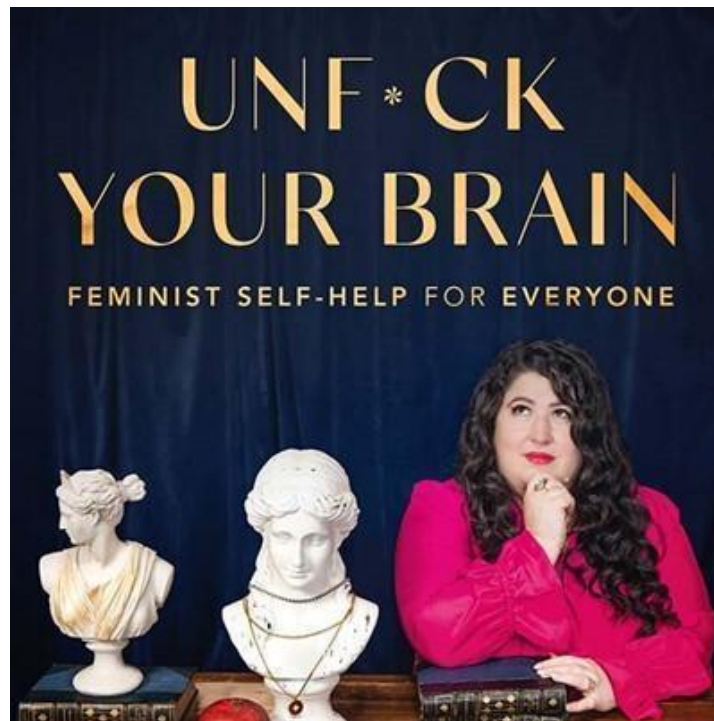


**UFYB 268: Nuances in Motherhood and Thought Work:
A Conversation with Sade Curry, Candice Toone,
and Karen Anderson**



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.

Alright, my chickens. Today we are talking to three of my incredible graduates of the Advanced Certification of Feminist Coaching. And we are talking about an issue that I think a lot of you will relate to and even if you don't relate to, it will be applied to some other relationship in your life. So we're talking a lot about kind of mothers and children and the thought work that goes around difficult mother relationships. And we're going to be mostly talking about mothers on this episode.

But this applies to any parental relationship in your life or even I think people develop quasi parental relationships with mentors, with teachers, with other family members, older siblings. You kind of have had anybody who was in a sort of nurturing caretaking role with you and you have a fraught relationship, this is going to apply to you.

And if you had just magically, perfectly, delightful relationships with everyone whoever took care of you, then number one, you're probably not a human. And number two, if you are then just listen so you can enjoy just thinking about how you don't have this particular thought work challenge. So I'm here with my students, Sade, Candice and Karen and I'm going to have each of them kind of introduce themselves, tell us who they coach and then we're going to start digging into this conversation.

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Sade: Alright, so I'll go first, I'm Sade Curry. I am a life coach for divorced women who want to meet a new partner after they divorce. And came from my own story basically and so that's what I do.

Kara: Nice. What about you Candice?

Candice: I'm Candice Toone and I help women stop wondering if they've married the wrong guy so that they can spend their brain energy on creating a life they want to live.

Kara: I like the way you line that up, you go to Sade so you can get remarried and then if your brain hasn't quite fully resolved then you hire Candice so you can stop stressing out about that.

Candice: Exactly.

Kara: And what about you, Karen?

Karen: Yeah. So I coach women who want to take better care of themselves in the relationship they have with their mothers and/or explore estrangement and look at boundaries that you might need to have or want to have if you are trying to avoid estrangement.

Kara: Alright, so I think I'd just like to start, I'd love to hear from each of you kind of how you came to this topic. And I feel like I have to say because my mother listens to my podcasts. This podcast topic was proposed to me. I did not say, "Let's do a podcast on mothers." So my mother often asks me when I give an example of a mom on the podcast if it's her. And I'm like, "Well, I mean if you did the thing I'm talking about then yes. Otherwise no, I made it up." So I just feel like I need a disclaimer that this was a pitched podcast topic to me.

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But tell us, I'd love to hear from each of you kind of like, Karen obviously coaches on it, but for the rest of you, sort of how this has shown up in your life or how you ended up coming to this work?

Sade: Okay, well, I'll start with sort of my lifelong search for what I thought a mom would be like in my life. So my parents divorced when I was very young. And there were periods of being away from my mother. And so obviously there was whatever that psychic longing was and when I was with my mother, there were those experiences. But as I got older there was just always this desire for a mentor, a desire for a female figure. It didn't matter what area of my life it was, there was just always this desire for a female figure.

And then going through the feminist certification I began to see where a lot of my own patriarchal programming had come from. And a lot of it had come from my mother figures, my mother, aunts and all of these places that sent these messages to me as a young child, as a teenager, as a young woman. And so as we untangled all of that I was like, "Wow, this is where I got this from." So I'll give a quick example is my older sister was unmarried at 29, finally got married at 50. I say finally because that is the language of, oh my God, we're all just so relieved. But that was the air that we breathed in my family.

Kara: And got married at 30 or at 50?

Sade: She got married at 50 but at 29 she was unmarried at 29. And this is where all of this messaging, I think where I really started absorbing a lot of that messaging around relationships and marriage being the end all be all and you've just really got to have a man in your life. So she was 29 unmarried, of course all the women in the family were very concerned about this. So aunts, moms and this is about grandmothers, everyone. And

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I had an aunt come to me and say, “Okay, here’s the plan.” So I was 21 at the time.

And she laid out the plan for me was to make sure I was engaged within a year since I was in college and there were all these single men. And she sat me down and laid out this plan for me to get married which eventually led to me choosing a husband at an age I was unprepared to choose a husband for which led to my divorce 17 years later and a lot of other stories along the way.

Kara: Wow. And so you’re 21, times a ticking. And also that whole thing of there’s all the men at college. There’s this constant scarcity narrative that I mean Sade and I could do a totally different podcast about this and she works on dating. But there’s this constant scarcity narrative of there aren’t enough men. You have to grab one when you’re around them. It’s like being at the grocery store, even if you don’t need or want bread, there might not be bread at the next place. You’d just better get one because we have to have a loaf of bread at all times.

Sade: A 100%.

Kara: I love that your sister got married at 50. She was like, on my own time, thank you, I will wait till it’s worth it. What about you Candice?

Candice: Yeah. So I watched my mom have a really challenging relationship with her mother. And they didn’t like each other basically and I always thought that was so strange. And my mom and I were super close which is the opposite of that. And my mom didn’t teach me hardly anything about rules. She was like, “Whatever.” I think because her mom was so strict. And so I was always kind of like, “Why is it so hard to have a good mother daughter relationship?” And then I have two daughters now and I’m like, “That’s why that’s hard.”

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And so I wanted to be part of this conversation because I have the lens of both. I am a daughter and I am also a mother. And I feel the pressures from both sides.

Kara: And what about you, Karen?

Karen: So I came to this work through my own difficult relationship with my mom like Candice, my mom and her mom did not get along. And that was something that was very present in my life. And like Candice also, I was close to my mom especially when I was in my early 20s and mid 20s actually. And didn't realize it at the time, because my mom and my parents got divorced when I was very young as well. And then my mom remarried when I was five. She divorced my stepfather when I was in college.

And when I got out of college and came home I lived with my mom and then started this sort of very weird unhealthy relationship where it was like we are like these two single women going out to clubs and whatnot. There were no boundaries. There was talk, you know, my mom I think was depressed. Again, in hindsight when I think back at that time I was very sort of unformed. My mom was the person who told me what to do. And as I got a little bit older and started to sort of want to separate myself from her, the angrier and meaner she seemed to become.

And so it was at the end of 2010 that I, and this was before I knew anything about coaching, well, I think I knew about coaching but wasn't really involved in it. But I estranged myself from my mom at the end of 2010 and then got into coaching. And it was in coaching, especially my master coach certification when a lot of my mother's stuff sort of came to the surface. And the coaching I got on it as a result of being in that program at the time was just it blew my mind.

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And so I had thought that I was going to go into coaching around body image because that is also a huge part of mother daughter relationships. But the results that I got, the aha moments that I had, the progress that I made in regards to the relationship I had with my mom just was sort of like, okay, this is, I have to do this work with other women.

Kara: Yeah, so beautiful. So many of us I think got coaching on the thing that transformed our lives the most. I mean I think certainly for me I feel like the more that I came to understand thought work and that our thinking is learned and [inaudible]. It just gave me a different perspective on both my parents and the messages I had gotten. Because I was just like, "Right, they didn't make these up. They weren't the first humans on Earth. They didn't make up the messages they were giving me." They got them from their parents.

Karen: One other piece I want to say on that is that what I started to see is I call it the micro and the macro. There's one woman and her mother struggling. And then the more I started to do this work and research, and talking to women, and programs like yours to see that this doesn't happen in a vacuum. It's not difficult, mother daughter relationships aren't just like, it's because the mother's a jerk or whatever. It happens in the context of patriarchy, and misogyny, and white supremacy, racism, all of it.

Kara: Yeah. So I'd love to hear from each of you, let's talk about that a bit because one of the things we wanted to really talk about in this episode is the ways in which mothers pass on those belief systems to their children, sometimes unconsciously. Sometimes consciously, sometimes embracing those values like Sade's story, nobody were subtly suggesting that marriage is important. They were like, "Let's go, you're 21. You've got to move this produce while it's fresh." So sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly.

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But I'd just love to hear from each of you, your thoughts on how you see that come up maybe in the niche that you work on or your personal experience, however you'd like to speak to it. But why and how that happens?

Sade: Yeah, I have two sides to it, one is me as a mother. And I think I knew something wasn't quite right as I raised my daughter because there were these moments that were just a little bit uncomfortable and I wouldn't know what to do. So I was prior to my divorce I was not questioning my thoughts. I hadn't done any coaching, wasn't questioning my thoughts, mostly unconscious about my socialization. But also wanting something different for my daughter that I had experienced.

And I remember, there would be moments, I remember little moments where she would be dressed a little disheveled. And I would catch myself wanting to say something because I remembered you couldn't dress that way. Men didn't like that, boys didn't like that. You were supposed to be all dressed up and looking good. But then I also just knew that there was something wrong about telling her, "Hey, you should change." Because she wasn't dressed badly, she was just dressed like my son would dress.

And so I remember some of those thoughts and some of those moments, or the fact that I wouldn't let her stay out as late as her brother which she complained vociferously about. And I would be like, "I just can't, I can't let you go out, I'm sorry." She's like, "But he can go out." I'm like, "I know, but you can't." Because of course I was trying to protect her. So a lot of the messages that I think mothers are trying to pass on comes from, I need to protect my daughter or make sure she's okay.

But a lot of that is also just because of what, they're not questioning why their daughter needs to be protected in that moment, or why their daughter wouldn't be okay in wearing what she's wearing or doing what's doing. And

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this is all, like I said, it's all messages that have been passed down and we've all just as mothers, just taken it all in and are just trying to make sure our daughters are okay. So that's kind of like me as a mother, trying to just make sure my daughter was okay and it showed up in all of those ways.

Kara: Yeah. Can we pause on that before we go to the next thing? Because I think this is so important, part of that context is for that thousands of years, women, even if they were lucky enough to be born, not enslaved, and with some money, and with some privilege. Still didn't have legal rights, couldn't vote, couldn't have their own bank account. So a lot of the messages that mothers passed on to daughters of you need to get a man, you need to look good. That was protecting them.

That was trying to set them up for success which was we've got to get you married to somebody. And the better you can present that is your safety otherwise what are your options? There wasn't a space in society to be a single woman, unless you happened to inherit a bunch of wealth that you had no male relatives to claim, which is a vanishingly small proportion of the population. So it was like become a nun, or get married, or be a spinster who lives with your parents forever, taking care of them maybe, if you happen to have enough money to do that.

That's centuries of background, just for those listening who are like, "My mother fucked me up about my body image, about my appearance and all of this." It's so many thousands of years of that being literally that's your asset that we have to help you make your way in life. And so of course it can be coming from that place of trying to protect and help you even though now that is not so helpful.

Sade: No. And with my mother and aunts, they actually adjusted the message a little bit. They were like, "Okay, but you need to have an education and make your own money, so that if you pick the wrong man."

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Kara: You still definitely need one but you also need an escape plan in case you pick the wrong one. It's such a fascinating message, but then why do I need one? And also we agree, I might get the wrong one but I definitely still need to get one but it might be wrong. That's such a perfect moment in time of cultural morays and laws shifting and cultures like I don't know, I think we still need a man but also you should have money, but also just the dissonance of that messaging is so fascinating.

Sade: And how it shows up with my clients, I'll just say a little bit is, it's the message never good enough. So first of all you are divorced so you obviously got it all wrong. And you're obviously not good enough to achieve this thing that you're supposed to have achieved and done right. And a lot of messaging is from moms, I mean a lot of my coaching is helping my clients see that, hey, your mom telling you you're too picky is not helpful in this situation.

So I hear their moms passing on messages like, You're too picky. Boys don't like, or men don't like, or you need to change. You need to tone down. I have one client who is unmarried and was assaulted when she was a teenager. And her mom didn't blame her for the assault because it definitely wasn't her fault. It's never your fault if you're assaulted. But always used it as, "This is the reason why you were picked, why you were targeted, because you didn't do x, y, z."

And then that messaging of you're not good enough, you didn't do it right, it just comes from so many different ways and so many different statements that imply that the woman isn't good enough to meet a man or isn't good enough because she doesn't have a man or wasn't good enough and that's why she's divorced.

Kara: My God, I just had this moment of how many conversations have women had about what men like? And how many conversations do men

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have about what women like? You just do not hear a lot of fathers and sons being like, “Son, women don’t like it when you don’t do your dishes”, or whatever it is. When you don’t know where the clitoris is or when you don’t think they’re your equal. That’s such a common phrase, men don’t like this and men don’t like that, heterosexual women but also anybody socialized in a heteronormative society is constantly running it through that filter.

And meanwhile men are just wandering around doing their own thing, really unconcerned about what women like or don’t like.

Sade: Yeah, it speaks to unconditional acceptance. And I think that’s the unconscious messaging whether like me you’re a mother who tried her best but didn’t quite succeed or a daughter. Unconditional acceptance is what women don’t get when we see these messages.

Kara: A 100%. What about you, Candice?

Candice: Yeah. So as you’re speaking about cultural morays shifting and the dissonance I was like, this is another example of that is where exactly does safety come from and is it a short term safety or a long term safety? Because I have a daughter in elementary school and kids are mean in elementary school if you don’t look a certain way or have a certain body type, or say the right things, or if you play a sport that a boy is supposed to play. Those kinds of conversations are still happening on the playground.

And so I find myself being like, okay, I understand consciously she can create safety for herself in her own brain. But she’s not fully developed enough to do that, so maybe I should try and control her C’s a little bit more. And so I think what I’ve noticed is that I choose to believe that most moms are trying to protect and create safety but we’re just not sure exactly where it comes from and so when can we stop controlling the C’s and trust her to create her own safety?

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And is she going to be reliable about it because she came home crying when that boy said that and what's my job here? So there's lots of questions like that that the dissonances makes it easy to relax back into what I was taught as a kid. You're supposed to look like this or you're supposed to do this. And so it's challenging to let that go when you see your daughter experiencing pain.

Kara: That's so important also because obviously there are also situations where mothers or parents are trying to protect their daughters, or their sons, their children from sexual assault or from police brutality. Just all these depending on your background and your kind of identity groups or whether you're a member of a marginalized community. There may be literal physical, not just emotional safety, [inaudible]. I mean I see the parents of people of color and especially Black people in America and especially Black men in America.

There's a lot of socialization that's being done literally to try to protect your life. And at the same time it's emphasizing the same. We're constrained by, okay, I'm trying to teach you how to have emotional and physical freedom in a system where you may not be free. And how do I teach you about that without also crushing your freedom at the same time? What that balance is.

Candice: How much do I want my own kid to be the guinea pig that goes in and stands for something else for instance versus how much do I just want to teach him to go with the flow even if it might stifle them in a different way? It's a challenging question.

Kara: What about you Karen, what are your thoughts on this? Ways you see in your work or your personal life of kind of mothers passing down patriarchal conditioning, or white supremacy, or whatever these systems are?

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Karen: Definitely in my family there was a huge emphasis on weight and looks. And what came up a lot between my mother's mother and her and then my mother and me and even my grandmother was a lot of shaming. And shaming and fear, I think at one time shame and fear were used as they were perfectly valid parenting tools.

Kara: I would say they still are for sure. We haven't fully escaped that.

Karen. I mean I remember when I was in my maybe in college or in my early 20s, my grandmother paying me to lose weight. And then seeing my mom being angry at my grandmother for doing these kinds of things. But then at the same time my mother shaming me as well over my body, and because my body was not thin enough for them.

But the other aspect that I see and this was my experience was that I think a lot of young adult daughters will choose to say, "You know what? I'm going to go my own way, I'm going to do my own thing. I'm going to have this body. I'm going to wear these kinds of clothes, wear my hair this way. Maybe I'm going to be gay, or maybe I am gay." I mean it's not a choice but they're going to follow their desires and the mothers shame them in order to protect them.

It's sort of like misguided like I need to shame them so that they won't do these things which could ultimately hurt them or they might be hurt because of these things. But then when the daughter goes ahead and does them anyway and maybe is living a freer, happier life the mother is then jealous. And this was my experience that if I couldn't have that and if I couldn't live in that way then you can't either, or you shouldn't. That was my experience, it set up this really weird dynamic between me and my mom. And so there were no boundaries,

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And for a long time I was so needing my mom's approval, well into my 40s even. So it was this really weird push pull thing that happened.

Kara: And one of the things I noticed since I've started to spend time with my partner and his children and be sort of participating in his parenting is I'm obviously somebody who is pretty sure I'm not spreading explicitly sexist messaging to the children. But there's all of these implicit things that you don't even necessarily consciously catch yourself on of am I implicitly teaching my daughter or somebody else's daughter, if one child is having a tantrum and you are asking the other child to accommodate that?

Are you teaching them that other people's feelings are more important than theirs? Or are you teaching them that it's their job to manage other people? And obviously women get socialized with that much more than men do. But so much of it, it feels like so much of that socialization that they're receiving is happening not just from you.

So you can't control all of those inputs and then it happens so early, those, whatever inputs they get from the world on the basis of their perceived gender by the world is already shaping the dynamic, the person, the way that they show up, what they think is expected of them, what they expect. And so the image I have is there's some big knot inside something opaque and I could put one hand in a hole and try to untangle the knot but I don't even know what else is happening in there.

And I'm just hoping that I don't accidentally also cut some other string that was necessary while I'm trying to untangle this knot. And then not even notice, probably I won't till 20 years later. So I do want to ask you guys, I want to talk a little bit about the way somebody, whoever wrote the question I thought was interesting. Because they said, "How can we keep conversations about this topic from developing into mother blaming and is that effort important?"

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Which I definitely want to talk about because as a feminist podcaster, also not lost on me that we're here talking about moms. And that mothers are always blamed for their child's problems. We have this long history of if you read the history of 20th century psychology it's just here are 75 ways that mothers have ruined their children. What are fathers? We've never heard of them and they are irrelevant other than I guess there can also be, there's Odysseus complex, I guess we'll have an Electra one too or whatever, just tagged on the end the way it doesn't even make sense.

So how can we have this conversation without it being and mothers are to blame for everything?

Sade: Well that's definitely a thought that has been passed down so just so you know, where moms are constantly triggered by the outcomes or how we see what the outcome is going to be. It's like, okay, I remember- my son was six year old one day and he told me a lie and my brain just jumped to prison. That was the problem I was trying to solve in that moment with my six year old which is a completely natural developmental milestone when your child tells you a lie. And so that's for when we're unconscious, unsocialized by the patriarchy and I'm questioning my thoughts.

This is what's happening inside of us. It's exactly what Karen was describing is the moms, we're triggered, we're just constantly walking around in this state of oh my God, this is going to happen, and that's going to happen, and this is going to happen. And we're thinking thoughts like, I'm not okay, he's not going to be okay, my child isn't going to be okay. And if they're not okay, we might be burned at the stake together. And this is sort of loop that's happening within moms.

And I think understanding that and having compassion for that can really help with just taking the blame out of it. Mom is just acting out of everything she's been taught, everything she's lived. And I'm not a fan of the phrase,

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they did their best with what they could because I don't know, there's just something about that whole, a whole other conversation.

Kara: So yeah, I have another episode about that.

Sade: It's understanding what's actually happening. What's happening is mommy's having a whole lot of thoughts that have been embedded in her and she's been emotionally retraumatized based on memories she's flashing back to in her childhood. I know things like I have had slowed myself down as a mom to say, "Okay, the fact that your child is asking for something that you think is ridiculous is not necessarily bad." It might mean that you're a good mom.

Kara: Oh my God, if that was a problem, my partner's kids told me the other day that for his birthday he wanted a horse and a pig to live in my backyard. So I was judging, also the other places comes up. There's us judging other people but then also I think it's impossible for that socialization to not impact what we expect from our own mothers, what we think our mothers are supposed to provide and the standard we have for them versus the standard that we potentially have for our fathers.

Karen: I remember reading this in the blog somewhere a few years ago and I don't even remember what the blog was about. But the woman who was writing the blog said that women were never meant to be raising children in the isolation that they do. And so women and I don't know for how long but it's probably been centuries that one man, one woman, nuclear family has come into be the norm. Women are isolated, especially when they have had a baby. I've never had a baby so I don't know that experience but everything I hear, it's not easy.

And yet you're expected to be this perfect mother who takes care of every need and all by yourself while your husband goes to work.

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Kara: [Crosstalk] on the weekends, [crosstalk].

Karen: Right. But when I read that it really hit home about just how behind the eight ball, is that a bad comment? I don't even know if it's a bad thing.

Kara: Behind the ball I've heard, I think eight ball is a drug reference, I don't know if you're behind the eighth ball or [crosstalk].

Karen: Well, the way it's set up makes it harder for women to be mothers in the way that I think that if, you know, in a more communal or village aspect. There is the aunties, and the friends and all of that that is naturally part of the process of raising children.

Kara: Let's talk about some of the sort of repair work that can be done, whether that's the work you do to repair a relationship with a parent or a mother who's in your life or the work you do on your own if you are. I'd love to hear from each of you, whether from your niche or your personal experiences. But the whole point is we're not just going to sit around and be like, "Well, my mom was terrible and here's a podcast about why." But how do we bring our own responsibility? Whether you have a mom, or two moms, or three moms, or no moms or whoever your parents are.

You are getting a lot of messages, some of which you maybe want to keep, some of which you don't. It's your responsibility as an adult to decide which of these belief systems am I going to keep? What am I going to pass down? What am I going to put on the curb for maybe somebody else to pick up because I don't want them anymore? So I'd kind of love to hear from each of you and Candice, do you have anything you want to start us off with?

Candice: I'm just going to start if that's okay. Yeah, so I went through pop psychology for a long time because I did my bachelor's and my master's in

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psychology. And so I very much was indoctrinated in the, your mom did this wrong, and this wrong, and this wrong, and this wrong thing. So I think I was kind of reactive to that and being like, “No, I understand that my mom is this, and this, and this.” And I understand all that. Which led me to disavow my own experience because I’m so understanding.

And so I think what I’ve learned when I became a mother was like, I have to understand her experience because it’s true, she didn’t do that out of spite or meanness, the way that she taught me things wasn’t out of that. I understand the pressures she was under but I also understand the impact that it had on me. And I can be disappointed, or hurt, or any of those things without disliking her which sounds a lot easier to say than it is to live because it requires a lot of honesty and pain.

And sometimes the other part of that partnership, my mom’s not super interested in hearing about the pain that I am experiencing because she for whatever reason doesn’t allow herself space to be. She just makes it, but she’s wrong. So it’s either I’m wrong or she’s wrong. And maybe neither one of the partners have to be wrong, just this was the way that you decided to handle the very real pressures that existed in your life because of what you were socialized to believe. And this is how it impacted me.

And here’s what I want to do with that knowledge instead of just blame you. Does that make sense?

Kara: Like cause and effect because if a tree falls on your house then there’s damage to the house. That’s not the same thing as being like that tree is out to get me, didn’t love me, doesn’t care about me, should have been a perfect tree. I mean people won’t always be able to hear it that way because if you haven’t done the work to liberate yourself from that, I call that the shame, blame seesaw. Somebody’s got to be wrong here so it’s me or it’s you.

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Candice: And we're invited to identify ourselves as wrong. If you'd just done that better for your daughter, if you hadn't have taught her this. And I have that with my eight year old, sometimes my husband will say it to me. He's not trying to be a jerk but he's like, "I think it's because you did this." It's never because of what he did of course, it's something that I did or people in your church will do that, or people in your neighborhood. Or the teachers will say, "If you just this." So we get invited to it and we have to just pass all those invitations back.

Kara: Well, also it's like there is this myth that you could possibly do it right as opposed to any ecosystem has advantages and disadvantages. And if you live in this place it's warm all the time but there's a lot of mosquitos. If you live in this place it's cold, but you don't have mosquitos but now it's cold all the time. I see that in my friend's parenting, my partner's parenting, how I was parented, the quasi parenting that I do. It's like you're trying to solve for one thing and then there's an unintended consequence.

You're trying to instill this value and then six years later you're like, "Shit, I think I accidentally instilled that one or skipped it." But this idea that if we somehow just got it, there's no socialization that is a perfect system that everybody would agree on. I was just talking on a podcast interview about how the goal of this work isn't to completely deprogram yourself. Socialization is everything, it's like I put on clothes today and what a house is and which food is safe to eat is also socialization.

We're not trying to undo it all. And there's such a perfectionist dialog around this. The other thing I see parents get so caught up in and both in their own parenting and then in blaming their parents is the fallacy, the delusion that it was done differently to me or if I can do this differently then my child will never feel upset and I [inaudible]. So it's like if only my parents had been different I wouldn't have to have this human experience of life where sometimes I feel bad.

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Or if only I can make all the right decisions for my child they won't have to have the human experience of life where they sometimes feel bad. And that delusion of control makes people crazy and makes them feel powerless. No matter how well your parents parented you, 50/50, still going to feel shitty sometimes. And no matter how well you parent your child [crosstalk].

Clarice: [Crosstalk] expanding capacity to feel.

Kara: Yeah. And you can do, even if you can do the perfect job then the world would be like, "Guess what, we've now invented internet porn. Everything is different and that socialization doesn't work anymore." Whatever new things would keep happening and then whatever you taught your kid would be outdated or not true anymore or whatever else. What about you Sade, do you have anything you want to add on the sort of repair front or how to move forward?

Sade: Yeah, I think two things. One is to stop looking for answers outside of yourself which I think that compounded the problem for me where, okay, mom doesn't have the answer. So aunt has the answers. Aunt doesn't have the answers, the church has the answers, which I found myself at 33 seeking out a mentor at church, an older woman. There's a part in my spiritual background where it's like, hey, the younger woman, seeks out an older woman who will help her.

And it was fine when she was teaching me to bake pies and all the things. But then the moment I mentioned that, "Hey, my husband is an actual jerk and this might be an abusive relationship." She never spoke to me again. So that's how that went. But I spent a lot of time looking for answers outside of myself, the answers are inside and just being willing to question, not question my experience but sit with my own experience and draw answers from, okay, this is actually what I'm experiencing. This is what I'm thinking. This is what I'm feeling.

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This is what is happening to my body or in my life. And being with that, and then making decisions for that. It was a huge part of my healing, my ability to set boundaries for myself with my daughter, my ability to set boundaries with my mother while having compassion which is still an ongoing journey. And I think the other piece which I hope maybe Karen will talk a little bit about is your nervous system might be completely jacked up by what you've experienced from these messages.

I worked with Karen at the coaching container to deal with a lot of the triggers is the word I'm going to throw out. There's a lot of definitions of that but it's an easy model for what was going on with my nervous system around my family, and my mother, and my divorce. And I think sometimes there's work that needs to be done there to hand if you're carrying around a lot of shame, that just comes up all the time. You might need to work with someone, a therapist, a coach, or someone who can help you kind of calm that down so that you can be with your experience in a way that's safe.

Kara: Yeah. I think that's so important. My experience in my family was that my relationship got so much better with them when I took responsibility for my own emotional state. Because otherwise what I was basically doing was any time I had a bad feeling it was like, well, let me find the corresponding fuck up thing my parents did that explain why now in 2013 I'm having a negative emotion. What's the thing they did in 1983 that caused this? And so it was so disempowering and then I was so overly sensitized to them and that whole thing.

And it was such great news, wait, I can decide how to feel, still going to be 50/50. But I think that's the reason that people get so hooked into this and cannot stop is that you feel so powerless if you believe that whatever your parents did controls how you can ever feel again. You feel so powerless then the only way you can try to find power is by fixating on it and ruminating about it as if you could change it by thinking about it or being

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angry about it which doesn't work at all. What have you got, Karen, it's your specialty, 40 seconds on how to repair the mother daughter relationship. Go.

Karen: Well, everything that everyone has said so far, yes, to all of it. And that taking responsibility piece is so, so important. And I think I know for a while I struggled with what does that mean? Does that mean that it is my fault? And that's that shame, blame, fault, it's yours, it's mine, who's is it kind of thing. And so I like to say things like, "Let's take fault out of the equation. Let's take blame off the table." And in some cases our mothers were abusive. I'll use that term.

In my case there was violence and addiction, and a number of things. And what I've come to is that I think a lot of women are hoping and wanting for the person who caused the problem or who was the abusive one, they need to be responsible for your healing. And what really shifted it for me was why am I expecting this person who hurt me to change and now all of a sudden be able to fix me, if you will.

Kara: That is so important in any relationship. People's breakups too, that person is not the source of your healing. It doesn't make any sense. We're like, "Well, you gave me the poison so you also have the antidote?" No, they don't have it.

Karen: Right. So you may not be responsible for what happened to you as a child but it is your responsibility now and thank God. Thank God that you have the, you know, there is tools, if you're listening to this, you now know, wait, it doesn't have to be that way, I can take responsibility. And that is such a powerful place to start. And so one of the things that I think is really important as Sade said is the nervous system piece. Again, there is all kinds of information out there, all kinds of people who are doing this kind of work.

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And one of the things that I like to do, I call it self-concept work. I know a number of coaches who do self-concept work. And the way that I do it is really about looking at the values, the traits, the qualities, that are important to you and being able to associate a felt sense, a feeling state in your body associated with these values or traits. And then coming up with thoughts that support you in feeling that way so that it become a sort of like it is thought work on a certain level.

Because it has you then showing up the way you want to show up in a relationship. Or if you are estranged, which that is a perfectly good choice for some people. But to base your choices from the self-concept that is not wounded necessarily or victimized. And I know that's a tricky word to use. So it is cultivating the self-concept. And it's from that self-concept that really healthy boundaries can be had and established.

Kara: Yeah. I think that's so important because like you said, there's nothing wrong with being estranged if that's what you want to choose. Or if it's that choice has been made by somebody else and you can't control it, you're not going to live with it. But I also feel like there's a – I know there's a cultural component to it too. As a Jewish person I'm always like, "What is being estranged from?" If you stopped speaking to your Jewish family they will generally show up on your doorstep, whether that is a good thing or a bad thing.

Just this is not, for a lot of immigrant communities this is just not really – of course anybody can make any concept available to them that they want. But there is a big difference I see in my experience across certain religious or immigrant communities to sort of more generic US been here for a while white person. I mean in terms of how involved family is in your life, what's considered the standard for that, how acceptable it is, what kind of involvement you need to have with your parents.

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And so I just think it's so, you know, to me estrangement was – and also I'm not, for any of my family listening, I am not suggesting that I ever considered becoming estranged from you or that anybody did anything that would merit that. I just am pointing out that I think even I find that so much of the pop psychology talk around boundaries and cutting people out of your life is I'm just like this is not, first of all this is not helpful and absolutist. And second of all, for some people that's not plausible, or possible, or desirable.

And there are other alternatives, not every culture supports the sort of vision of adulthood in which you are supposed to be completely independent from your family and it's no big deal if you never speak to your parents again.

Karen: What's kind of interesting and it's not that I forgot but it just sort of popped into my mind again. The fact that my mom was estranged from both of her parents. Her parents got divorced in 1981 I think. And so my mom was what, 40 something, I don't know how old she was at the time. And she eventually was estranged from both of them and didn't go to either of their funerals any of that. And it just, again it dawned on me, well, that was what the model was.

Kara: Yeah. So I think the point is you get to choose. And you can always choose your reaction. Yeah, but you could have a parent who's decided to estrange themselves from you and you can't control that. But you get to decide how you're going to feel about that.

Karen: My mom has estranged herself from me at times. And my thought that I practice very consciously is let me know when you change your mind.

Kara: And that's also beautiful, things can change. Things can ebb and flow, where your relationship is at right now with whoever this is in your life

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that you're kind of thinking about listening to this episode isn't necessarily where it's going to be forever. It's like how [crosstalk] show up.

Karen: There's a great quote from somebody like Ogden Nash or somebody like that that goes, "The state of mind in which you make your final decision rarely lasts."

Kara: That's a good one.

Sade: Yeah. And I think one thing that can maybe add a little nuance to the whole boundaries estrangement thing is that doing what's right for you, going back to the answers are inside, is it's not boundaries, or creating safety, or teasing out these relationships, or doing what is right for you according to your values doesn't always feel good. And I think sometimes we reach for these answers, okay, if I cut her out of my life then [crosstalk].

Kara: I'll feel better if I set this boundary. I'll feel better if I cut out this thing I'm reacting to, yeah.

Sade: Yeah. And as someone who I feel like I'm doing this work amazingly both with my mother and my daughter, it still feels terrible 50% of the time. But there's this other 50% that's amazing that I can now experience as part of that journey. So boundaries don't always feel good. It's really about sitting and understanding, what am I trying to do? What's my intention? Where am I trying to get to? What's right for me according to my values?

Kara: As opposed to feeling shitty all the time, you get to feel amazing half the time and terrible half the time as opposed to feeling mediocly bad all the time. Alright my friends, thank you for coming on. Will you each please tell people where they can find you if they want to learn more about your specific areas of expertise.

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Sade: I'll go first.

Kara: So nobody wants any clients ever, you just want to sit quietly on my podcast. Where can people find you?

Sade: Yeah. So I'm Sade Curry, Sade is spelled S-A-D-E Curry C-U-R-R-Y like the food. You can find me at sadecurry.com or on my podcast which is my favorite place to hang out, it's just The Dating After Divorce Podcast or just social Sade Curry on your favorite podcast platform.

Kara: What about you, Candice?

Candice: Yeah, I'm Candice Toone, you can find me at candicetoone.com. It's Candice with an I.

Kara: And Toone has an E at the end?

Candice: Correct, yeah.

Karen: And my website is kclanderson.com and you can also find my podcast which is the Dear Adult Daughter Podcast on all the platforms.

Kara: All the podcast places. Alright, thank you for coming on my friends. Everybody go call their mom and assure them that the podcast wasn't about them.

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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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