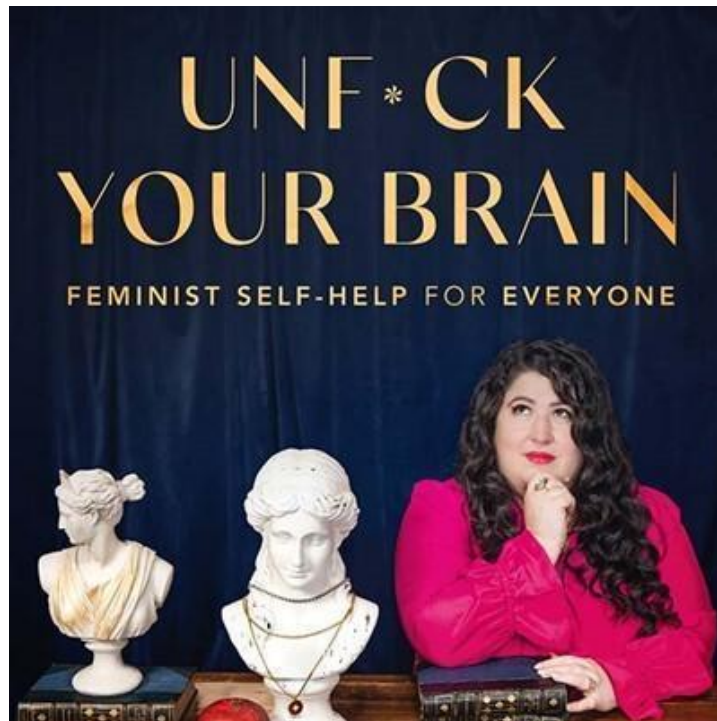


UFYB 516: Why We Check Out or Try to Control It All & How to Stop



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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

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Okay y'all, did you do your homework? In our last episode, I told you to start noticing the difference between what actually happens and then the story your brain creates about what actually happens. The reason I wanted you to start with this exercise is that doing this is the first step to getting your power back. When we are giving our emotional power to people and things outside of us, we only have two choices, try to control them or give up and check out. Neither of those is going to get you the life that you want. So today I want to talk about both these strategies and why practicing this tool of separating the facts from your thoughts about the facts is the first step to regaining control of your mind, your feelings, and your life. 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.

In my experience, women who have trouble asking for what they want or telling the truth about how they feel are holding back either because they are trying to control what everyone else thinks and feels, or because they've just shut down and detached and don't think it's even worth trying to get what they want or share how they feel. Both of these are solutions that your brain and nervous system have come up with to solve the problem of not being able to manage your mind, process your emotions, or regulate your nervous system.

So today I want to explain each of these strategies, what works about it and what doesn't work. And of course, I'm going to teach you a better approach and tell you where to start.

So let's start with the premise that your brain is trying to solve a problem. We usually feel like our brain is creating problems for us and it often is, but

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it isn't doing that on purpose. That was never the goal. In fact, your brain is trying to solve problems for you. It just unfortunately generally chooses immediate relief from any emotional distress over long-term mental or emotional health.

Both trying to control other people and checking out and becoming passive come from the same cause, which is not knowing how to handle the emotional discomfort of our own thoughts and feelings. So some of us respond to negative emotion by trying to act our way out of them. Right, we tend to be people who want to solve problems. We have all the ideas and all the answers. See 12 steps ahead and have thought it through from 10 different directions. We're trying to control everyone and everything around us. That's our idea of how to stay safe when we are having emotions that we don't know how to handle and we get activated.

Now, you might think that this personality type would not really have a problem speaking up, right? It sounds like a take charge kind of person who would actually be happy to tell everyone else what to do, and sometimes that's the case, ask me how I know. But often the way we're trying to control people is by people pleasing, overfunctioning, trying to manage their behavior by acting whatever way we think will make them act the way we want. So we're running 10-part plays in our head, where like, we say this and they do that and then we do this and then we can do that. And then we don't have to have the feeling we're trying to avoid, right? We're trying to manage the whole situation.

We don't realize that's what we're doing, right? We think we are just like being efficient and keeping things running or being sensible or smart or thinking ahead. And we are thinking ahead, but we're actually trying to control everything because we don't trust ourselves to handle the feelings we have, whether that's anxiety about uncertainty of an outcome or anything else.

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The other half of us are more likely to disengage. We just shut down, we check out, we kind of mildly disassociate. We've decided there's no point in speaking up, there's no point in asking for what we want, there's no point in being vulnerable. We don't think the circumstances will change or that other people involved will respond in any kind of like a tuned or responsive way. So we just withdraw.

And this is another way of trying to avoid those thoughts and feelings by just disconnecting from what's going on. So we might pretend that we're just really easygoing or we're staying above the fray or we're keeping the peace or even we're being evolved. But actually we're disengaging, not because we feel powerful and above it, but because we feel powerless so we're checking out.

I see this a lot in online pop psychology where people will post about like setting boundaries and cutting people out of their lives and disconnecting from anything that's challenging or difficult. And it's clear that they don't actually have the skills to have honest conversations, to be vulnerable, or to manage their mind in order to stop being so reactive to other people's behavior.

I'm not saying there's never a reason to end a relationship with someone, obviously, we all get to choose who we want to be in relationship with and why. But we have to understand that when we decide we're going to check out, there's a cost. If we decide that we're just going to stop dating the person who challenges us or triggers stuff for us when we have arguments, or who acts in a way we have a lot of thoughts and feelings about, we're potentially cutting off the opportunity to grow with someone and to learn how to negotiate the challenging terrain of real intimacy.

If we decide that we're just not going to play the office politics game, there can be a cost to our career. Now if we're doing that because we actually just get emotionally dysregulated when we try to deal with other

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personalities in the office, we're sacrificing our own potential advancement just because we don't know how to manage our mind.

So, this doesn't mean that you should feel bad or ashamed about any of this. Okay? This is actually an opportunity to bring self-compassion into your growth. And it's an opportunity to see how your brain is trying to solve a problem for you. When we believe that our brain is making our lives worse or being impossible or making problems for us or being irrational, we're not able to be curious about what problem our brain is trying to solve. We're not able to bring self-compassion to our self-reflection.

When we can see on the other hand that our brain is just trying to solve a problem for us, then we can start to get curious about what the other possible alternative solutions might be. If we just berate ourselves and say, I can't believe I didn't stand up for myself, and then we feel bad about that, we're no closer to standing up for ourselves the next time. But if we can see, oh, I see how staying quiet was my brain's attempt to solve the discomfort and fear I felt about speaking up, then we can start to see what would need to happen in order to get a different behavior.

So after this quick break, I'm going to walk you through how to slow down and make a different choice in those moments when you are activated and you want to control everyone or just give up and check out. So you can start making different choices for you.

All right, so let's get ourselves in the headspace of that moment where we're about to swallow the truth about how we feel or what we want. Whether we're choosing our words carefully to avoid upsetting someone or we're just mentally checking out, it's a moment where we can move closer to the person we want to be and the life we want to have or farther away from it.

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In that moment, we're doing whatever we're doing because we have a thought and a feeling. Our brain is identifying what it thinks is a threat and then it's activating whatever our danger avoidance response is, control or avoidance. And usually these types of people marry each other, ask me how I know.

So the first thing we have to do is identify that reaction we're having, whether that's to argue or manipulate to try to control the other person or whether we're starting to feel kind of foggy and distant. These reactions happen in the body, so we have to actually try to feel into them in our physical form. What does it feel like in your body when you start to check out or disassociate a little? What does it feel like in your body when you start to feel like people aren't doing what you want or you urgently need to communicate or act on a plan or solution?

Once you've started to identify which of these is you and what it feels like when it starts to happen, then you can move on to starting to get curious. Your brain is going to want to jump to like, okay, I noticed it, so I can just stop it. But that's not how this works. The next phase after awareness has to be curiosity. When you notice that feeling coming up in your body, that is an opportunity to get curious about your thoughts. What are you thinking that's making you want to check out?

Thoughts like, I can't handle this. I don't know what to do. Oh God, they seem upset. I'm scared. I need to let go. I need to check out. I need to get out of this. When we check out, when we drift off in our minds, we are obviously not telling the truth about how we feel or asking for what we want. But that can be true of those of us who prefer to try to control and manage everything also. Because in that moment we aren't telling the truth about the feeling we're trying to manage away. We aren't just asking straight up for what we want to happen. We're trying to manage everyone and everything to make it happen and keep everyone from being upset about it

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and feel in control of the whole process instead of feeling the vulnerability of the ask.

So when you notice that urge to control and plan and manage and coordinate, you can get curious, what are you thinking? I can prevent a bad outcome. I just need them to do what I say. I know what we need to do. I need to close this loop and have the whole plan done, right? If I can just be in charge, I can manage this.

So that's your level one inquiry. That's what our curiosity can help us notice on the surface level. The level two inquiry goes deeper and this is what brings us back to that foundational tool from last time of learning to separate your circumstances and your thoughts. Both checking out and trying to control, all the things that block us from speaking up for ourselves are being driven by the story our brain tells us about something that's happening. The reason you are checking out instead of telling the truth about how you feel is that your brain is telling you this person is mad at me and if I disagree, they will leave me. So it's better if I just attach and agree with them, or I can't control what's going to happen, so I just have to go along with it even though I don't want to.

The reason you're trying to control instead of asking for what you want is that your brain is telling you don't deserve to have something just because you want it. You need to construct this entire plan and argument to make everyone agree that this is what they should do. Your brain deploys checking out and controlling as mechanisms to deal with fear, with uncertainty, with anxiety, with unease. But those feelings aren't just inevitable realities caused by the world around us that we can't control. They're caused by our own thinking.

We are the puppet master and the audience. Something happens or someone exists or someone makes an expression with their face or breathes a certain way or says certain words and our brains make a story

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out of it. And then we scare ourselves with that story. And then we react to the scary story and the fear we created by withdrawing and checking out or by controlling and managing.

So learning to change this behavior requires being a witness to our own experience on multiple levels before any change can even happen. So you see why just vowing to tell the truth or speak up next time isn't effective, right? You have to have awareness that you're even doing one of these behaviors. You have to have awareness of the habitual thought that's driving the behavior. Then you have to have awareness of the story your brain is telling that set off the habitual thought and behavior.

So if we want to be able to engage more productively, to stay present when things are challenging and to solve them, or to take a step back from trying to solve and manage everything and be open and honest and collaborative, either way, we have to start with identifying the fear in our body that is driving these patterns. And we have to identify the story we're telling ourselves about what's happening that's setting off that fear.

That's why learning to speak up actually ironically starts with staying a little quiet. But with presence and intention and looking inward to understand what thoughts are driving your behavior. So this week, instead of vowing to just be different, I want to invite you to start paying attention to when you check out or go into control mode. Start to get curious about what story you're telling yourself that's driving your fear and your habitual response to that fear.

In our next new content episode, I'll share how to start allowing that fear without as much distress so you can get to the other side and actually start to change.