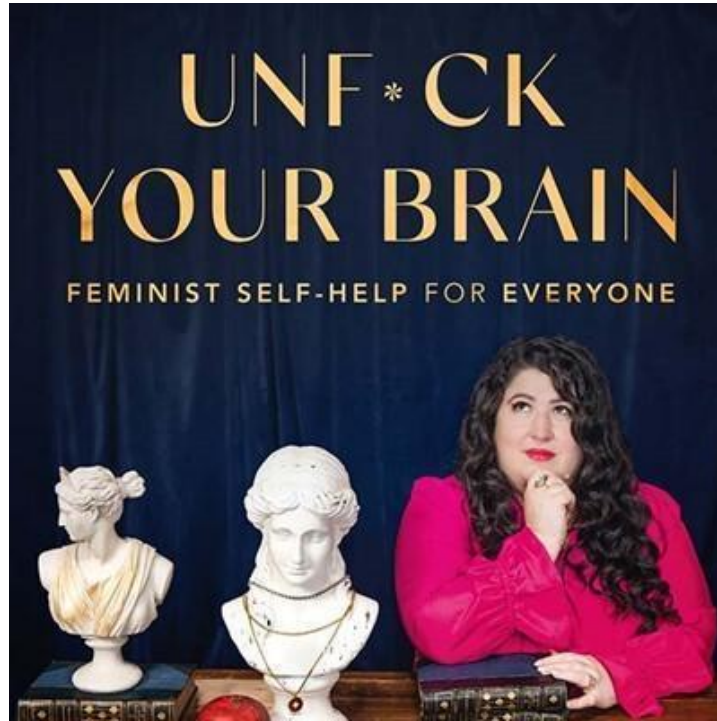


**UFYB 503: Coaching Hotline: Sibling Rivalry
& the Comparison Trap & When Your Child Has
a Chronic Illness**



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.

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.

So, here's the first question. "I was wondering how to use thought work to stop myself from thinking of my sister as my rival. All my life, my family and people around me have compared me to my sister. I've been the bigger sister, the shyer sister, the serious sister. Our personalities have been compared. As a result, I've placed it in my head that my sister is my rival, so I compare myself to her and I resent her."

Such a good question, right? Because I think when you start to pay attention to how parents and families often talk about children, I think this is useful both as the child of parents, as we all are, but also some of us are parents ourselves and to watch our own minds when we do that. Like how ingrained it is in humans to make comparisons. It's so interesting. You know, some of it is societal and maybe some of it is just like brains are bored so they're like, what can I do? Let me compare this object to that object.

I know, for instance in my family, for sure, there was a lot of like evaluation and judging of everything. That was just like the family hobby. It was like, if

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you interact with an object or a person, the first thing you do is evaluate and judge it. So, I think some of our brains may be a little more prone to this than others. But it's all totally resolvable with thought work.

So, in this scenario, you are thinking that your sister is your rival, and then you resent her for that, right? Even though it's your own thoughts. But the whole thing under here is not the comparison necessarily, really, it's the evaluation, I think. So if I compare two delicious dishes, I might be like, well, this one tastes more like chocolate, which is delicious. That one tastes more like fruit, which is also delicious. They're both delicious. They're just different. I like them both.

If that's how we think about ourselves compared to our siblings. So like, I'm very introverted and very focused on my own internal experience. And one of my siblings is very extroverted and he's really great at building relationships with other people. I don't think one of those is better than the other. I used to, right? I used to think, of course, whatever I was, was bad, right? Whatever somebody else was, was good. And so I would be like jealous of his ability while not valuing my own ability. And now post-thought work, I don't have those thoughts. I'm just like, oh, these are just two very different gifts. And what's really interesting about stuff like that is I think often we can't have all the gifts. It's like there's limited energy in the world.

So, I don't know that I could be as introverted and as attuned to the subtle movements of my mind and emotion, which allows me to be a coach and be a teacher and share with all of you, right? So much of what I share and teach comes from my observation of myself. I wouldn't be able to do that if I were busy spending all my time and energy focusing on other people and building those relationships. But that's not bad or good, right? It's just two different ways of being in the world, which may even be incompatible.

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So, I just want you to think about your problem as being like not even so much that you are noticing differences between you and your sister, but that you think one of you has to be better. You think one of your ways of being has to be better. And of course, you're always finding that you're lacking and she's the better one. And then you feel bad and then you resent her.

So, yes, you could just try to stop comparing yourself all together. But I kind of think part of just what human brains do is notice differences, and that sometimes it's more accessible to notice the difference but then notice how the second layer is really the important part, which is that you're evaluating and judging it.

So maybe she's more extroverted and maybe you're more introverted. So what? Maybe you're more serious and she's more funny. Again, so what? Both of those things are part of like the world. We need funny people and we need serious people. Funny people shine in one kind of situation, serious people shine in another kind of situation. There's benefits and disadvantages, quote unquote, to being funny or serious. Like one doesn't have to be better than the other. One doesn't have to be worse than the other.

What if they're just different and that's okay? Whenever we're comparing ourselves to someone else and then we're resenting them, it's always because we always find ourselves lacking in the comparison, or we believe other people find us lacking. So you may be resenting her because you're like, well, people think I'm shy and serious and she's funny and outgoing and people think funny and outgoing is better. And then you resent her. But it's all still your thoughts. If somebody thinks being extroverted is better, I'm like, awesome. I hope you're extroverted if you think it's better, otherwise you're going to be unhappy. But I don't take that personally or make it mean anything about me.

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So, the work here is for you to really see that you're projecting your own judgments about yourself onto your sister or onto the people who have made these observations. If you didn't believe that one of you had to be better than the other, or that she was better than you, you wouldn't care what other people think about it or if they comment on it, and you wouldn't be so invested in your own thought process about it. It all comes back to what you're making it mean about her and you. And right now you're making it mean that she's better or other people think she's better. Neither of which is true. It's that you think she's better, that's the only problem.

Okay. Next question, also about family, totally different angle. So here's the question. "I'd be grateful for ideas of how to think about my son's health problems. He is seven and has a chronic rare disease and immune deficiency that mean he gets sick and hospitalized often. I ruminate about his health and feel anxious. My thoughts are that it is my job to protect him, but there's only so much I can do. When he is healthy, I'm able to let go and focus on other things, but he's often sick and when he is, my anxiety is very high. Usually I can see how my anxiety is an overreaction. I'm freaking out about weight gain and imagining everyone at the gym feeling sorry for me, which I can see is not a real crisis. But I don't know how to think about something that is actually life and death."

So, here's the mistake that you're making that so many people make. Because your anxiety is about a topic involving life and death, you think that the life and deathness is what causes your anxiety. Okay, I'm going to say that again. Because you have the thought that this is life and death, and you feel anxious, you are assuming that the reason you feel anxious is the thought, this is life or death. But that's not actually why you feel anxious. The reason you feel anxious is the thought, it's my job to protect him and I can't. That's why you feel anxious.

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You said it's my job to protect him, but there's only so much I can do. That thought is what is making you feel anxious. It is not the life and deathness of the situation, which is an optional thought. It's not even the thought, this is a life and death situation. So is driving a car. We drive cars all the time, even though lots of people die driving cars. It's a life or death situation. We don't freak out about it. It's the thought, it's my job to protect him. So you are telling yourself it's your job to do something you can't control. That will always make you anxious.

And that's why when he's healthy, you feel fine. Even though that doesn't make any sense. If it truly were his illness that caused your feelings and just because he was healthy sometimes, wouldn't matter because he always has the underlying illness. So it's not his illness. It's not that it's truly life or death. It's none of that. It's the thought, it's my job to protect him, but there's only so much I can do. That thought probably sounds to you like it's a useful thought, like you're acknowledging I can't control it all. But you're telling yourself it's my job to protect him. And you can't. You can't control whether he lives or dies.

So if you tell yourself that it is your job to make sure that he doesn't die, you will feel anxious. And that would be true whether he had this immune issue or not, whether it was your 100-year-old father or your 7-year-old son, whether he was a picture of perfect health or on death's door. Anytime you tell yourself it's your job to control something you cannot control, you will feel anxious.

So the work for you is really seeing very clearly where the anxiety comes from, and not believing your brain that, oh, you're anxious because it's quote unquote, truly life and death. You've got this distinction in your head between like things that aren't really crises and things that are really crises. But there's no such distinction. It's all just thoughts. And your anxiety and your rumination are not caused by the like objective severity or importance

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of the issue. They are caused by the thought that you need to control something you can't control. That is always where anxiety comes from.

So that's the work is digging into that and making peace with the truth, which is that you can't control this. And you probably have some thoughts that like this is different because your son has this diagnosis, but I have coached many a parent whose child was the picture of health, who still had ruminating anxiety like this about them. Because it's nothing to do with the actual health of the child or the parent or whoever. It has to do with our belief that it's up to us to control something we can't control and what we imagine we would say to ourselves if we can't control it. So if the person does get sick, if the person dies, what we imagine saying to ourselves is usually horrible. Like it was my job to protect him and I didn't, I failed as a mother, daughter, nurse, whatever. All those thoughts and feelings are what you fear.

So, I would look at that, do some work on that thought about trying to control it. I think the clean and dirty pain podcast episode is also very useful, even for like imagined suffering in the future to help you distinguish, oh, this is grief I would want to feel if someone close to me died for any reason versus this would be the shame and blame that I would be creating for myself, which would be the same thoughts that created the anxiety beforehand, that I don't have to keep believing.

So that's it for this week. I'll talk to you next week.