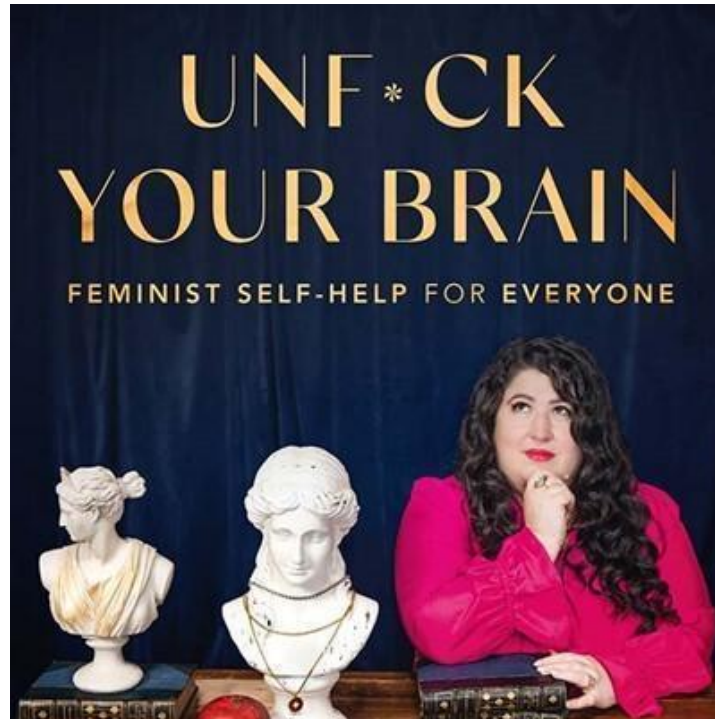


UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode



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. We are doing one of my favorite kinds of episodes today which is a Q&A episode. So I asked all of you all to submit questions on social media, on Instagram specifically. If you don't follow me on Instagram, there's a good reason to follow me on Instagram because when I'm going to do a Q&A episode, that's where I ask for questions. My profile is just my name @karaloewentheil, you can find me there.

Okay, so lots of good questions today. I like to start with something a little easy, just kind of ease us in. So the first question I'm going to answer is what's your favorite cold summer treat, sweet or savory? I don't know what a savory cold treat would be, like frozen pretzels. I tend to be a savory snack person but if it's going to be cold, I'm going to be honest, coffee ice-cream is always going to be my choice. And I really struggle with being an adult and understanding that if I eat ice-cream that has caffeine in it at 9.00pm, I'm not going to be able to go to sleep on time.

So I would say once a season I forget and I eat ice-cream or even more so an ice-cream sundae at night and then I am up until 2:00am. So I have to try to get it done in the afternoon, but that's my answer on that.

Okay, second level and question, still kind of a softball but would you ever consider a European branch of your business like Paris? I mean if we're talking officially, that seems complicated. It's notoriously kind of difficult as a foreigner to set up a business in France, especially. So I'm not sure if we would have an official branch. But would I like to spend two months in Paris every year? I would. But did I partner with somebody who has two small

UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode

children who have to live in Brooklyn to be near their mother as well for the next 10 to 13 years? Yes, I also did that. Not 10 to 13, 10 or 11 years.

So I'm in Brooklyn for a while but some day, I've already been very clear with the gentleman consort that since I have agreed to now live in Brooklyn for a decade, I get to be in charge of where we move after that. Alright, let's get into some more serious questions. Now, those are very serious questions. Listen, coffee ice-cream's a serious matter.

First question, how do you determine when relationship issues are on you or the other person? So I think this is one of those questions where, let me preface this by saying, I think a lot of really good coaching is somebody comes to you with a question and you show them why that's not the most helpful question. People think that you come to a coach with a question and they answer it. But often my job is to show you that you're asking a not very helpful question for yourself.

Any question where you are trying to figure out is it my fault or their fault, is it my fault or their fault, is it my fault or their fault is really a useless question. This is not a moral thing. It's not more moral to forgive. It's not about being the bigger person. It's not moral at all. It's literally just that when you ask yourself that you don't know how to figure out an answer. And so the actual concrete result we're getting is just that you are balancing back and forth debating that question with yourself for days, months, weeks, years.

So when I say, "Let's put aside the question of blame", it's not about letting the other person off the hook. It's not about turning the other cheek. It's not about forgiveness being a virtue. It's not about any of that. It's not even about, the whole point is even if we're thinking about it as forgiveness or turning the other cheek or whatever. We're were still sort of in this mindset of I have to figure out which one of us is wrong. I have to figure out which

UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode

one of us is bad. I have to figure out whether it's my fault or their fault. And that would be fine if you could ever figure it out.

But if you're asking this question and you're coming with this to coaching it means that you have gotten stuck in what I call a thought cul-de-sac. It's like you're just going around and around the cul-de-sac and you're never ever, ever, ever getting out of the neighborhood. So I just don't find that question helpful. Who cares on some level in the sense that you're not able to decide and feel sure about it. So it's not worth thinking about so much. You have to ask yourself a more useful question.

So if you're in a relationship and an issue seems like it's not being solved then the question is do you want to be in that relationship? It sort of doesn't matter if it's technically your fault or technically the other person's fault. I mean that's kind of a funny phrase because there's no such thing as technically. We're not getting a letter from the universe saying who's at fault. I just want you to step outside of that paradigm. Stop trying to decide that and just decide, do I want to be in this relationship.

If you think it might be you and you see there are things in your behavior that you would like to change, then just change those things, work on that and then see what happens. If it resolves the issue then great, it was you and you fixed it. If it doesn't resolve the issue then maybe it wasn't you or maybe it's not being caused by what you think or whatever else. The worst thing you can do is just get stuck going back and forth about this. Either decide it doesn't matter, do I want to be in this relationship as it is right now? And if the answer is no then that's my answer.

Or decide I'm going to take responsibility for anything that I can control here and I am going to assume that these relationship issues are coming from me and I'm going to do my own internal work. And when I have resolved that, if they're still here then I'm going to know it's not me and then

UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode

I'll know what to do. Just choose something. There's no way to know what is whose fault in any way that will make your brain feel sure because I'm 100% positive that if you're stuck in this loop, you've asked your therapist or you've asked your friends or you've made lists or whatever.

Your brain is not able to settle on it so it's not a useful framework. So I really recommend that you just ask yourself, do I want to be in this relationship the way it is? These are the issues we have. If they're never getting solved, do I want to be in this? Do I want to change my thoughts so that I see these problems in a different way or do I want to leave this relationship? Or if you're not going to do that, the other approach is to say to yourself, "Okay, well, I'm going to change everything that I think I can see that I'm doing that contributes. And then I'm going to see where we are."

Sometimes when you change yourself you realize, now it's fine, it was you. Sometimes you change the way you're showing up and nothing really changes for the other person or in the dynamic and you get more clarity that it isn't you, you do want to leave. But you can't get there thinking about it, all you can do is decide to take responsibility or to take some action then.

Okay, someone says, how to my manage my mind, re: my mom who hasn't respected boundaries for 40 plus years? So this is obviously a very big question that I probably can't completely answer from this amount of space. But my guess is that you are thinking about boundaries wrong. So I would definitely recommend you go listen to the episode about boundaries which is one of the earlier episodes. Boundaries are not something that you do to control other people.

So it is very common that if you set a boundary somebody won't 'respect' the boundary. The boundary isn't there to make them respect it. The boundary is there so that you have a plan for what you're going to do if someone crosses the boundary. So if the boundary is, mom, you can't

UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode

show up at my house unannounced. If and when you do, I'm not going to come to the door. The boundary is not to stop your mom from showing up at your house. You can't control her.

The boundary is that you don't have a big debate with yourself about whether you're going to answer the door, should you answer the door, are you being bad, all of that. The boundary is so you know what you're going to do. I'm not going to answer the door. That's my decision. I've thought through my reasons. I like my reasons. I have my own back on this. I have my own support in this, that's what I'm going to do. So I mean you have a lot of evidence that your mom's not going to respect your boundaries.

So you have to decide, do you want to keep interacting with her? And if so, how can you think about your boundaries as something you're doing for you? But embedded in this is your belief that your mother should respect your boundaries. And we could all agree that she should, but she doesn't. So being really focused on this idea that she should respect your boundaries if that's what you think is probably causing you a lot of emotional suffering. When the truth is, she doesn't, based on what you're saying.

So how does it help you to constantly be thinking that she should? She doesn't. Really coming to terms with that reality, you have a mother who does not respect your boundaries. If you've said them clearly and she doesn't respect them, meaning she continues to act in ways that you've set a boundary around, your only job is to uphold the boundary for yourself. But if you keep focusing on how she should be different, you're going to be in a lot of emotional suffering. Her boundary breaking doesn't cause your feelings.

Your own thinking about what she's doing is what causes your feelings and the belief that she should be different is part of the problem here. So you

UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode

can change your understanding of boundaries even, but you also have to release that emotional resistance to her being the way she is. That doesn't mean that you have to answer the door. You can absolutely have the boundaries of what kinds of interactions you are willing to have or not have, what's up for discussion, how much time you're going to spend, when you're going to be available.

All of those are boundaries you can set. But emotionally you will continue to struggle so long as your belief, conscious or unconscious, is she shouldn't be the way she is. The terrible thing about human autonomy is that we all get to be the way we are. You get to be the way you are even though your mom really thinks you should be different probably. In her mind, she's like, well, I show up at the door because my kid won't talk to me on the phone so I come to the door. My kid should talk to me on the phone, I mean I'm their mother.

That's her thought process and your thought process is, don't fucking come to my door. I mean I'm making up these examples. But the point is that so much of our suffering in life is not caused by the person's behavior, but by our belief that they should be different than they are and our belief that we are right about who they should be and how they should behave. But if we want autonomy to live life according to our own thoughts and feelings and what we believe, the problem is everybody else gets it too, which is really unfortunate, but also philosophically very hard to argue with.

So I would do some work around that. You can set the boundaries but boundaries do not protect you from other people crossing them and they don't protect you from negative emotion. You can't set a boundary wanting your mom to obey the boundary so that you don't have to have the feeling you have when she crosses one. You've got to be responsible for your own feelings and that comes from releasing that resistance to her being who

UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode

she is. And then you'll be able to set and keep boundaries because it will be about practicalities and not about trying to control her or your feelings.

Someone asked, "I enjoy my own company and being alone. How do I know if I really want a partner?" So I think part of what's embedded in this that's really interesting is the idea that wanting a partner does or should stem from not liking your own company and not wanting to be alone. It's like, well, I do like being alone so how would I know if I want one? I think these are two different things. You can like your own company and prefer to be single or you can like your own company and want to have a partner.

I like my own company quite a lot and having a partner involves spending less time with myself than I used to. And sometimes I miss that and I try to make space for that in my relationship. But I don't really think these things have to be related in this way. When you ask yourself, how do I know if I really want a partner? I don't know. How do you know? This is another example of a question that isn't that useful. How do I know if I really want a partner? What does that mean? How would you know?

I think a much more useful question to ask yourself, number one, maybe you know, let's just see. Do I want a partner or not? If you can't say, I don't know, what's your answer and why is that your answer? What are the thoughts you have about having a partner? But I think that the reason that you're kind of spinning about this is that you haven't linked up with this idea that if you didn't enjoy your own company then somehow it would be more worthwhile to get a partner. And I just want you to separate these things in your mind.

I don't really think they're connected, they shouldn't be connected. You can 100% love your life alone and love your own company and that's totally different from do I want a partner. And ask yourself why, what would be my reasons for wanting a partner or not wanting a partner. And start to look at

UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode

those reasons. But you can't ask yourself a question like, how do I know if I really want something and expect you to have an answer for yourself. It's basically you're just saying to yourself, I don't know if I want one.

You're not going to get clarity from constantly saying to yourself, I don't know if I want this. I would make a list of why you think you might want one, why you think you might not and look at those thoughts and see what you find.

Someone said, how do you go through a breakup so you can go from loving to being indifferent towards your ex? Well, I think this is another one where it's interesting that the premise is that the goal is to become indifferent. If you're trying to tell yourself to stop loving someone and start feeling indifferent, that's going to be very challenging. Your brain doesn't know how to stop thinking something. You don't know how to stop feeling something. That doesn't work as a change mechanism. We can't just tell ourselves, stop thinking this, stop feeling this.

And this idea that what you need to feel is indifferent is also just interesting. It's like that's what we can imagine. We're like, well, loving someone during a breakup or after a breakup is painful. And so what I need to do is be indifferent. But now when you're doing that, you have an agenda. You're trying to rush yourself through your emotional process. So you're rejecting where you are. You're telling yourself it's not okay to feel this. It's not okay to feel love. It's not okay to feel grief. I need to get to feeling indifferent.

So just imagine if you have a kid who's having a hard time with something they're upset about and you tell them, "Stop feeling that way, you should feel fine." That doesn't work. All it does is teach the kid that it's not okay to express their feelings and that they need to try to shove those feelings down and numb out from them in order to get approval. And that's kind of what you're doing to yourself when you have an agenda for your emotions.

UFYB 293: Boundaries, Breakups, and Relationships: A Q+A Episode

When you have an agenda for your feelings, and you're sort of telling yourself it's not okay to be here, I need to get to this other place. That makes it very hard to actually process and experience your emotions. So the best way to go through the breakup and go through whatever the emotional journey is, is to not have an agenda for it. Can you wake up every day with, I'm open to whatever feelings come up today?

I'm going to work on them. I'm going to look at my thoughts that are creating them. I'm going to be curious about myself and my experience. That's a very different feeling from what you're doing now, it sounds like, which is looking at your watch every two minutes being, "I don't know, we're still not at indifferent. Guys, come on, we're trying to get to indifferent." Rushing them along. So the way to get through any emotional process is to be willing to be in the process for as long as it takes, which I know, it's the worst answer. I feel that way too, but it's also the only true one.

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