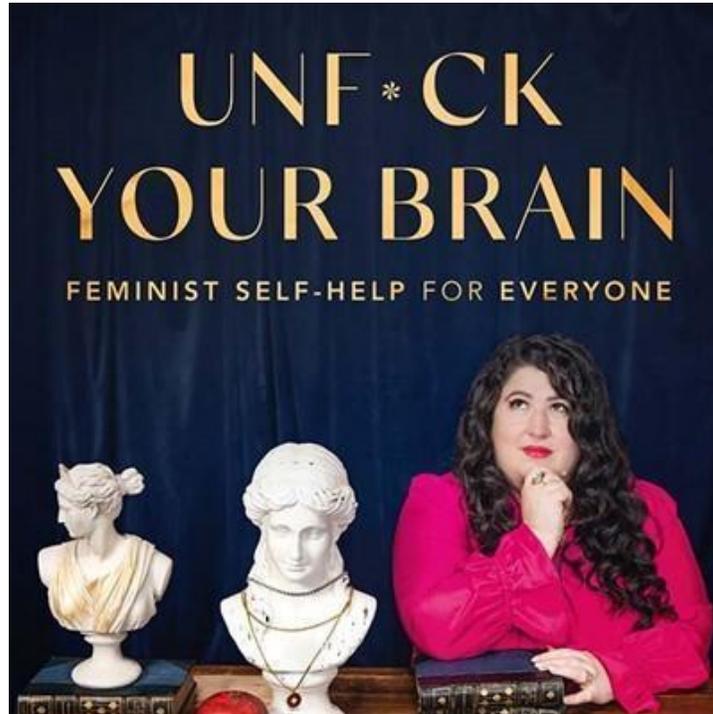


UFYB 468: How to Microdose Negative Emotions & Become Unstoppable



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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I'm going to be very upfront with you all about how square I am. I have never microdosed a drug. I've never microdosed shrooms, ecstasy, even GLP-1s, whatever else people microdose these days. Caffeine, sure, but that's more of a macrodose.

But what I do know how to do is microdose my negative emotions. And this one ability and habit has built my capacity to tolerate any feeling that comes up. And that in turn has built my capacity to create any outcome that I want in my life. So today I want to teach you this practice too, because when you are willing to feel anything and you can feel anything, you can do anything. So let's get into it.

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 friends. How are you all doing? I just wrapped up the in-person retreat for my Mission Impossible Mastermind members. We were at this beautiful private club in Tribeca called Maxwell Social, gorgeous, and it was so wonderful. It's a small intimate group and we have so many renewals that we only add a few people each time we open, which is only twice a year anyway. So this was one of the times that we had some few lucky new members who were meeting the group and just so beautiful to see how quickly they felt at home and safe and comfortable. Because that is really the magic of being in community with women who get it and women who are managing their minds. So everyone is just bringing curiosity and compassion and empathy to the table.

Just a really beautiful special space and it's so fun to go deep with each of these women and get to know them and coach them over the long term. And we were talking about such a variety of goals, like everything from

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super concrete, I want to make a million pounds or a million dollars in my business this year. We have it's international, so different currencies. Or something really more emotionally nuanced, like I want to increase my self-acceptance. Being able to work through concrete and abstract goals and see how they all tie back to the same foundational principles, I think is really powerful.

And one of the students came up to me privately afterwards and said something that was really striking and that I thought really inspired this episode, because we were talking about allowing emotions and she said, it's really wild, but I went to therapy for years and I've had other coaches, and everyone has always told me I need to feel my feelings. But I just had no idea what that meant until I learned it from you, and I was always embarrassed because it seemed like this was apparently supposed to be obvious and everyone else knew what it meant.

But that really made me realize that I should talk about this because the truth is that so many of us are like this client. Like we have heard so many times that we're supposed to feel our feelings, but we actually have no idea what that means. What we do know is that our negative emotions feel unbearable, like they're upsetting, they're distressing. We are desperate to escape them. So, when we imagine feeling our feelings, we don't really know what that means, but we are sure that it sounds like a real bad time, right? Like in fact, many of us who came to therapy or came to coaching or whatever, it was precisely because we feel bad and we want to feel better. So it seems extremely undesirable when someone tells us to feel our feelings more.

And I totally used to think this. I really remember distinctly being in therapy in my 20s and my therapist would talk to me about feeling my feelings. And I was like, I already feel my feelings, way too much, thank you. Like, I am nothing but feelings. The whole problem is that I am anxious all the time and I cry at the drop of a hat and I feel bad and heavy and exhausted and

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like, I am just a ball of negative emotion. Like, what do you mean I need to feel my feelings more? That doesn't sound possible or desirable. It definitely doesn't seem like the problem.

But the truth was, I didn't know how to feel my feelings. And my therapist at the time didn't know how to explain that to me or teach it to me. What I knew how to do was notice I was having a feeling I didn't like and then freak out. I knew how to avoid. I knew how to try to escape from my feelings. I knew how to try to numb out. I knew how to try to distract myself. I knew how to try to control everything around me to make the feeling go away. I knew how to send 10 impulsive text messages or call a friend and get validation or eat a pint of ice cream or watch TV or scroll social media. Like I knew how to do lots of things when I started feeling a feeling. But none of those were actually feeling the feeling.

And none of that worked very well, right? All of those attempts to resist and distract and escape and numb and whatever, didn't actually work well. They actually escalated my distress because when they didn't work, now I felt out of control of my own body. I felt trapped with this feeling and the feeling didn't go away. It just got shoved down and I could still tell it was down there, right, like lurking. And so I felt even worse.

So that whole mess, starting to have a feeling, immediately resisting and freaking out and trying to make it go away or trying to get away from it and then feeling out of control, all of that, that whole like ball of feeling and reaction and freak out and avoidance, that's what we think it means to feel our feelings. Like we label that whole mess having a feeling. But that's not a feeling. That is a feeling and then a reaction and an escalation and an attempt to escape or distract. It's like a feeling and a chain reaction and then we're calling that whole thing just the feeling.

So most of us, myself included in my 20s, don't know what a feeling is. We know what it's like to resist a feeling and we know what it's like to make it

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10 times worse, and we know what it's like to have it constantly popping up when we're trying to avoid it. We don't actually know what it's like to just feel a feeling start to finish with no interruptions or distractions or resistance. And this is really a problem, this conflation that we make for two reasons. So after this quick break, I'm going to explain why it's a problem that we do this and how to use microdosing your negative emotions to solve both of these problems.

So the first problem with resisting or trying to distract or escape our emotions is that it just sucks. It feels way worse than just having a feeling. And I know that is something that you can currently probably understand intellectually but can't really feel in your body the difference, and that's totally fine. That's why I'm going to teach you how to microdose your negative emotions in this half of the episode. So you're going to see what I mean. But when we resist our emotions, the feeling actually lasts longer and we activate our nervous systems because we're communicating to ourselves that our own feelings, sensations inside our body are a threat, are bad, need to be gotten away from. And that revs everything up and really escalates us because now we've told our body that something inside our body is a threat.

Imagine that you taught your body that your kidneys were a threat and your kidneys are inside your body and you can't get them out. So you're going to be constantly freaked out because you're constantly setting off your threat detection system and your nervous system is escalating and you're getting stress hormones in your body pouring out because you have identified something that's inside your body as a threat to yourself. That's what's happening when we resist or try to distract or try to get away from our emotions. So that makes everything feel 10 times worse and that sucks on its own, right? It's unnecessary suffering.

But second, maybe even more importantly, what stands between you and any outcome you want is the feeling that you are not willing to have. So if

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you think about the things you want to do but are not doing, what you are avoiding is a feeling. You don't want to feel the anxiety that comes up when you consider taking a financial risk, so you stay at your stable job and don't start a business. You don't want to feel the rejection that happens when a date doesn't work out, so you don't go on enough dates to meet your partner. You don't want to feel the loneliness that might happen after a breakup, so you don't tell your partner the truth about how you feel because you don't want to risk that.

You don't want to feel the shame that comes up when you try something and fail, so you don't ask for that new client. You don't negotiate that new salary. You don't run for office in your hometown. You don't want to feel the overwhelm and hopelessness that comes up at the end of the day, so you numb out with wine or Netflix. You don't want to feel the discomfort of being bored, so you scroll on your phone way too late. Everything you want is on the other side of being willing to have unpleasant feelings.

But it's very hard to force yourself to run into the fire. I have been teaching this for years and encouraging people to actually experience their emotions. But of course, nobody wants to because it feels like it's going to suck. And it is in the short term. So this is why I want to teach you how to microdose your negative emotions to build the skill of having them.

So what does that mean? Essentially it means reducing the psychological barrier to feeling your feelings by making the experience much less intimidating or overwhelming. So that's the purpose of microdosing your emotions. You are going to reduce your unwillingness to do it by making the thing that you imagine will suck just a very short experience.

When we're in the habit of avoiding and numbing out and resisting our emotions, we imagine feeling them as overwhelming and unending, which makes us obviously not willing to do it. So the solution is to microdose them, to practice being willing to feel them for very short periods of time.

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And by short, I mean like 30 seconds to two minutes. And you promise yourself that after the time is up, you're allowed to go back to whatever you normally do to deal with your emotions. So after the 30 or 90 seconds, whatever you choose, you are allowed to start scrolling Instagram again or send the 10 impulsive text messages, right? Or go get the glass of wine. Like whatever it is you normally do to distract or avoid.

But for that short microdose period, you are going to commit to actually feeling the emotion, the one you're scared of, the one you hate, the one you always want to get away from. And we really mean feeling. Not thinking, not being in your head, not arguing with yourself or your brain or someone else or the universe. For that short period, you're going to actually focus on what is happening in your body. You're going to describe what's happening in your body using words that describe physical sensations. Where is the feeling located in your body? Is it hot or cold? Is it fast or slow? Is it rising or falling? Is it small or big? Is it pulsing or steady? You can even describe it with a color. Does it have a color or like a smell or a shape or an image for you?

But you don't want to get too far into thinking and using metaphor. So when you describe it like it feels like I'm all alone in the world, that's not a feeling, that's a thought. The feeling would be it feels really heavy in my stomach and my whole body feels like it wants to lie down. So you're just going to focus on the physical sensations in your body for a short period of time. Like I said, 30 seconds, two minutes. When the timer goes off, you can stop. And you want to pick an amount that you really feel willing to do. Don't pick 10 minutes because that sounds like a good amount. If you are not willing to have your emotions, start with 30 seconds.

We need it to be such a small amount of time that you really don't have a lot of resistance to it. And this sounds like a small thing and your brain's going to tell you it's not worth it. But each time you practice experiencing the emotion on a physical level in your body, you are building safety around

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your negative emotions. You are teaching your brain that they aren't dangerous and then your nervous system is more able to tolerate you having them and your brain is more able to allow them without resisting, numbing, distracting, escaping, etc.

The more safety you build around having negative emotion, the less reactive you will be to those emotions. And the less reactive you are, the less intense the emotions become. The less reactive you are, the less intense they feel. If you are not reacting to an emotion, the physical sensation will move through your body in about 90 seconds. So that's the goal we're working towards, to be able to experience an emotion without resistance or reaction, to let it flow through you and then you're ready to move on.

But in order to get there, we have to establish safety and familiarity with our emotions. And when that feels overwhelming, microdosing them can help our brains get on board with being willing to experience the discomfort involved. When we're able to let emotions flow through us, then we don't have anything to be scared about. And that's when we're able to go after whatever we want in life because the prospect of the negative emotion we might feel when we try, if we fail, whatever, is no longer a reason to hold ourselves back and we're able to just pick ourselves up and keep going and not be deterred by the prospect of having a feeling in our body that we don't like. And that is really when we become completely unstoppable.

So give this a try this week. Microdose that emotion that you're constantly trying to avoid and see if you don't feel a little bit stronger on the other side.