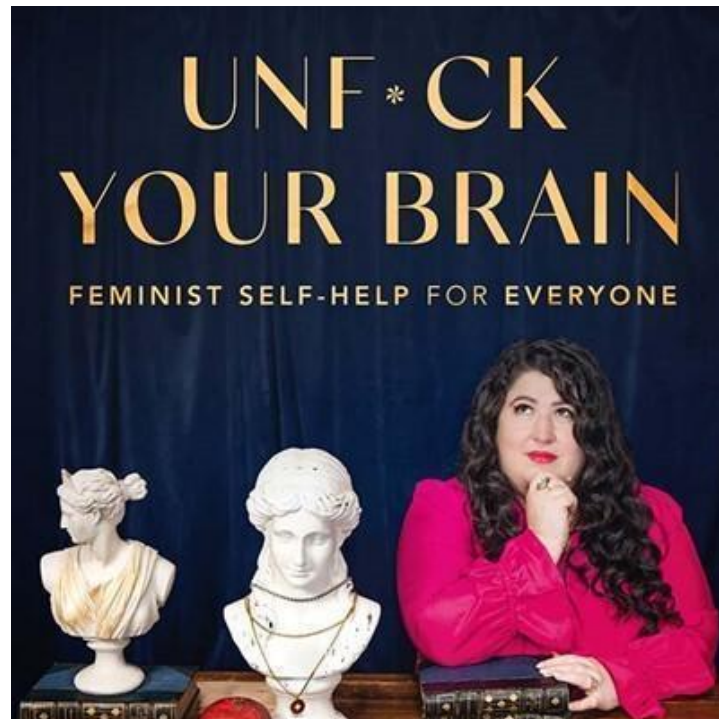


**Live Coaching: Relationships, Productivity & Health
Anxiety During Pandemic
(Turn Panic Into Peace Series #9)**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[UnF*ck Your Brain with 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 all holding up? I hope you have been listening to this miniseries and listening to it more than once if you need to, which you probably do, and starting to get some control of your brain and your emotional resilience. We've talked a lot about what is different now with this pandemic, and with our new reality, and how quickly things have changed, and we've talked a lot about what is the same.

One of the things that I have really seen in myself and in my clients, and that I've mentioned in different ways over the last few episodes is the way in which our new circumstances, of course, are not creating new thoughts and feelings, but more they're not just turning the volume up on old thoughts and feelings, which I have mentioned before, but I really think that it's almost acting like a mirror for all the work that we have been trying to avoid and now have to confront.

That is really what I have been seeing as the weeks have ticked by, and the initial flush of panic is winding down for some people, although, of course, it may be ebbing up for some others depending on where you live, and what is going on around you, or what's happening with you, or your family, or your health, or whatever.

That's not at all to say, "Oh, people should be over their negative emotion by now." That is, of course, not what I mean, but I do think when our circumstances change, we have this initial reaction, and then as the dust starts to settle a little and we start to adapt, I think what we're seeing so

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much is on a social level and on an individual level that this disruption is a time of reckoning with the patterns that we have.

The dysfunctional patterns that we have been enduring in ourselves and in our society. You can see that happening on a social level with all of the features of health disparity, and wealth inequality, and whose health is more on the line now, and access to healthcare, and who we depend on to keep society functioning.

All of these social problems that we have been ignoring. I mean, I have not been ignoring, you may not have been ignoring. We have been thinking about and working on them, but just as a society, we haven't yet, let's say, not necessarily ignored, but hadn't resolved. I think on an individual level, that's happening too, and that's what this podcast is really about, our own thought work.

So, the way that I see that relevant to us individually is that I think that any work that we have been avoiding with ourselves is no longer avoidable. We are now in a situation where we are thrown back much more on our own internal resources. We cannot just go out and party to distract ourselves. We can't go to the office to distract ourselves, and in some places, we can't even go outside to distract ourselves.

So many of our distractions. Our job isn't necessarily a distraction, but just the things that used to occupy your time have just been reduced. We are now, many of us, at home and alone with ourselves, or if we're not at home, if you are an essential worker and you're still going to work, the same thing is still true emotionally. Whatever patterns were going on for you, whatever work you had been getting away with not doing on yourself, is now being heightened, I think.

I think we are all now just not as able to ignore whatever was going on in our brains before, all of the dysfunctional patterns we had, all of the

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anxieties that we weren't dealing with, that we were just trying to escape or ignore, all of this self-sabotaging or procrastination that we were depending on external structures to keep us going.

What I really see is that this change, this social, and public health, and economic crisis is a mirror that is showing each of us the work that we've been trying to escape, and that has been really powerful for me to see, and so powerful for my students in The Clutch, and all of the members that I have been coaching to see yes, a lot has changed outside of us, but also what we're being called to address internally is the same.

Whatever problems you had before this pandemic are the same problems you have now. Only now, the volume dial has been turned all the way up in your mind. So, that is painful, of course, but it's also such an opportunity. To me, this is the time, now more than ever, that we need to get a hold of our brains, and manage our minds, and learn how to increase our emotional resilience.

A lot of the ways that I think people are trying to care for themselves during this time, there's nothing wrong with them, of course. I'm 100% in favor of napping and taking it easy sometimes. It's not about endless productivity, but I do think that a lot of the ways that we try to care for ourselves, always and now, are really just escapism and not true building of emotional resilience.

I think what could be more of a wakeup call than this current moment to show us all of the ways that we have not built that emotional resilience that we need? That we have not learned how to manage our minds yet, and now, that's such an amazing opportunity to do so. However much we resist reality, it's different now. Things have changed. Our lives are going to look different for many of us. Maybe it's for a few months, and maybe it's a year and a half, and maybe it's forever.

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The question is always how can we best prepare ourselves to surf the waves of whatever is coming? I really think thought work and learning to manage your mind, learning how to create the positive emotions you want on purpose, and how to handle and process the negative emotions that we don't necessarily want but are a part of life, and how to be resourceful and be resilient, and tap into that human spirit that has gotten people through so many challenging times. That is our work now. That is really what I think thought work is all about.

So, today, what you're going to get to listen to is some live coaching that I think exemplifies all of this, and the three coaching sessions you're going to get to listen to, I think you will see so much of yourself in them. You will also see the ways in which all of the people being coached, just like me and just like you, are experiencing coming to a reckoning and a confronting with themselves of the kinds of thoughts, and patterns, and belief systems, and self-sabotage, and actions that they were trying to escape, or distract themselves from, or just change before.

I think one of the reasons this is such an opportunity is that often, we take all this action to try to change our circumstances to feel differently. We try to change where our body physically is in space, or who's around us, or who we're talking to, or where we're working, or whatever it is. Now, a lot of those options are not available to us to change our circumstances anymore, and that is why we're really being thrown back on, I think, our own emotional work.

I've definitely noticed that compared to the people I see around me, I feel much calmer. I've had my own health anxieties during this time. I've been sick for part of it, and of course, my amygdala lost its shit. I have family members who are high risk.

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So, of course, it's not my circumstances, but I think that having done thought work for so long now, such a daily practice, I feel so rooted and grounded in myself and in my ability to handle whatever comes my way, that you can change where I physically am or not. You can change the economic circumstances. You can change whatever is around me, but I don't get shaken off the board by those waves.

I think that's why this is such an opportunity for those of us who still have work to do there, and of course, I still have work to do too. We all do. But an opportunity to really engage with what this time is showing us about what is going on with our brains so that we can come out the other side of it stronger, and more resilient, and more focused, and more empowered.

Crisis has a way of clarifying things. That's a truism for a reason. People have a near death experience, and all of a sudden, they understand what's important in life and what they want to do. We're now having a social collective near death experience.

I think when we can be brave, and really engage with that, and not just hide and try to pretend everything's going to go back to normal immediately, but really grapple with the questions of what we're doing with our lives, and is this what we want to be doing with our lives, and how are we engaging with ourselves and others, and how are we living consciously and with intention or not? That is such an opportunity. It's maybe a messy, chaotic opportunity. That's what all transformation is like.

So, you're going to hear in these three coaching sessions exactly that. Of course, I want you to listen to them regardless of whether each of these particular circumstances resonates with you because it's always the thought patterns. You'll see that we really cover a lot of ground. We cover coaching on living with other people you can't control during this time, or any time.

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We cover procrastination and how we're using our time right now, whether we're able to get things in black and white, all or nothing, thinking. We cover really intense health anxiety and how to deal with intrusive thoughts about our health, and other people's health, and how to grapple with those thoughts and realities.

So, I hope that you find these helpful. If you want to get some coaching yourself, The Clutch is the place to do it. You can come join us in The Clutch. I'm doing extra coaching every week in The Clutch for my Clutch members. Live coaching calls, just like the one you're hearing. We're doing those every week.

We have an Ask the Coaches feature where you can submit for coaching in written form, and you get coaching back in just a couple of days. We have an amazing Facebook community where you can post anytime, day or night, and usually get some feedback from your chickens within hours.

We have people all over the world in there who are really stepping up to help and support each other, and manage their minds during this time and any time, and a million amazing resources too. Workbooks on every issue you can think of, and this whole special section on pandemic resources and how to cope with this crisis.

So, if you want to come check us out there, it's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch or just listen through to the end of the episode and when you hear the outro music, if you stay on, I explain how you can just text us to get the link. All right. Let's take it away with the coaching.

Okay, success. Hi, how are you?

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Speaker 1: This is so amazing. I'm great. How are you?

Kara Loewentheil: Good. So, give everybody the short version.

Speaker 1: Oh, gosh. Okay, the short version.

Kara Loewentheil: The three-sentence version because I know you could do a three-hour one, I'm sure.

Speaker 1: That's right. I was so proud of myself because I gave you the three-sentence version. The three-sentence version is I'm in the middle of a divorce. My husband is an alcoholic, and we are living in lockdown land. We are in the same house together with two teenage girls. I said, "Is it possible to live my best life when in close proximity to someone whose people always impact us – somebody whose actions and behaviors impact me on a daily, regular basis?"

Kara Loewentheil: Okay. So, let's answer that question. There's a lot of parts to that. Let's just start with this. How would we know if you're living your best life? Do we get a memo of some kind? How are we going to know?

Speaker 1: That's a great question. When I filled out your coaching form, I was like, "Oh, Kara is going to totally call me out on that."

Kara Loewentheil: You're like, "I can do this. I know what's going to happen here."

Speaker 1: Yeah, so I put some notes together. My best life is connection with inspiring people that are also pushing themselves to grow and expand, a steady stream of adventure, and risk taking, and creativity. Growing into a leader for my industry and my community, surrounding myself with support, and joy, and memorable experiences for myself and my girls. The only

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thing in there that feels like it might be a, “Okay I can’t do this with somebody else in my vicinity,” is having a choice of who’s in my circle and who’s not.

Kara Loewentheil: Okay. Let’s just start with the basics because I know you think that this thought about living your best life is a really great, inspiring thought, but I just want to see what’s actually happening with it. When you think, “I need to be living my best life right now,” how do you feel?

Speaker 1: I don’t think of it as, “I need to be living my best life.”

Kara Loewentheil: Well, what’s the thought?

Speaker 1: The thought is, “What is my best life, and is it possible in these circumstances?”

Kara Loewentheil: Isn’t that so interesting? You’re like, “I don’t know what it is, but I’m still pretty sure it’s not possible in this situation.” Let’s think about this. The whole reason you’re asking this question is that your brain is telling you it’s not possible to live my best life in this situation.

Speaker 1: Right.

Kara Loewentheil: That’s the only reason we have the question. I’m not like, “Is it possible to do my job right now?” My thought is that it is. Right?

Speaker 1: Okay.

Kara Loewentheil: So, your brain is telling you it’s not possible to live my best life in this situation.

Speaker 1: I would say my best life does not include that person.

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Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, but your real life now does. So, you get to decide if you want to keep thinking that your best life doesn't. You think your best life is a real thing outside of you. You're like, "I have a five-factor test, and if all of these factors are met, then I am allowed to think this is my best life." It sounds super inspiring.

Let's think about it like this. If somebody was like, "My best life is I have to be on safari in Africa." Unfortunately, right now, I'm under legal obligation to be in this igloo, and I cannot be in safari in Africa. I have to be somewhere very cold right now. I have to live in an ice building, and I can't be on the planes."

Speaker 1: I'm aware that my best life is in here.

Kara Loewentheil: I know you're saying that, but I don't think you are because you're also telling me that you can't live your best life when you are in the circumstance you're in.

Speaker 1: I get what you're saying, and I do struggle with that. I do just live it, just be it, just have it because it might not be excelling at your job. It might be just getting out walking the dog today. That might be my best.

Kara Loewentheil: That's not what I'm saying at all. That's not what I'm saying at all. Here's what I'm saying. You have an idea of what your best life is, and you think that that's a real thing. You're like, "I've come up with this idea, and so that makes it true that that's my best life."

Speaker 1: Okay, I'm believing my own thought.

Kara Loewentheil: So, you are believing, "I've come up with this idea of my best life, and this is a useful and empowering thought for me." What I want to suggest to you is that when your definition involves something that

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is in contrast with current reality that you can't change right now, that thought is not actually helpful to you.

Speaker 1: I think a lot of the things that I put down when I challenged myself, like what is it that I actually want, are part of my life right now, but I hear you that I'm using it to make myself feel shitty about what's going on right now to feel like I'm not enough or it's not enough.

Kara Loewentheil: I want you to just don't worry about coaching yourself. I just want you to think about it this way. Let's just put this on the side for one second. Why are you staying in the house with your ex-husband and your kids?

Speaker 1: Because he won't leave, and now we're in this. I'm staying here because I've decided that that's my choice around the pandemic and what I can do to be healthy and keep my community healthy.

Kara Loewentheil: Okay, that's what you've chosen. So, why would you want to believe that that isn't part of your best life since that is the choice you've made right now, and this is the life you have right now?

Speaker 1: I don't think that that choice is not part of my best life. I think that having to be near him is not part of my best life.

Kara Loewentheil: No, no, no, no, no. You do think that because you're saying, "I've made the choice to live with this person, and then I'm telling myself that living with this person means I can't have – live my best life."

Speaker 1: Okay, so I've got two competing thoughts going on.

Kara Loewentheil: Right. You're like, "I've chosen this, but then I'm telling myself that this is incompatible with my best life." What I want to offer you is that you get to decide what your best life is. Why of all the thoughts we

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could have about your current life would we want to choose this choice I've made that I'm not going to change is incompatible with having my best life?

Speaker 1: Can I ask a related question? Because part of this feels like it's out of my control.

Kara Loewentheil: His behavior is out of your control, but your thoughts about whether you are living your best life are within your control. You're like, "I have a vision of my best life. It doesn't match my circumstances. So, I guess I can't live my best life."

Speaker 1: Right.

Kara Loewentheil: I'm saying, "No, you have a vision of your best life. It doesn't match the choice you've made. You don't want to change. Let's revise the vision of your best life." That's just an optional thought. Why don't we decide this is your best life?

Speaker 1: Okay, and not worry about his behavior controlling it.

Kara Loewentheil: My best life has nothing to do with whether you can live your best life. You have the terms of the question wrong. You're like, "Can I live my best life, which is a real thing, with this alcoholic in the house who I can't control?" And I'm saying that whether or not something is your best life, that's not a true checklist we have. We have to be like, "I don't know. Can we do X with an alcoholic in the house? Can we do Y with an alcoholic in the house?"

It's like you have this checklist of things for your best life, and then your brain wants to be like, "Well, you can't do number three with an alcoholic in the house, so then you can't live your best life." And I'm saying you could decide, "My best life is the life where I have chosen to stay home during a pandemic with my alcoholic husband and our children. This is my best life."

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I'm going to think of this as my best life, and look for all the ways that this is my best life."

You want to talk about risk and growth and adventure? Let's talk about the emotional work you get to do while living at home with your soon-to-be ex-husband and your kids during a global pandemic. Plenty of growth and work to do. Plenty of connection to work on with your kids or other people.

It's so important to understand the distinction between your original question was, "My best life is a real thing and can I do it with him here?" And I'm saying, "No, your best life is a totally imaginary thing you made up, and why would you want to make one up?"

Kara Loewentheil: That's what I would be curious with yourself about. Yeah, do some work on your story about him, and why it's a problem, and just be curious. I don't know, you'll have to see, there's a lot of different reasons, but there's something going on where it's like you want to fight for the idea that he can negatively impact you. So, I think you just want to be curious with yourself about why that is.

Speaker 1: Right.

Kara Loewentheil: Why do you want that to be the case?

Speaker 1: Yes, I've been working on that a lot. So, I will keep working on it.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, so that's fine. You've still got more work to do, but the good news is now we know you are living your best life. You could choose to believe that, if you want. Of course, it's just a thought. You get to choose. I don't have a certificate either for what your best life is.

Speaker 1: I love that.

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Kara Loewentheil: But I just want to encourage you. You get to decide to believe this is your best life, and I think if you really practice believing that, it would illuminate some of this other stuff for you. Yeah?

Speaker 1: Yeah. It's so great too. You just flipped it. Just believe you're living your best life. Just know that you are.

Kara Loewentheil: That's awesome. Usually, the answer in coaching is it's the opposite of whatever we say.

Speaker 1: I'll remember that.

Kara Loewentheil: You were great and brave to go first.

Speaker 1: I know. Well, I love it. Thank you so much.

Kara Loewentheil: You're welcome. All right. You are up.

Speaker 2: Hi.

Kara Loewentheil: Hi. All right. We're talking about health anxiety, which I think a lot of people on the call will relate to.

Speaker 2: Yeah, it's been pretty bad lately.

Kara Loewentheil: All right. So, let's talk about it.

Speaker 2: Well, I think I've always had some sort of level of anxiety, and after my son was born in 2016, it got really bad about my health. I have fears of just dying and passing away, and me not being there for him. With everything that's been going on lately, it's been really hard not to focus on that. I just don't know how to get out of my brain because then I have anxiety about it, and I literally started having palpitations. Sorry.

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Kara Loewentheil: No, it's okay.

Speaker 2: I have a cycle of freaking out that I'm going to die randomly, and I have these horrible images that'll pop into my brain. Like I'm walking him in a wagon, and I literally have an image of me just collapsing over and dying. I don't know how to make it stop.

Kara Loewentheil: Okay. So, I think we got to start with the anxiety. When you start to feel anxious, so you have that image, you start to feel anxious, and then what do you think?

Speaker 2: Well, I try to just get it out of my brain. I really try not to think about it. I try not to process it, and I don't think that's making matters any better.

Kara Loewentheil: No, I don't think that helps, right?

Speaker 2: No.

Kara Loewentheil: If you think about it from your brain's perspective, your brain, even though it's misfiring a little bit maybe, it thinks it's trying to help you. Your brain is like, "Just so you know, this could happen. My job is to tell you all the things that can happen, and this is one of them." So, when you try to shove it away, you're basically like, "La, la, la, I can't hear you." Right?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Kara Loewentheil: Some people maybe are good at compartmentalizing. I have never been one of them. My brain is like, "Oh, you can't hear me, so I should scream. I should be louder," which is what's happening with you. Right?

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Speaker 2: Yeah. Well, and it'll be endless. If the day starts out good, and I don't have anything, it's an easy to manage day, but then if those images occur, or if my fears pop up and I just try to ignore it, I'll try to stay busy or I end up literally sitting on the couch unfunctional.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, because you're putting so much energy into trying to get away from this thing. Let's just imagine that somebody could say to you and know for sure, "Listen, half your days in life are going to be great. You're not going to have this problem, but half the days, you're just going to have these thoughts sometimes. You can't get rid of them. They're just going to be there." What if it was okay that your brain did this?

Speaker 2: Well, I mean that's part of it, is accepting it that I'm not crazy, that it's just something that my brain does, I guess.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, what if it turned out we all have these thoughts?

Speaker 2: That would probably make me feel a lot better.

Kara Loewentheil: That's so important though. What would you think if I told you, which is 100% true, that whenever I'm driving around and there's like a ravine, my brain is like, "The car could just go over." I'm like, "Why would I do that?" My brain is like, "I don't know, but it could happen."

Speaker 2: Yeah, I've had those too.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, thanks for that update. So, tell me what your thought is. If you know that I have those thoughts too, how does that change what you're thinking about yourself?

Speaker 2: Well, that I'm not the only one that has those thoughts, and I'm not crazy. I got to, I don't know, just accept it and let it pass.

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Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, I think you're making it so much more painful for yourself because when the thoughts come up, you're like, "Oh, my God. I'm crazy, and there's something wrong with me, and this is terrible, and I shouldn't be thinking it." Right?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Kara Loewentheil: There may be people on the call who their health anxiety is new for them in this situation, there may be people like you who've had it, but the same thing applies. The minute that we're like, "Oh, no, not the anxiety. I don't want to feel that. That's a bad feeling. I want it to go away," we make it so much worse. As opposed to like, "Of course our brains are doing this, especially now." It's like we feed our brains this diet of information, and then we're like, "I don't know why you're freaking out."

Speaker 2: Yeah, and I'm trying not to watch the news because I realized that I was definitely making it worse.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, it's like we expect our brains to somehow be superhuman. This is what's in the air right now. This is what people are talking about. It's in the news. You have a part of your brain that's solely devoted to keeping you alive. So, of course it's going to freak out, but we don't have to. The part of us that can reason and watch ourselves, we don't have to join the freak out. How old is your son? You said you have a little kid, right?

Speaker 2: He'll be four on Sunday.

Kara Loewentheil: He's going to be four. Okay. So, tell me the last thing he had a meltdown about.

Speaker 2: He was playing with some gross items outside, and I told him he had to go in and wash his hands, and he didn't want to wash his hands.

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Kara Loewentheil: Then he just lost his shit?

Speaker 2: Oh, yeah. Yes.

Kara Loewentheil: Did you lose your shit and start screaming about hands also?

Speaker 2: No, that one's a pretty regular thing for me.

Kara Loewentheil: Okay. So, what was your thought about it? He's freaking out, and you could have been like, "Oh, my God. You're right. Hand washing. This is a nightmare. This is terrible. This is a disaster," and you could've lost your shit too, but you didn't because what was your thought?

Speaker 2: He'll calm down, and eventually, he'll go in and wash his hands.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah. So, what if that was your thought about your own brain when it starts to freak out?

Speaker 2: That it'll calm down and eventually it'll go back to being okay and stop fixating on it. I've never really thought of it that way.

Kara Loewentheil: Like what if you could parent that part of your brain, the way you parent your son, which is like, "Okay, I hear you're very upset. I understand"? To your son, that's so real. To us, it seems funny, but to them, they're like, "This is hand-washing. This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me. It's so horrible, and I hate it so much," but we don't get sucked into it.

Speaker 2: To talk to that part of my brain, just because my whole life, my mother was traumatic and horrible, and I've always just dumped everything

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down and never acknowledged it. So, it's hard for me to acknowledge those feelings, and let them be, and work through them.

Kara Loewentheil: That's why you're on this call. This is what we're learning right now, so you don't have to keep telling yourself that you can't do it and don't know how. You know how to deal with your son having a freak out, which is that you're like, "Okay, I hear you, buddy. You're very upset right now. I see that. I have compassion for that, but I'm not," we call it being in the pool, "believing all your thoughts about hand-washing and jumping into this with you. I'm not going to mirror it with you."

So, that's what I really want to recommend you try. Can you practice? It's a skill. It won't be perfect the first time, but can you practice holding that space for yourself?

Speaker 2: Okay.

Kara Loewentheil: Because imagine if your son started to freak out, and then you were like, "Oh, God. I can't get these tantrums to go away. This is horrible. Shove down, shove down." It wouldn't work.

Speaker 2: No.

Kara Loewentheil: And it would make him so much more agitated. If you started screaming when he was screaming, now everybody is screaming.

Speaker 2: Just panic everywhere.

Kara Loewentheil: Now, everybody feels worse and terrible. Now, everything is five times worse than it was in the first place. Right?

Speaker 2: I guess I got to be more patient with myself, and it's okay to feel that and just let it go.

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Kara Loewentheil: Not let it go, but just allow it to be there and try to practice. It's almost like practicing talking to yourself. It's like, "Oh, I hear you. I see you're really freaked out right now. That's okay. This doesn't feel amazing. It's not my favorite, but it's okay. These are just feelings."

The reason you don't freak out with your son is that you know that even though his pain is real for him, you know that he's going to be okay. It's going to pass. He's not actually in danger. He thinks washing his hands might kill him. It's very real to him.

Speaker 2: He hates it. He says he hates the way he feels.

Kara Loewentheil: Right, and it's so real to him, but you know that he's not really in danger. So, you are able to just be like, "Okay, buddy. It's okay." That's what I want you to think about trying to practice with yourself. Rather than when your brain starts screaming, you're like, "Ah, I got to start screaming too. Now, everybody scream." It's just like, "Okay, I hear you."

Speaker 2: Just acknowledge it.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah. It's like we think that our only options are resist something or completely believe it and validate that it's true. That's what we think about our thoughts, and really, the way out of that trap, the Buddhist call it the watcher and meditation, but it's just the ability to observe your own thinking and to be like, "Oh, there's a middle ground of, 'I see that this is hard for me, or that I'm having a lot of emotion. I'm not trying to shove it away.'"

It's like we think, "Well, I'm feeling scared, so my thoughts must be really true, and I must really be in danger." As opposed to with a child, you're like, "Oh, I see you're feeling scared. I actually know you're not in danger, but I don't scream at you about it. I just try to be kind to you and reassure you, but I'm not buying into your thoughts." That's what I want you to practice.

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Speaker 2: Okay, I can do that.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, practice parenting your own brain the way you parent your toddler.

Speaker 2: Pretty much talk to the toddler part of your brain.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, exactly, 100%. I frequently am like, “It’s okay. I see you’re really freaking out. It’s all right. I got you.”

Speaker 2: Instead of just letting it take over.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, we’re either smacking it or trying to shove its head under the ground, or just being like, “Well, you’re in charge. Okay. That’s it.”

Speaker 2: Sitting on the couch and not be functionable today.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, it’s like for your kid just being like, “All right, fine. You never wash your hands. You’re right. It is dangerous.” It’s that middle ground.

Speaker 2: [inaudible 0:35:23] the rest of our lives.

Kara Loewentheil: Exactly. Can I observe and try to hold that space? So, that’s what I want you to practice. Okay?

Speaker 2: All right.

Kara Loewentheil: Little self-compassion.

Speaker 2: I will.

Kara Loewentheil: And not trying to get rid of it. It’s just we’re humans. We’re going to have negative emotions sometimes. Anytime we’re like, “I

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got to get rid of this,” imagine if your thought about your son was, “I have to make sure he never ever has this thing about his hands again.” You’d feel so out of control because you can’t control that.

Speaker 2: No. So, they’re always going to be there. It’s just managing them better.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, and I think as you get better, it’s a skill. As you practice allowing and holding that space for yourself, I do think the intensity and duration will go down, but we’re not trying to get to zero.

Speaker 2: No.

Kara Loewentheil: Nothing has gone wrong when they come up. It’s just how your brains are.

Speaker 2: I just recently started listening to your podcast, and even just over the past couple of weeks, I’ve noticed a huge difference. My palpitations have gone back to next to nothing.

Kara Loewentheil: That’s awesome. So, you already are doing the work. Just keep going.

Speaker 2: It’s going to take time.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, it’s a skill. Totally. But you got this.

Speaker 2: Thank you so much.

Kara Loewentheil: You’re welcome. Okay. There we go. Hi.

Speaker 3: Hey.

Kara Loewentheil: How are you?

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Speaker 3: I'm doing great. How are you?

Kara Loewentheil: Good. So, we're talking about getting things done in quarantine. Yeah?

Speaker 3: Yes, and it's still very applicable. I was hoping it wouldn't be.

Kara Loewentheil: I think it's applicable to everybody on the call. So, you're not alone.

Speaker 3: Thank you so much for picking me.

Kara Loewentheil: You're welcome. All right. So, tell us what's happening.

Speaker 3: Studying. You went to law school, right?

Kara Loewentheil: I did.

Speaker 3: So, you know all about that. I don't know why, but I, for some reason, can't get myself to sit down and just do it. Then when I sit down and just do it and try to, I get distracted every five minutes, and I'm just not getting anything done. There's this overwhelming feeling all the time, and anxiety, and just like a numbing, frozen, anxiety is the best way I could describe it.

Kara Loewentheil: What are you anxious about?

Speaker 3: I think I just really don't want to do it because I'm so worried about my family, and Europe, and whatever my brain tells me to worry about.

Kara Loewentheil: Okay. So, before COVID-19, did you always do all your work on time, and you loved it, and had no problem?

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Speaker 3: No, I've always had a problem with this.

Kara Loewentheil: So, we just all have to be wise to our brains because now, your brain can be like, "Listen, it's very important to worry about the state of the world and our parents' health. This is very legitimate. So, we can't do our work." I have to take it with a grain of salt because before COVID, it was whatever it was worrying about instead. This is for all of us.

I've said this a million times on the podcast by now. Whatever we're thinking now is what we were thinking before. The whole reason I keep stressing that is that when everybody else is freaking out, it's very easy to start to become very gullible towards our own brains and just be like, "Oh, you're right. It's about health. So, it's very serious, and I can't do my work."

Speaker 3: It's true.

Kara Loewentheil: So, before COVID, why were you not doing your work?

Speaker 3: Yeah, that would be the better question because I don't know what it is. I've been doing a lot of self-work with your podcast, and just CBT in general, but I don't know. For some reason, I can't get to the bottom of it. I know I want to be in school. I didn't go straight out of high school. It was my decision. I'm taking out the loans. I want to be in school. I want to do it.

I think I'm just in college right now in a smaller college, and I'm from Hungary originally, and there's a really big prestige around the name of your big university, and I feel like maybe that might be part of it, but I feel like it's such a small, shitty college or whatever like, "Oh, I don't have to put in the work."

Kara Loewentheil: You're like, "I'll just do a shitty job because it's a shitty college."

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Speaker 3: That's my guess, but I really don't know.

Kara Loewentheil: Let's just get down to really basics. Let's say it's time after this call to do your homework. What is the thought that you're going to have?

Speaker 3: That even if I get that one question done or that one assignment done, there is still so many, that it doesn't matter because it's such a small thing. I'm still going to fail all my courses, and I'm going to go drop out of school.

Kara Loewentheil: Okay. We're going straight to fail all the courses and drop out of school.

Speaker 3: Because that happened before. I did fail a couple courses, and now I have to like redo them, and it's a whole thing. I'm like, "Oh, it's just going to happen again." Some days, I'm like, "I don't want this to happen again."

Kara Loewentheil: But you kind of do because you're just repeating the same cycle. So, when you failed your courses the first time, why did you fail? What was the thought?

Speaker 3: I think it got to a point where I wasn't doing my work, and it was so much of it. Then I was like, "Oh, you know what? I'll just redo the course." I just gave up.

Kara Loewentheil: Your total perfectionist fantasy. You're like, "I'll just start over."

Speaker 3: I think so. I'm scared to call it that because I don't know.

Kara Loewentheil: 100% you were like, "I'll just start over, and then I'll do it perfectly. I'll have the same brain, but I'll just get a totally different result."

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Speaker 3: You know what? I do that every single morning. If I don't wake up at 7:00, which is my time when I want to wake up, I wake up at 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, the whole day is ruined.

Kara Loewentheil: What percentage of the time do you actually wake up at 7:00 a.m.?

Speaker 3: 10%. Well, with COVID, it's been a bit weird, but before COVID, it was actually pretty good. I would say like three to four days out of the week I was up before 7:00.

Kara Loewentheil: That's 50%.

Speaker 3: Oh, sorry, work week. So, from Monday to Friday, three to four days.

Kara Loewentheil: Okay, fine. So, let's say it's 70%, but you just know that consistently you're going to do the 70% of the time. You're just deciding ahead of time that 30% of the time, you'll just do nothing.

Speaker 3: Yes.

Kara Loewentheil: But it's just important to own that because in your brain, this is like perfectionism. You are 100% in that perfectionist.

Speaker 3: Really? That's so great.

Kara Loewentheil: You think you're not because you're not perfect.

Speaker 3: Because I don't do good enough work.

Kara Loewentheil: Of course, this is the thing about perfectionism. Perfectionists have no idea. People who say they're perfectionists are not. Perfectionists are people who all think they're not perfectionists because

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they're not perfect enough. They're like, "If I was a perfectionist, I would be more perfect." No.

Speaker 3: Okay.

Kara Loewentheil: Perfectionism is having this thought pattern of all or nothing, which is what you have.

Speaker 3: I totally have. I have it with everything.

Kara Loewentheil: Everything. Of course, the way you do one thing is the way you do everything. It's black and white thinking, all or nothing. I'm amazing or I'm terrible. If I didn't get up at 7:00 a.m., fuck the whole day. This person either loves me or hates me.

Speaker 3: Oh, wow. Even that? That's crazy.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, all of it.

Speaker 3: I say that all the time. I'm like, "You just love me or you hate me."

Kara Loewentheil: In your brain, you're the kind of person who only loves and hates things because that's the way that you're thinking about things.

Speaker 3: I get called out on that all the time too.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, exactly. So, I don't know if you've listened to it, but I definitely want you to listen to the episode on Perfectionist Fantasies.

Speaker 3: I think I didn't even listen to it.

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Kara Loewentheil: Of course, because you're like, "I'm not a projectionist." So, let me give you the preview. You need to listen to it. It's your whole life in one episode.

Speaker 3: Absolutely.

Kara Loewentheil: The idea is that what perfections get sucked into this constant all or nothing because we're so self-critical. So, we just think like, "Well, once I'm finally just perfect, that's when I'll be allowed to be nice to myself or accomplish anything," and we get addicted to the cycle. It feels so good to think about how we're going to be perfect in the future.

Speaker 3: Oh, the days I spent planning.

Kara Loewentheil: That is perfectionism in a nutshell, is to spend a day doing a perfectly color-coded plan that you secretly know you will not be able to keep with two or three days, but you get this high from doing the plan because that's the only moment that you allow yourself to think positively about yourself. You're like, "Future me who does this plan, I'm going to be good enough."

Speaker 3: Exactly.

Kara Loewentheil: Then it's just this vicious cycle. So, you have work to do. We're not going to go from zero to a hundred on this call, but the biggest thing you have to learn is the most uncomfortable thing for a perfectionist, which is doing a B- job and being okay with it.

Speaker 3: Wow, that's great. I have that quote from you, "B- and out the door." Is that how it goes?

Kara Loewentheil: Exactly, yeah.

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Speaker 3: My friend who introduced me to your podcast, she told me that all the time, and I was like, “Oh, yeah. That doesn’t really apply to me.”

Kara Loewentheil: Sure. You’re like, “I’m already terrible,” and I could do it perfectly. You have to get used to doing a little bit at a time and seeing the value in doing a little bit. So, the other podcast I want you to listen to. Did you listen to The Infinite 1% one? I like that you skipped all of the ones that would be relevant to you.

Speaker 3: That’s crazy.

Kara Loewentheil: You listened to all the ones that are about working harder, and you were like, “Yes, I need to work harder. I have to make another ambitious plan.”

Speaker 3: The one about how to procrastinate, and put your phone away, and get off of social media. I hide my phone all the time.

Kara Loewentheil: I want you to listen to The Infinite 1% also. Probably just listen to any of the ones that you skipped that you thought weren’t about you. All of those are probably you. The point of The Infinite 1% is that we think, especially perfectionist think, if you’re not going to do it amazingly, there’s no point. We think it’s people who do nothing, people who do a little, they’re all down here. Then there’s the people who do all of it, they’re the amazing ones.

Speaker 3: Oh, yeah.

Kara Loewentheil: So, no, wrong. The biggest difference is between people who do nothing and people who do a little. That’s the infinite difference. That’s going from one category to another. Whether you do a little or a lot, that’s just repetition.

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Speaker 3: My mind is blown right now. I moved to Europe because I wanted to go to med school, but I didn't even want to go to med school. I just wanted to be a doctor because they do it all.

Kara Loewentheil: Exactly. You're like, "If I were a doctor, I'd get up at 7:00 a.m. every day.

Speaker 3: Exactly. I would just love studying if I were a doctor.

Kara Loewentheil: My whole brain would just be totally changed. No, you have to change it on purpose little bit by little bit. So, The Infinite 1% is all about the difference between doing nothing and doing a little. There's a great book. Well, I'll just tell you it.

Speaker 3: Oh, yes.

Kara Loewentheil: The book is like 300 pages long and 297 pages of it are repetitive. It's self-published, so nobody edited it. It's called *The Slight Edge*. It's basically the concept of compound interest, looking at the map on compound interest. It seems like it's nothing to save a penny a day, but if you are investing, I don't have the map at the top my fingers, but the idea of compound interest is that it's exponential.

Or if you want a terrible example, you can look at the COVID cases. The different exponential growth of something small. The same is true of taking small efforts. They add up exponentially, but perfectionists just think it's not worth it until we are at that exponential level. We somehow think we can skip the part where you have to do the little bits that add up to it.

Speaker 3: Wow. Wow, wow, wow. Oh, my gosh. How did I not realize this?

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Kara Loewentheil: The word perfectionism trips people up a lot. So, you got a lot of good work to do, but the good news is now you know what the problem is.

Speaker 3: No, that's awesome. There's so many resources out there on that. I see them all the time. I'm like, "Oh, good for them."

Kara Loewentheil: Don't get sucked into doing a ton of research and perfectionist planning.

Speaker 3: Instead of studying.

Kara Loewentheil: That's not what I want you to do. I want you to listen to those two podcast episodes, and then I want you to come up with a thought you're going to practice like, "Doing two problems is 200% more than doing zero problems," or something like that. A thought that helps you do a little bit of work rather than everything or nothing.

Speaker 3: Wow, I love that. That's so cool that you have episodes on it too that I can listen.

Kara Loewentheil: That's the idea of B- work. A lot of people listening have the same problem you have. I used it all the time when I was building my business. I can either not put anything out because it's not perfect and won't get me 100 clients, in which case I will have \$0, or I could put something out that is maybe not amazing.

Maybe I'll get one client that will still be, at the time I was like doing one-on-one coaching, whatever. I's like, okay, but that'll be \$2,000. That's how crazy a perfectionist brain is. It's like, if it's not perfect, I'd rather make \$0 than \$100,000.

Speaker 3: That's crazy.

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Kara Loewentheil: No, let's make a little first, and then keep building on it.

Speaker 3: Do you think that comes from just worried about whatever, other people judging you, you judging yourself?

Kara Loewentheil: Who knows. It's genetic. It's how you're raised. The good news is I think it's identifiable, and we know what the treatment is, which is to practice. Really, for yourself, I used to do this all the time at my coaching practice. I would be like, "Okay, brain, let me just make sure I understand. What you're saying is it's better to definitely fail my class by doing no work than to do 20 minutes of work and have a chance of not failing. Let's just be clear that's what we're saying."

Speaker 3: Yeah, it totally makes sense to spend a day on the couch because I woke up at 10:00 instead of 7:00.

Kara Loewentheil: Right, you're like, "Because I only have four hours to do things now, I'll do nothing."

Speaker 3: I'll start again tomorrow. Tomorrow, I'll get it perfect.

Kara Loewentheil: It'll be perfect. Right. That's why all of the work on how you talk to yourself, when you listen to those episodes you'll see, is all part of it because when we imagine how perfect we'll be tomorrow, that's when we stop shitting on ourselves for those few moments. That's why they feel so good. We have to learn how to stop doing that now. Otherwise, we'll keep chasing that.

Speaker 3: That's crazy. That totally ties into my whole mental health situation lately too, which is the whole like depressive balls because, and too, because of all the harsh words that I tell myself.

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Kara Loewentheil: Exactly, exactly. All right. You got some good work to do.

Speaker 3: Thank you so much.

Kara Loewentheil: You're welcome.

Speaker 3: This was amazing. You're amazing.

Kara Loewentheil: I'm sure at least half the people on this call had the exact same thought pattern, probably more.

Speaker 3: Working from home too, I thought that this would be useful for everybody.

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