe some ways are more valuable than others, and that's okay. That's just the process of transferring belief from an old thought pattern to a new one.

Now I'm just in the middle of the process. But attaching I have permission to do x, y, z, whatever the thing is to a specific moment or activity is really powerful, even though I don't yet have 100% belief in the overall concept yet.

Anyone who's ever gotten coached by me knows that I am always coaching you to get as granular and specific as possible. Because I am convinced that the part of our brains that give us the most trouble, the more primitive parts, they don't even understand abstract concepts really, and they only grasp very concrete thought changes.

That's why for instance, we don't practice my body is a beautiful goddess. We practice this is a human stomach. That's why we don't try to solve for I

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have bad overall self-esteem, we don't try to come up with one thought on that. We drill down in coaching to what's the thought you had about yourself in that situation that happened yesterday very specifically, now let's work on that thought.

And that really works to our advantage here because I find that this is very effective, even if I still on some level have the thought that I'm not productive enough or TV is bad or whatever in that example that works for me, when I just say to myself you have permission to watch TV right now, it completely lightens that moment for me.

So how can you tell if you need to give yourself permission? You have to practice tuning into the emotional hum in your body, even during normal daily activities. So again, for some of you, your brain is screaming that you shouldn't do these things, so you'll know very obviously when you need to give yourself permission.

But for some of us, especially if we're already done some thought work on an area, there's no more screaming in the brain, but there may be this low-level hum. So you really have to practice. It's a somatic practice. It requires discernment. It requires time. You got to practice. It may take a minute.

Learning how to feel your feelings and process your emotions is challenging when you're not used to doing it, and that's true even when emotions are very obvious. So if you have a strong anxiety response about eating something or resting or doing a certain activity, that's an obvious sign to stop and try to give yourself permission.

But sometimes it'll be more subtle. Just like a low-level feeling of off-ness or agitation or very low-level guilt or anxiety. I found one really good clue for me is if I'm rushing through an activity, or I'm trying to distract myself while I'm doing it, that always means I need to stop and give myself permission.

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So if I'm eating something and I find that I'm kind of rushing through eating it and not really savoring it and enjoying it and paying attention to it, that's almost always a sign that I need to stop and give myself permission to eat it. That on some subconscious level, I still believe maybe that I shouldn't be eating it, and so I'm rushing.

Or if I am watching TV and I then I feel that low level hum and I start looking at my phone, that means either I'm actually bored and don't want to watch TV and I should stop and do something else, or it means that even though it's an activity I supposedly want to do, I have some thought somewhere that is subconscious that I'm not really allowed to do it or I'm not doing it right.

And so I'm not actually experiencing it. I'm distracting myself at the same time. So any time I'm rushing or distracting myself, I will stop and give myself explicit permission. I really think this practice of giving yourself explicit permission, and that really means thinking the thought or even saying it out loud.

I will actually stop and think the thought, "I have permission to do this," whatever the thing is. Or "You have permission to do this." I think it speaks to this childhood, more primitive part of your brain that is just always so worried about doing something wrong or getting in trouble.

Especially if you had a childhood where things were erratic or unpredictable, the rules weren't clear, you didn't know when you were and weren't going to get in trouble and what was and wasn't okay from one day to the next, you develop this kind of hypervigilance about doing the wrong thing, not doing it right, doing it wrong, making the wrong choice, getting in trouble.

And so explicitly and consciously giving yourself permission kind of relieves that constantly running doubt that's happening in the back of your mind that

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you're not even conscious of. So that's really what I want to teach you about this, but I do want to address one possible objection, which is that some of you either consciously or subconsciously think that your feeling of anxiety or guilt or shame or agitation or unease, discomfort, whatever we're going to call it that we're talking about here, that low-level hum or that loud scream, depending, is actually going to motivate you to change your behavior.

And so you don't want to give yourself permission to eat or rest or watch TV or cancel your plans or whatever else, because you still think that maybe that negative emotion is going to force you to change. And to that I just want to say, how is that working out for you so far?

If you're feeling that feeling while nevertheless eating the thing or watching TV or taking the nap, so you're still doing the thing but you're just ruining the actual pleasure or relaxation you could be having by manufacturing this negative emotion about it, then not giving yourself permission isn't doing anything positive. It's not actually changing your behavior.

So try giving yourself permission to do what you're already doing anyway. I have found that just doing this practice kind of randomly and intermittently whenever I notice I might want to, and I still probably only catch 10% of it because it's a relatively new thing I've come up with, it's still giving my life way more of a sense of ease, more relaxation, more pleasure, more happiness.

I just feel better all-round because I think that I'm getting to this very low level distant background hum of subconscious thinking and consciously giving myself permission to live my life, make my own choices, by present in it is really powerful.

And you can use this for - I've been giving these kind of small daily things because that's the place that I practice it. I already believe I have

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permission to make the big decisions in my life, but some of you may not believe you have permission to make the big decisions in your life.

And so consciously giving yourself permission for those too would be really powerful, right? I have permission to decide which job I want. I have permission to say no to this project. I have permission not to go on another date with this person. I have permission to ask this person on a date. I have permission to speak to this person or not speak to this person. I have permission to live in this place or not live in this place.

Giving yourself permission to make these decisions, to do what you want to do is incredibly freeing. There's a huge effect from this very small behavior. So I highly recommend you try it, chickens. And if you're in The Clutch, I want you to try it and come post in the Facebook group about what you realized you need to give yourself permission for and how you find doing the practice so that we can all learn and discuss.

Alright chickens, I give you permission to use this tool. I'll talk to you next week.

If you're loving what you're learning on the podcast, you have got to come check out *The Feminist Self-Help Society*. It's our newly revamped community and classroom where you get individual help to better apply these concepts to your life along with a library of next level blow your mind coaching tools and concepts that I just can't fit in a podcast episode. It's also where you can hang out, get coached and nerd out about all things thought work and feminist mindset with other podcast listeners just like you and me.

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