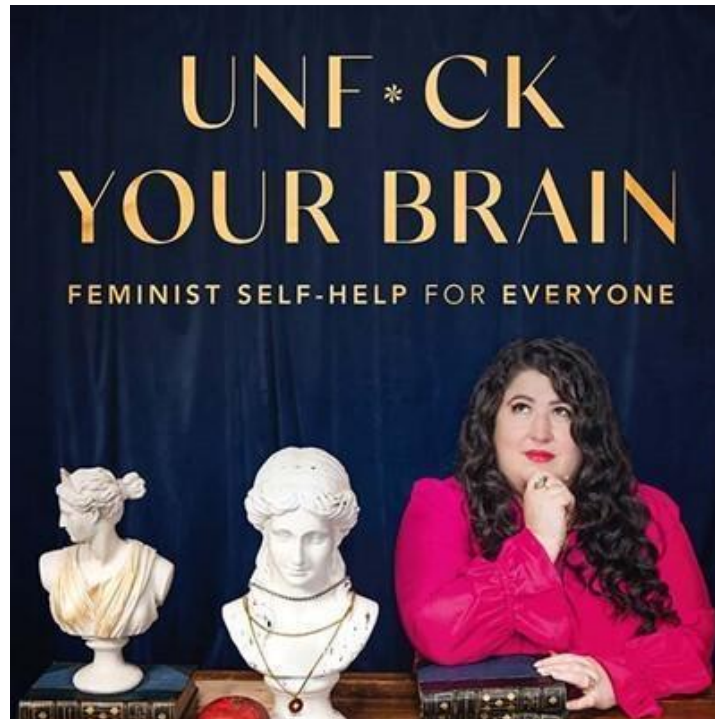


UFYB 61: Listener Q&A Vol. 9



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? It's the middle of the holidays for you. I'm recording this ahead of time because I am actually taking a real vacation, which is super exciting. I'm going to Paris and then I'm going to hang out in New York and just be in my two favorite cities and not look at my email for a while.

Okay, here we go. Time for some questions and answers. Y'all, this is the last podcast of the year. That's so wild. It's going to be 2019 when we meet again. Okay, I'm a little punchy and nostalgic in advance.

Alright, "Dear Kara, I understand managing my mind but I have an eight-year old child who is not able to manage her mind yet. What do I do with family that I think are not healthy for my child's mental health? They are thinking and projecting the same unhealthy thoughts they did as I was growing up. My parents is who I'm asking about."

Yes, I think we got that. "I want to just love them but what about parenting?" Okay, so I love this question. Such a good question. It comes up a lot, and there's two parts to the answer. Number one, yes, when you are acting on behalf of your children or your pets or some younger or smaller thing that can't really advocate for itself, you totally might want to set a boundary about what can happen around them.

So for instance, I might have a boundary that you can't kick my cat, and you might have a boundary that no one could have a firearm around your child or punch them, and it doesn't have to be physical. You might have a boundary that - I mean, if I had a child, I would probably have a boundary

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that if someone in the family commented on my child's weight, that we would leave and not spend time with them unless that person was willing to not speak that way anymore.

Because to me, if I had a child, raising them to love their body and not feel shame or self-consciousness about their weight, that would be a value I want to impart. Of course, I can't control my child's brain and it's susceptible to all the social influences, but I totally as a parent can make that decision.

So you can of course decide what you want your child to be around, especially when we're talking about a very young child, and you can decide if you want your child to be around kind of certain dynamics or certain actions, or even certain comments.

But here is the thing; so it's really a boundary issue and this question listener should go back and listen to the boundary episode also, I think that'll help. The reason that you feel all confused though and that you are not ready to make a boundary is that you don't just love them. You also think that what they're doing is unhealthy, and I think reading between the lines, that you think that they harmed you. You're saying the same unhealthy thoughts they did as I was growing up.

I think you think that your parents harmed you with their thoughts and you're trying to protect your daughter from them harming her. So you're giving their thoughts a lot of power and then you're feeling powerless. So you have to do your own work to get clear about what your boundaries are for your children. What are the things that you don't want your children to be around and why?

You have to make sure that you like those reasons and that you are not kind of coming from a place of feeling disempowered, believing that other people hurt you or caused your problems and then wanting to somehow

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protect your child from that. You know, this was a very short question so I don't have a ton of context, but my sense is that that's what's going on here.

That's why you think you're confused. Because you say, "I want to just love them, but what about parenting?" So I think the other place you're confused is that you think loving them and accepting them means that you wouldn't have a boundary about having your child around them, and that's totally not true.

Loving and accepting someone does not determine any particular course of action. People get stuck on this a lot, which is one of the reasons I wanted to answer this question. You can love someone unconditionally and decide you're never going to speak to them again. You totally can do that.

You can love a spouse and not want to be married to them. You can love your parents and not want them to talk about your kid's weight in front of your kid or whatever it is. To say racist things or to play with firearms. Whatever it is, you can absolutely love your parents. That has nothing to do with how you decide to parent and whether you decide that they are certain things that you are not going to have your child be around.

So that's the second place that I think that you're stuck. You think that those things are in conflict or in contradiction with each other, but they're not. So you can love them totally unconditionally, which is why you have to do the work on the power you're giving their thoughts over you, I think, and then you can decide what you are going to have your child around or not.

And remember, a boundary isn't telling your parents how they can behave. It's setting it for you and your kid. So it's like, if x, then we're going to leave or end the phone call or not answer the question or go to the other room or whatever else. You have to decide what it's going to be.

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But just make sure you are not giving your parents thoughts all this power over you because that's going to make you feel powerless and then you'll feel powerless to protect your child, your daughter. And then also make sure that you're not conflating loving someone with not taking any action, or with taking a particular action. They're totally unrelated.

Okay, got another boundary question so we're just going to do these together. "Hi Kara, I thought I'd get straight to it." Alright, I'm in, let's get straight to it. "I've just listened to your boundary podcast because of a situation I came across. I really don't like it when any guy touches me. Even if it's a pat on the shoulder. My brother's a touchy guy so he'll pat my shoulder, give me side hugs with one arm around my shoulder, or tap my hand to get my attention. It really irks me. For example, today he innocently patted my shoulder and I just snapped, 'Don't touch me.' I feel repulsed by the touch. I'm trying to coach myself so the boundary can come from a place of love, but every time I think of it I feel disgusted. I just don't want to be touched. How can I set a boundary if simple actions in society irk me?"

Okay, so I think this is a great question because I think the reason that you're finding this confusing is that you're taking your feeling of disgust to be somehow automatic, as though it's not caused by your thoughts. So you're like, well, but I just feel disgusted, I just don't want to be touched so how do I set a boundary?

That question actually doesn't even make any sense because your premises don't have anything to do with each other. So number one, so I think your problem is in kind of two parts. Number one, you don't understand why you don't like to be touched and you don't know what the thoughts are that are causing that feeling of disgust or revulsion. You're just taking it to be kind of natural, like it just happens to you.

And because of that, you can't do the thought work on it to figure out why you don't like it. So that's number one. Then number two is that you see to think that because you feel disgusted by touch, you can't set a boundary

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from love. I mean, that's true in the sense that like, if you think there's something wrong with your brother touching you, then you are not able to set a boundary from that place of love that you say you want to feel.

But I don't really think - reading this question, I don't really think the issue is about doing it out of love or how can you set the boundary. The real problem here is that you think simple actions irks you. But actions don't irk you. Your thoughts irk you. So you have to figure out what the thoughts are that are creating the feeling of disgust or revulsion, that's what you need to work through.

Once you have some ownership over that, you will be able to set a boundary if you decide you want to in a much more - like a calmer way. And if you want to feel love for him, then you just have to practice thoughts about loving him. But the revulsion, the disgust, the irking, whatever we're going to call it, those are kind of different levels of intensity, it's caused by your thoughts. It's not just a thing. It's not just a natural biological reaction or something, so that's what you need to figure out.

Okay, this person addressed her message to Karla, but I think that's for me. "Hi Karla, I've been listening to your podcast religiously for the past two months. I've been able to use your advice in my everyday life to manage my stress and anxiety and build my confidence in my personal and professional life, and I've seen real progress. My girlfriend has fled the Venezuelan crisis is in my country seeking refugee status, which she has not yet received. Her passport expires soon and she may have to return to Venezuela to renew. If she does that, she may not be able to return to my country. My question is how do you control your mind during uncontrollable circumstances so that life's curveballs don't totally derail you and so that you can stay focused on your goals while this whole other thing is happening in the background?"

Okay, this is a great question, and I'm going to answer you this by telling y'all a story. So I don't think it's any secret that I'm a feminist and my politics

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are progressive, and those of you who are upset about that can write me emails about that later. And after the 2016 elections, like a lot of people, I had a lot of thoughts and feelings.

And one of the sort of ways that showed up for me was that my family is Jewish and there was a lot of kind of concern in the Jewish community about anti-Semitism in the White House and anti-Semitic people being part of the new president's cabinet and this is when Steve Bannon was still very involved in the White House so it was a lot of talk about that in Jewish circles, Jewish communities, at least in my family.

And I realized that I sort of was loosening the reigns of my thought work about it and that I was kind of freaking out and thinking that I needed to do something to prepare in case the next Holocaust happened basically. I think people who don't grow up in Jewish families who experience a lot of Holocaust drama, it's kind of hard to understand how much we're raised to just be thinking that that could always happen again.

That's kind of the story and in a lot of Jewish families, the story is like everybody tries to kill us all the time and we always need to be on the lookout for it and it happens when you least expect it. So just totally not anxiety causing thoughts at all.

So anyway, long story short, I was spinning out for several months about this and trying to make all these concrete plans of like, how much money do I need to put in a go bag and what - and here's what I realized eventually from coaching myself about it. I realized that I believed I could manage my mind basically up until there were concentration camps.

If there were concentration camps, then I was like, all bets are off, I can't manage my mind and I'm going to be terrified and die and be upset and be scared and die. That's what was going on in my brain. And that was super fascinating to me that I had unconsciously sort of decided like, oh, there's

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this certain point at which being able to manage my mind won't be enough. I'll need to already know now what actions to take then.

I remember I was totally obsessed with this question of - this is what it is, it's all coming back to me. I was so fixated on this idea of knowing when to leave. Like, I was really obsessed with this idea that there was - because you would hear this all the time about people in the - Jews in the Holocaust in Germany, that they kept waiting and thinking it wouldn't get worse, and then by the time they realized it was time to leave it was too late.

And so that is like, the thought process that I had borrowed and so I was like really - I remember getting coached about this. I was really fixated on this idea that there was a point of no return, at which it was too late, and I needed to figure out that point ahead of time so I would know when it was.

Now, if you think about it, of course that made me crazy. There's no way for me to do that. I can't predict the future. It's always only clear in hindsight when it was "too late" if that even exists. It's all just a set of optional thoughts I'm trying to predict ahead of time.

And I was so fixated on like, figuring out the answer to that question, but of course that was the wrong question. And what I was assuming was that if I missed that point, if I didn't leave but when I "should have" and it became "too late" that then I would just be terrified and die. So I would just miss the point and then all of my thoughts and feelings would be real and would be disastrous.

And I realized that I was basically telling myself if it gets to that point, I'm not going to be able to manage my mind. I wasn't thinking that consciously, but that's what I was creating for myself. It was like, oh, well at that point, then all is lost.

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And what I realized was of course that's not true. That my ability to manage my mind endures and cannot be taken from me. And in fact, I later found this quote from Viktor Frankl, who was a Holocaust survivor and a concentration camp survivor. It's something like the power to determine one's own attitude in the face of any circumstance is the last remaining human freedom.

It's something like that. I may not have the words exactly right but that's the basic sentiment. And when I realized that, it was such a shift for me and so much relief because I can always choose to manage my mind whatever happens. And we know people do this. If you think about a brave resistance fighter who doesn't give up her comrades, it's because she can manage her mind.

So that is my anecdotal way of answering this question, which is you know, there might be crisis, she might be a refugee, she might have to return to Venezuela, whatever, she may not be able to come back. Whatever circumstances happen, the thing you have to know is that you can always manage your mind. That is what will give you the most peace. It doesn't mean that you won't feel some negative emotion.

It's not like that means okay, well if I'm in a concentration camp I'll never feel sad or upset. Of course, I'm going to have negative emotions as a part of life. Of course, if your girlfriend has to leave and she can't come back and you can't go there, you're probably going to feel sad and that's okay.

But the thing that will help you face any set of circumstances is knowing that no one can take away your ability to manage your own mind, which is really wild when you think about it. People can take anything from you. They cannot take your thoughts from you. You always get to decide what to think and no one can take that away from you.

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And for me, that is just - it is like, such a comfort and it is the thing that resolves whenever my brain wants to spin out with anxiety about what if x, y, z happens, that's what I always have to come back to and that just immediately releases it for me. So it doesn't matter what happens in the sense that none of it has to control my feelings. I will always be able to do that for myself.

So when you really believe that - and listen, that takes practicing on all the little stuff. You can't wait until you're in the concentration camp and then start managing your mind. You've got to do it now so that it's a really engrained habit if that ever happens.

But knowing that is what will allow you to of course, like, you'll have some negative thoughts and feelings and negative even is an optional word, but like, of course you'll feel sad, whatever it is, but you'll also be able to keep going and you'll be able to stay focused.

And you know, in a much smaller example, it's like in the past, if there was a trouble in my relationship, in my romantic relationship, we were fighting or there might be a break up coming, it was like, completely absorbing and devastating and I didn't understand how people could like, go to work when they broke up or got divorced. It seemed impossible to me because I had no management of my feelings. it was so volatile, so intense, and I was making the break up mean so many terrible things about my future and myself and the other person.

And now I totally get how people go on and in fact can go on pretty easily sometimes because even if I'm sad that a relationship might be ending or whatever else, I'm not creating all this emotional drama about what it means about me and them and my future and I'm not predicting all this future pain I can't do anything about, I'm not resisting it.

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And so I'm totally able to have space in the back of my brain that this thing is happening and I might have be sad about it but I can also just show up and do my work and coach my clients and take a walk and make dinner and do everything else I need to do. That's what allowing kind of feelings to be there with you and knowing that you don't have to fear anything in the future because you'll be able to manage your mind, that's what it allows you to do.

Okay, that was kind of a long and intense question and I think I'm going to leave it there because I really don't think I can say it any better than that. So thank you all as usual for submitting and listening. The cars are honking in celebration of the last question. Happy New Year to all my chickens and I'll talk to you in January.

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