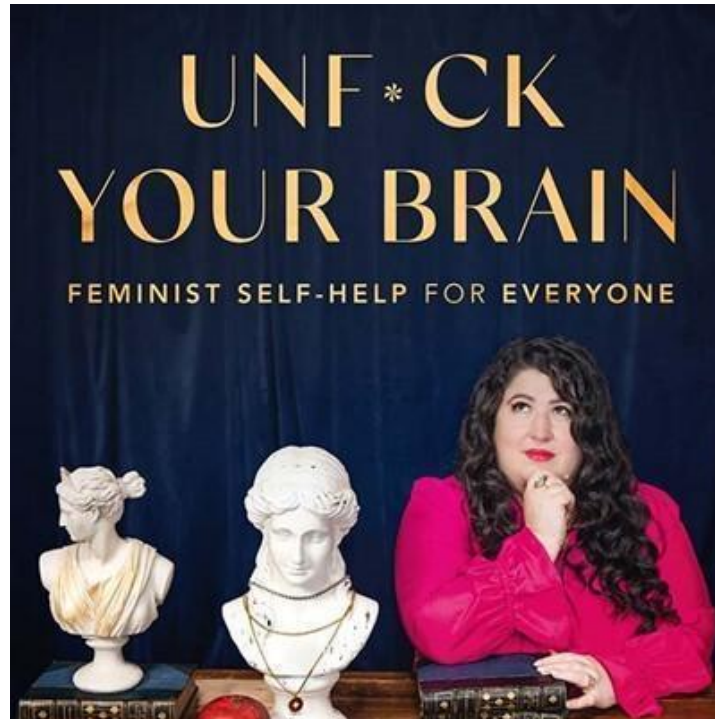


**How to Feel Better
(Turn Panic Into Peace Series #3)**



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. So today I want to talk to you in this episode about your feelings. So in the first two episodes really of this limited series, Turning Panic Into Peace, I really focused more on your thoughts, and we're going to completely keep talking about your thoughts and managing your mind.

I started with your thoughts because I think that giving you some easy reframes and a couple of easy tools to use is a good way to kind of get you a little bit jumpstarted and get you kind of starting to practice some of the tools and get a little bit of perspective and give you a little bit of relief right at the start.

But all of the work that we are trying to do with our thoughts, to try to calm down and to feel more sane is all because of how we feel and how we want to feel. And so we do have to get into learning how to cope with and process our emotions and how to create the emotions that we want to have in order for this work to really make headway.

So that's what I want to talk to you about today. The first kind of definitional thing I just want to explain is that when I talk about an emotion or a feeling – I use those words interchangeably – I'm talking about a physical sensation in your body. So we often will say, "I feel like," and then have a long thought.

"I just feel like everyone is freaking out and the world is ending." That's not a feeling. That's a thought. It's a sentence in your mind. A feeling is the physical sensations that happen in your body when you think that thought.

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So when you think, “Everyone is freaking out and the world is ending and we’re all going to die,” how do you feel?

If you feel anxious, if you feel afraid, if you feel sad, those are feelings. Those are physical sensations that exist in your body. Some of us are very plugged into our bodies and we know exactly what our feelings feel like. Some of us have spent our whole lives trying not to feel our feelings and trying not to be in our bodies.

But your feelings happen in your body. That’s how you know that they exist. When you feel anxious or you feel overwhelmed or you feel scared or you feel guilty or you feel happy or loving, those are physical sensations that are happening in your body that are caused by your thoughts. The thought goes through your brain and then your body responds to it.

Your brain releases certain hormones or tells your body to react in different ways that create your feelings. So that emotion, that feeling, it’s a physical sensation in your body and it’s created by your thoughts. So there’s a couple of concepts that I want to teach you today that are going to really help you navigate this time of heightened emotion.

And the first is something you’ve probably heard before, which is that feelings aren’t fatal. But let me explain really what I mean by that because it often feels like they’re going to be. When you have a feeling, your primitive brain doesn’t really understand what’s happening, a negative feeling, it’s freaked out.

And that’s the reason that we resist our emotions so much. We don’t want to feel anxious, we don’t want to feel sad, we don’t want to feel afraid. And so we try to push those emotions away. We try to talk ourselves out of them or distract ourselves from them, or we try to numb ourselves out. We drink or we eat or we smoke or we shop or we do whatever we can to get away from our feelings.

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Or we try to kind of reason ourselves out of them. We go to so many lengths to not experience what are just physical sensations in our bodies, that truly cannot kill us. They're harmless. They're just feelings. If you don't act on them and you are able to allow them to just exist in your body, you will find that they, number one, actually disappear and flow through you pretty quickly, and number two, that they can't hurt you. They're just physical sensations.

If you think about all of the kind of energy that you put into freaking out if you start to feel anxious and not wanting to feel anxious and trying to resist the anxiety and push it away and think that it shouldn't be there, it's so much additional suffering and drama going on just because you're so desperate to not have the feeling that you're having.

When you compare it to something like having a headache or a leg cramp, okay, it's not the most fun thing ever, but we don't freak out, we don't resist it, we don't run around like a chicken with our head cut off, trying to get away from it. We don't impulse shop or get high or text everyone we know to try to distract ourselves, or whatever it is we do to try to get away from our feelings, just because we have a headache or a leg cramp.

So I really want to encourage you, even though I know it is a little bit scary because your primitive brain doesn't believe it, to approach your feelings as if they can't hurt you and it's totally okay to have them. Part of the problem is that our primitive brain associates negative emotion with actual death, actual fear of actual death.

And so it kind of raises the stakes so much more than they really need to be. If you are feeling anxious, what does that feel like in your body? It feels, for some people, it's like your heart is going faster, for some people, your face might feel hot, maybe your hands feel clammy. That's okay. You have survived having a fast beating heart and a hot face and clammy hands before, and you'll survive it again and probably many more times before

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you die because human experience is positive and negative emotion. It's both.

I think one of the big reasons that we try to resist our negative emotion is that we think that it shouldn't be there and that we're supposed to be happy all the time. We think that human life should just feel good. I don't know where we get this idea. Nobody's human life has ever just felt good.

This is not what human life is supposed to be. And we know that because it just isn't and it never has been. Being a human means having a mix of positive and negative emotion for your whole life. You're always going to have both.

So if we stop believing that feeling negative emotion means something terrible has gone wrong, we're already going to find it so much less intense. It's going to be so much more bearable for us because the resistance to the negative emotion, the freaking out on top of it, it's like if you got a headache and then you gave yourself a panic attack about having a headache.

The underlying headache is not such a big deal. It's your reaction to the headache that's causing even more suffering. Same thing with your emotions. Having a negative emotion, feeling afraid, feeling sad, feeling whatever, it's not such a big deal.

But when we start to think, "Oh no, I shouldn't feel this way, I have to try to get rid of it, I have to make it go away, what can I do? How can I get away from it?" And then we can't, and then we get more and more desperate to try to stop having the feeling, all of that drama is so unnecessary and it makes it all feel so much worse.

So the first step is always to just work on allowing that feeling to be there. I like to practice thinking, "What if I just was willing to feel however this was going to feel?" So much of the distress and stress comes from not being

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willing to have the experience that we are already having and can't stop having right now.

So what if I was willing to have this experience? What if I was willing to feel sad? What if I was willing to feel anxious? What if I was willing to feel angry? Not necessarily acting on it, but what if I was just willing to be in my physical body while I had those sensations? If I was just willing to do that.

And what you'll find is that the more you practice this, the more you're able to allow an emotion without resisting it, the quicker those emotions will pass and the cleaner they will feel. And then once you have allowed your feelings to flow, that's when you can actually start to shift them.

And that is the second big thing that I want to teach you, which is that most of us think that our emotions just happen to us and that we can't do anything about them. So we go about our lives just being like, well, I hope I feel happy today. I hope the happy bus comes, I hope when I get to work the joy greeter is there and sprinkles me with some joy.

We don't think we have any say over what emotions we have, so we just go out every day being afraid that bad ones will happen to us because we think they're terrible, and then just hoping some good ones might happen to us. We're not exercising any control over what goes on in our minds.

But the truth is that when you understand that your thoughts cause your feelings, that is the golden ticket, that is the information you need in order to change how you feel. You do need to accept and allow the emotion, like I just talked about in the first half of this episode. It won't work to try to change your emotions if you're resisting the first one.

It's like, if you were trying to pick up a box and move it but the box was attached to the ground with a chain. So you're struggling and struggling. You can't move it that way. You have to be willing to see the chain is there,

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put the box down, figure out how to undo the chain. You have to allow the emotion first.

But once you've done that and you are not so freaked out and you are willing to be having your own experience, then you can start trying to create the emotions that you want to create on purpose, which is the best news. Did you know that you actually can feel happy or loving or safe or hopeful or optimistic or joyful or motivated, whatever you want to feel, by creating that feeling on purpose?

You don't just have to hope it happens to you. You actually can create an emotion on purpose and the way you do that is by coming up with a thought to think on purpose that will create that emotion for you. So just like your negative thoughts create your negative feelings, a sentence goes through your mind and then you have an emotional response to it, the same is true for positive feelings.

If you want to create a positive feeling or a neutral feeling or whatever, you have to come up with a thought that will create that feeling. So you have to do some brainstorming. There's a little bit of work to do there. But just knowing that if you want to feel a certain way, all you need to do is come up with a thought that produces that feeling, that is like the key to the kingdom.

So for instance, when I want to feel love right now for all of my students and all of you who are listening who I don't even know, I can create that emotion on purpose. I don't have to just go through my day thinking like, "Well, I hope I feel loving today."

No, I can wake up in the morning and say, "Okay, I want to consciously think about how much I love my students. I have so much compassion for their human experience and my human experience and what it's like to be having the human experience that is not what you thought you ordered." I have so much compassion for that. I can bring up an emotion of love by thinking about how much I love all of you who are listening.

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And I can do that for my family and for whoever is around me that I want to. If I want to feel motivated to produce all of this extra podcasts and coaching content that I am producing for all of you and for my students in The Clutch, I can create motivation to do that by thinking thoughts that make me feel motivated, like, “I know this work is going to help so many people. I want to share this wisdom with them. I know I can make an impact on people today.” Whatever. Those are my thoughts.

You might have different thoughts that you want to create. But you can create your emotions on purpose. You can create positive emotion by thinking thoughts on purpose to create it. And especially when you are in a very reactive state of mind, for instance, if you’re constantly reading the news and then your brain is just spiraling, or you’re reading Facebook or you’re worrying about getting sick or people you love getting sick, whatever is happening, when you are in that reactive space, it’s so important to consciously produce positive emotion because you’re not going to get a bunch of random happy coincidence inputs to produce it for you probably.

There’s a lot changing in the world and most people around us are very fixated on negative catastrophizing thinking right now. So if you want to produce positive emotion, if you want to feel neutral or happy or optimistic or focused or motivated or loving or whatever it is, you need to create that for yourself and take the ownership of that and take responsibility for that.

It’s not going to just happen to you. So you need to do it for yourself. And the way to do it is to practice thinking thoughts that create those feelings on purpose for you. It takes a little bit of experimentation. You got to brainstorm.

Just like I talked about in episode two, how to neutralize your negative thoughts, the way you know if you believe a thought is how it feels in your body when you think it. And that is true for neutral thoughts and it’s true for positive thoughts. So you do some brainstorming, you think of thoughts that

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you could practice. You can talk with your friends, brainstorm with them, however you want to do it. Write them down.

And then you need to practice thinking them to produce those positive emotions on purpose. Don't just wait and see if your brain happens to produce some positive emotions today because if you're listening to this podcast series and you were attracted to the name, Turning Panic Into Peace, then probably your brain is not on its own producing a lot of positive emotion right now, and that's okay. It's totally normal.

It's called having a human brain. But we have to take control of that and we have to step into the driver's role, not just be in the back of the bus letting our unconscious brain drive all around, just hoping for the best. We have to take the wheel and be willing to experience our negative emotion, allow our negative emotion, not resist it, not freak out, go through that process of allowing, then be ready and willing and able to cultivate positive emotion.

It's almost like if you've ever gone through a breakup, you have to go through the period of crying and feeling terrible, and then on the other side, great, now you're ready to start again and meet someone else. Same idea, except much shorter timeframe.

You just allow the emotion, let it flow through you, don't resist it. Just be willing to feel hot in the face or empty in the stomach or whatever those physical sensations are, focus just on those physical sensations, see how they feel, practice being willing to have them, and then you can start shifting the gears and producing positive emotion by thinking thoughts on purpose that will produce those emotions for you.

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