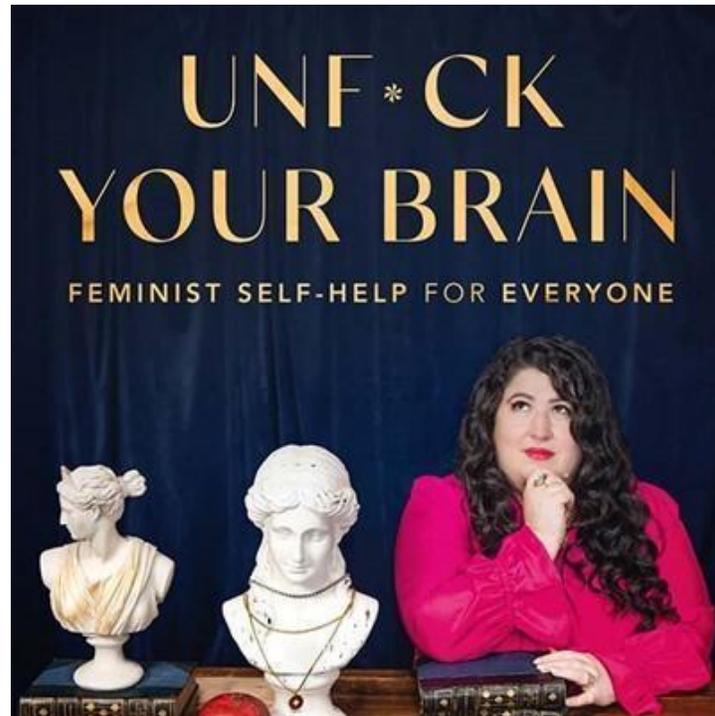


UFYB 471: Coaching Hotline: Teaching Thought Work to Teens & Managing Phobias



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

UFYB 471: Coaching Hotline: Teaching Thought Work to Teens & Managing Phobias

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.

Welcome to this week's coaching hotline episode where I answer real questions from real listeners and coach you from afar. If you want to submit your question for consideration, go to unfuckyourbrain.com/coachinghotline, all one word, or text your email to +1-347-997-1784 and when you get prompted for the code word, it's coaching hotline, all one word. Let's get into this week's questions.

Here's the first question, which I think a lot of you share, so I thought it would be a good one to answer. "Hi Kara, I can see that my teenage son would truly benefit from thought work. He constantly rages and blames others for his feelings. However, when I talk to him about the concept of how his thoughts cause his feelings or try to just get him to examine his thoughts with the download, he rebels and just writes things like, 'this is fucking stupid.' Is 15 too young to wrap your mind around thought work? If not, do you have suggestions on better ways to approach him to get him to truly participate?"

Okay. So, 15 is definitely not too young. I don't think any age is too young to start teaching emotional processing and management. Now, obviously how you teach that changes over time. With a four-year-old, you might just try teaching them that it's okay to have their feeling, right? To be sad or to express it rather than telling them like, don't cry or don't be upset, right? Those kinds of messages we get that's not okay to have our feelings. Whereas you're with a four-year-old, you're probably not going to be like, well, your thoughts cause your feelings, right? I don't know, it depends on your four-year-old. I was reading at three. Maybe.

UFYB 471: Coaching Hotline: Teaching Thought Work to Teens & Managing Phobias

But in general, I think obviously you want to vary it. As your child grows up, you start with stuff like just teaching them about really kind of the same process you learn. Like, the first thing is always like it's okay to have feelings and not try to shut those down and not be scared of them. And then as their cognition develops, right, you could start to teach them about thoughts and feelings.

The problem here is not that he's 15. The problem is that you are trying to make him do something that he doesn't want to do. So you say, suggestions on better ways to approach him to get him to truly participate. So what you are asking is how can I control my son and make him do something he doesn't want to do? And the answer to that is you can't.

In this context, in this sense, your children are just like anyone else. You cannot force them to do things. You can't control them and it doesn't work to try to manipulate them. Children, just like adults, can sense when you are trying to change them for your own sake. Now, I totally understand that as his mother, you think that this would benefit him, and you probably have the thought that your role as his mother, your job is to try to help him and teach him things that would benefit him.

But right now you have an agenda. You're invested in whether he does it or not. You're trying to make him do it. You're trying to teach him this and get him to do thought downloads, right? You're trying to coach him without permission, essentially. And we don't ever coach without permission. Now, again, I don't mean you can't teach your four-year-old about feelings without asking permission. But 15 years old, he's close to adulthood. He has a very strong independent sense of self, right? He has his own thoughts and feelings, and you are trying to make him do something he doesn't want to do and that's never going to work.

So the truth is with a teenager or an adult child or a person of any, right, anyone who's not really a small child who's related to you or not, your job is

UFYB 471: Coaching Hotline: Teaching Thought Work to Teens & Managing Phobias

to do your own work. Your job is to get out of their business, do your own work, and show up in a way in your own life that you want to. And sometimes people around you, your children or someone else, will notice that and get curious about it. But when you try to force it on them, they are going to be instantly resistant.

So just imagine that I have a friend or a stranger talking to me about their feelings and I start trying to tell them about thoughts and feelings and doing a thought download. They don't want to hear that. If they haven't asked me for coaching, if they're just venting and with a child, with your teenager, I bet you hear him yelling about something and then you go get involved. It's not even like he's asked for your help.

So he's expressing an emotion and thoughts and then you are telling him those are a problem and he needs to change them. He is not going to be receptive to that. No one is receptive to that. So, I don't have suggestions on how to get him to truly participate. My suggestion is that you do your own work and manage your own mind about this, because you want him to change so you can think and feel something. That's true always for everyone.

Just because someone's your child doesn't turn it into this pure selfless motivation that doesn't have anything to do with thought work. Right? You want him to not rage and to not blame other people for his feelings. And your work is to figure out why. What are your thoughts about why that's a problem? Because you're not managing your mind about his thoughts and feelings. That comes through, right? So you're like, well, I haven't done my own work on my thoughts about you, but I'm going to try to tell you to do work on your thoughts and feelings. That's never going to work.

So you got to get your eyes back in your own lane and you need to do your own work about why you think your son needs to be different. The only way you can positively influence people to be open to thought work, if at all, is to

UFYB 471: Coaching Hotline: Teaching Thought Work to Teens & Managing Phobias

do your own work and model by example. And you can offer things. I'm not saying you should never say to your children, you seem really upset. You know, I'm learning this thing that I find really helpful. Would you like to hear about it? But I don't think that's what you're doing here, right? You're just trying to tell him what to do, which is never going to work with thought work or anything else.

Okay? So do your own work, clean up your own thinking. That's the most powerful thing you can do in this situation.

All right y'all, I know you're as tired as I am of having the top podcasts in wellness or health and fitness categories be a bunch of dudes who don't know anything about socialization and who are not taking women's lived experiences into account. So if you are looking for ways to support the show and more importantly, make sure the show gets to more people, please leave us a review on Apple Podcast or Spotify. And bonus points if you include a few lines about the way you use thought work and self-coaching or anything you've learned from the podcast in your daily life.

Those reviews are what teach the algorithms to show us to more new people. It helps us get new listeners all over the world. And I'll be reading one story from a recent review in each of these question and answer episodes.

This week's review is subject titled, "Holy Butter Biscuits," which is possibly the best one of all time. And here's the review:

"Did that catch your attention? Good. I wish I would have started this podcast when it first launched. Instant obligation syndrome. Can I just say, whoa. Could have slapped myself in the face with that one. As an 'It Ends With Us' kid, I had to unpack a lot with that one. Then again with the 'Am I Too Much?' That really got me into some thought work as well. I'm not one

UFYB 471: Coaching Hotline: Teaching Thought Work to Teens & Managing Phobias

for a miracle statement kind of person. However, if you put the actual work in and dedicate yourself, the results are there, period. I got so much out of the podcast that I actually joined The Confident Life program this month that was offered back in December. I'm looking forward to the year of thought work and growth. Thank you, Kara. Here's to hoping my review finds another person wondering what's next. This podcast, self-growth."

All right, next question. "Can you offer any guidance on managing your mind regarding phobias? If you know or think a phobia is irrational, how do you figure out the underlying thoughts that cause the intense feelings and physical reactions? For example, I have a long-standing fear of heights, which really manifests when driving across very tall bridges or flying. Although I'm generally a pretty confident person and I've spent a lot of time educating myself about phobias and learning why bridges and planes are actually very safe, I still have horrific panic attacks. I've been trying to use the thought ladder. I'm open to believing I can learn to manage my mind on an airplane, but it's slow going. Do you have any practical recommendations for using the thought ladder for phobias?"

This is a great question and I'm obviously not an expert in phobias specifically. But here are the two things that I would practice working on. The first one is, whenever we have something where we tend to panic or have anxiety, over time we start to get freaked out about how we're going to panic or have anxiety. If we have panic attacks when we do public speaking, we start to become afraid of public speaking, right? Whatever caused that original, like maybe the original anxiety was caused by the thought, I don't know what I'm going to say and these people will think I'm stupid or whatever it is, we started having anxiety. We don't know about thought work yet. Then we start to notice, oh my God, every time I do public speaking, I get anxious and then we get anxious about that. And sometimes for some of us, then we end up having panic attacks when we just think about speaking.

UFYB 471: Coaching Hotline: Teaching Thought Work to Teens & Managing Phobias

So the first step always, I think, is working on your thoughts about how you're going to have this experience and that's okay. With any kind of meta thought where we got to work on our resistance to a thought pattern or to an emotional experience, we have to start with accepting that. So we have to start with, I have this phobia, and you have to decide if you want to use that word or not, how it makes you feel, right? Believing it's a phobia is a thought that you could choose to think or not, and you want to check in with yourself. If you think when you think it's a phobia, do you already freak out about that? Or is that word really neutral to you? You got to look into that.

But you already have thoughts of kind of, I still have horrific panic attacks, right? You think the panic attacks are horrific. So that's where I would want you to start. Don't worry about the thought letter yet. You need to practice just accepting that this is what it is right now. I am a person who is educated and smart and I'm confident, and also, when I drive across bridges or go on airplanes, I have a lot of anxiety. It's like I'm smart and educated and confident and I'm allergic to strawberries, right? Not a huge deal, not horrific, not the end of the world. Just this is one of the things that my brain does.

Right? And same with panic attacks. You want to really look at that word. Is that word neutral to you or does it already make you anxious? So I would really work on your acceptance of this is the state of things right now. This is who I am right now, and anything you're making it mean about you, my guess is that you may have judgmental thoughts about the phobia and what it means about you, which are also making it more complicated and creating resistance. So I wouldn't even work on the underlying stuff yet. You got to work on your relationship to the phobia, quote unquote, your relationship to the panic attacks.

Again, quote unquote. I'm not saying quote unquote like I don't believe that a panic attack is a thing. I think that's a term we use for a certain physiological experience, but I'm just using quotes because you want to

UFYB 471: Coaching Hotline: Teaching Thought Work to Teens & Managing Phobias

decide whether the word phobia and the word panic attack are serving you. You could also describe them as anxiety or fear of bridges or however you want to describe it. You get to decide. You need to do your work on your relationship with that. Rather than resisting it, rather than wishing it didn't happen, rather than calling it horrific. Just embracing that this is who you are right now, and this is your experience, and it's okay that this happens. And just expect that for right now it will keep happening and that's fine. Do that work. Then you'll be able to access the underlying thought and figure out what that is better.

Even starting with I'm open to believing I can learn to manage my mind on an airplane, I don't think it's helping you when you still are sort of resisting that this happens at all and thinking it's a problem. That's true for all of you about any thought you're resisting or judging or any experience you're not willing to have.

All right. Practice that all week, all of you. And I'll talk to you next week.