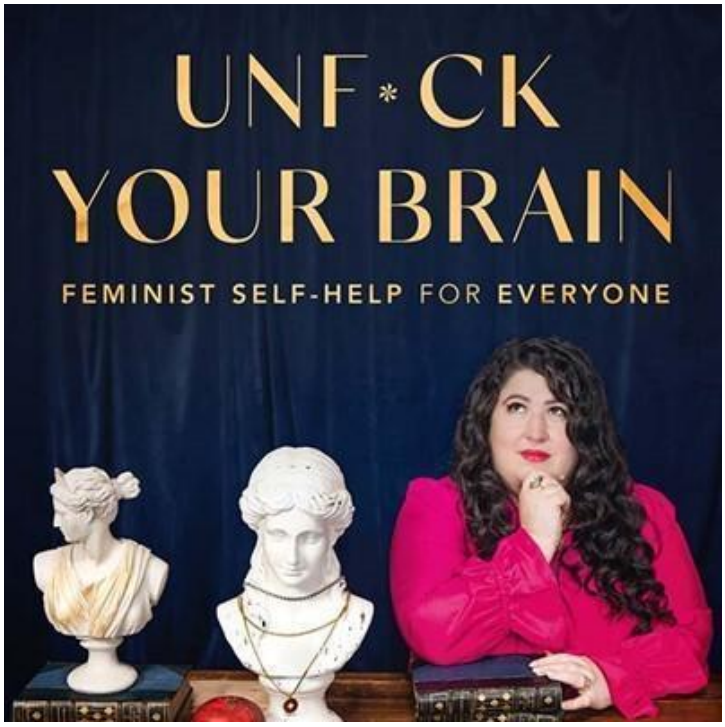
UFYB 543: Coaching Hotline: The Differences Between Boredom, Activity, and Productivity



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 coachinghotline, all one word. Let's get into this week's questions.

Here's our Coaching Hotline question for this week. “I've recently realized I have some long-standing issues regarding boredom, activity, and productivity. I'm often bored and I have a difficult time coming up with things to do. That's true whether there are things I genuinely enjoy, which is especially tough for me to find, or things I feel are worthwhile or productive. There's a ton of shame and guilt around these thoughts. I should know how to entertain myself and my kids. I think I'm confusing these terms in my mind, boredom, activity, and productivity. Are these all deeply intertwined or are they worth investigating and teasing out some deeper understanding? How do you view activity and productivity in regards to thought work?”

So, those are some big questions, but what I actually really want to dial in on here is the shame around not knowing how to occupy or amuse yourself. Anytime that we encounter some kind of challenge, we feel bored, we don't know what to do about it. And then we start layering on shame, we immediately stigmatize the problem to ourselves.

The truth is, I have no idea what you would find fun to do or how you could think about activity and productivity for yourself. You're the one who will

know that and can figure that out. But you can't figure that out when you have that shame about it. And the number of normal human experiences that we will label as shameful and feel bad about is really unending. And they're also kind of irrational. If you actually break it down, why would being bored be shameful?

Where does that come from? You have to ask yourself, is that something you heard growing up? Is that something you absorbed? It's like we will feel shame about having any negative emotion or uncomfortable experience or not knowing the answer to any question or having anything we struggle with. It's like for some of us, that shame response is so powerful that just having something we don't know how to do or having any problem or having any challenge or any struggle immediately sets off this shame response.

And so that is really the first and most important thing that you have to do. You're the only one who can really figure out how you may have conflated these things. Of course, if you work one-to-one with a coach, you can delve into it, but in terms of my ability to coach you remotely through this question, I would have to ask you so many questions about what's going on here to get to the bottom of it for your brain. But what I do know is you can figure this out if you deal with that shame. And so the coaching I do want to give you is to destigmatize this for yourself. How can you be kinder to yourself about feeling boredom and not being sure what would help? It sounds like you're understimulated if you both feel bored but nothing feels like it would be interesting or exciting.

So, the questions I would be thinking about are, is there anything I actually find interesting or exciting? I do believe that humans generally have things they find interesting or stimulating. But sometimes we also shame about those things and so we block those off in our mind. So I'd be curious if you're doing that. If you have things you actually like, but you've told yourself that they're bad or you shouldn't do them, or they're immature or

they're whatever, and so you're not letting yourself explore the things you actually do want to do.

The other thing I would just always recommend is I think anyone who is struggling with dopamine, motivation, shame, anxiety, and a lot of boredom may potentially want to get evaluated for ADHD or other forms of neurodivergence, feeling understimulated a lot and not being able to figure out how to get the stimulation you need can be a sign of neurodivergence, but it isn't always. That is just something to explore if it seems useful to you.

But either way, using thought work to first normalize that it's normal to feel bored or understimulated. It's normal sometimes to struggle with figuring out what to do. Humans are living in a world of endless temptation and things to do and we don't have the same lifestyles that we evolved to have and all of this is just very normal. You're just having a human experience.

If you can take the shame away, I think you'll be able to get a lot more curious about what you actually like to do, what you actually find stimulating. And you will also be able to get more curious with your kids, right? You're not only shaming yourself, but you think somehow even though you don't know how to be bored or what to do about it, you should also somehow be able to solve your children's boredom or need for stimulation, right? So you're doubling down on telling yourself that you're doing something wrong. I think if you work through that shame, you'll also be able to be a lot more curious and effective in helping your kids figure out what does it feel like to be bored, what could they do instead.

And the last thing I just want to offer is that there's value to boredom. Now, one of the reasons that I mentioned the neurodivergence issue is that it is a little different for people with ADHD and people who don't have ADHD in terms of how we want to think about boredom and stimulation. But either way, I do think there's value in learning to tolerate boredom because when

we are able to tolerate not being constantly stimulated, that's often when we're able to think more deeply, have bigger ideas, rebuild our attention span or our focus.

But again, that advice can differ if you're neurodivergent or not and so if you are having a lot of trouble with boredom, not being stimulated enough, all of that stuff, that's why I just throw it out there that if that resonates for you, if you've ever thought about getting evaluated, that could be something to look into just to make sure that you are sort of applying the right framework to your own thoughts. But regardless, starting with that shame is really what's going to allow you to unlock anything else.