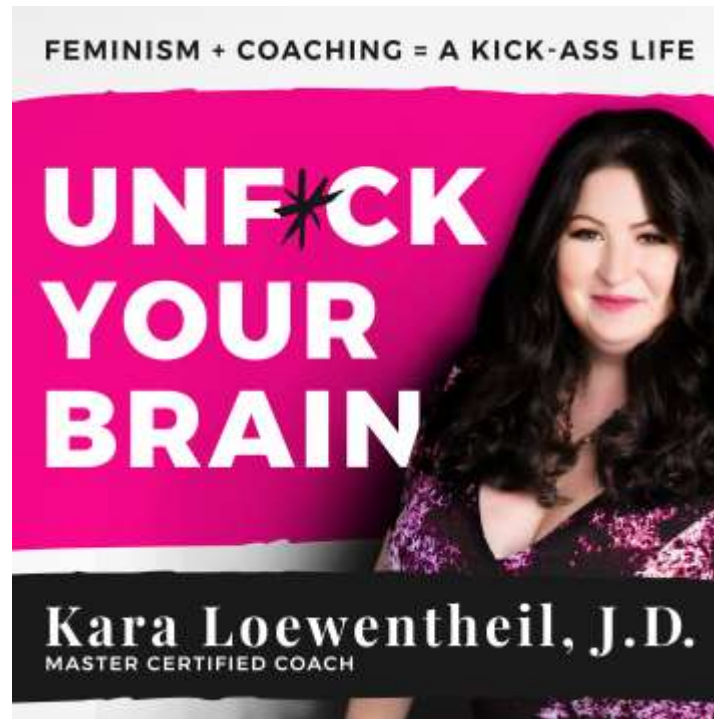


UFYB 53: Listener Q & A Vol. 5



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello, chickens. Time for another installment of listener questions and answers, and we have some great ones today that I think are going to really help you guys understand how to apply the teachings. So let's just jump in, no reason to delay.

“Hi Kara, I'm in the midst of overwhelm right now so I thought I'd go ahead and ask you something that I feel is consuming me. How do you deal with being in high demand; demand from your clients, demand from your spouse, your friends, your colleagues, your children, and your family? I feel like everyone wants my complete and undivided attention and I'm struggling to share myself around. I have needy children and a very needy best friend. I'm feeling completely suffocated. Please send help.”

It's funny, as I started reading that, this downpour arrived. You guys might be able to hear the rain. Funny timing. Okay, so you got to manage your mind. Other people can want whatever they want. You don't feel overwhelmed because of them. You think your child is needy and your best friend is needy and that everybody's demanding things from you and that's why you feel overwhelmed. That's not why you feel overwhelmed.

You feel overwhelmed because of your thoughts. You have the thought, my children are needy. You have the thought, my best friend is very needy. You have the thought, everyone wants my complete and undivided attention. Those thoughts are what is creating the feeling of overwhelm for you. So in this kind of coaching problem or scenario, what you have to do is examine all these things you think are facts and see how they are just thoughts.

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Other people may want what they want. I highly doubt that everyone wants your complete and undivided attention all the time. Most of us know that other people have a life, right? But even if it were true that everyone wanted that, when you think that thought, you feel overwhelmed. So you need to really separate out what our thoughts and what are circumstance is here and question some of your thoughts and see if those thoughts are serving you.

Like, we can't silver-lining it, so we just agree that everyone wants everything from you but you feel okay about it. We need to change that thought, that everyone wants everything from you and that these various people are needy. That's what's making you feel suffocated. Not that they are needy, but that you have the thought that they are needy.

Okay, "Hi Kara, I am improving at recognizing when I'm getting emotionally reactive and letting my thoughts run away from me, which is great. But I'm also starting to notice when other people are getting emotionally reactive and have completely unmanaged minds, which recently has led to me feeling kind of apathetic about their woes and stories. They won't have these issues if they started managing their minds. It seems like something went wrong along the way with my practice because I want to feel empathetic towards these people, especially my loved ones. Do you have any advice as to where I went wrong along the way and how I can work towards being more empathetic?"

Okay, I don't think that you did go wrong. We think that being empathetic means we should believe other people's thoughts about what's wrong with their lives. But I don't know what good that does us. If somebody's upset and then we get upset also because they're upset, how is that serving the situation and how is it serving them?

Now, I do think that you can empathize that people in your life are suffering. Their suffering is real. Now, we know it's caused by their thoughts and they

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don't know that, but they're still suffering. And so you can have compassion for that suffering, but I personally prefer to have compassion rather than empathy.

I don't want to feel other people's feelings. That would mean I would have to believe their same thoughts, right? Someone believes a thought and so they feel sad. Now for me to feel sad, I have to believe their thought too, but I don't want to believe their thought. I don't want to feel sad about their optional thought. That doesn't serve me and it doesn't serve them.

So I want to have compassion that they're suffering. And I don't coach without permission, so if my friend wants to complain to me about how the guy she's dating is a jerk or whatever, I can just switch into friend mode and just be like, oh my god, that's really hard, or whatever. I can validate it. But I don't take on – I don't believe her story, her own thought, that the guy's a jerk, any more than I believe my own thoughts that the guy is a jerk. I just know that those aren't helpful.

So I do think this is common when you start doing this work, and I've also found that it's harder at the beginning. Over time, it's easier to switch back and forth. Like, now I can kind of switch in and out of it and just be totally in friend mode or in coach mode. So just know, as you keep practicing, you'll get better.

But if you want to bring out compassion, I would focus on feeling compassion for their suffering. You can remember a time that you believed your own thoughts and it was so painful for you. So you can hold space for an have compassion for their experience, but you don't have to empathize in the sense of believing their thoughts.

And I personally don't view this as things having gone wrong. I don't think that believing other people's thoughts and empathizing with them is the goal of life. And I know being a coach and being a friend are different, but

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certainly as a coach, if I empathized with my clients, I'd be totally useless to them. I would just be like, yep, all your terrible thoughts are true. I guess you just have to feel that way forever. That's really hard for you.

That wouldn't be helpful. So what I've found is, even in my own life, it was a little weird for a while that I was not empathizing, but now people come to me because they want my perspective. Of course, my friends and family know I'm a coach, but it's not that they come to me because I'm a coach. It's because over time, they have seen how much better I seem and so then they're kind of like, oh well what would you think about this situation? They're curious about it.

So I think one way of being a good friend or partner is kind of modeling, in your own life, what it's like to have discovered this secret to the universe, and then practicing having compassion for them, but not necessarily empathy.

Okay, next question. This is a new one, "Hi Kara, your podcast on confirmation bias really hit home. I grew up in a family of fortune tellers, so getting your tarot cards read was like going for a dental checkup, something you did every six months or so; totally normal..." That's part of her question. I'm not – it said totally normal, that wasn't my commentary.

Okay, "My last reading foretold of disaster with my sewer line. Because of this and other factors, I'm selling my house and I desperately want to close on the sale before sewer line disaster strikes. I had the sewer checked. It does have an issue, but nothing that's going to need fixing anytime soon. My deep confirmation bias and magical thinking says otherwise. I know intellectually I couldn't listen because fortune telling is BS, yet my irrational mind is grabbing onto this one thing. Help."

Okay, well I would say you're a little far in. once you're selling the house because of it, I'm not sure at that point you're going to be able to tell

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yourself not to believe it. Here's what I want you to think about; a fortune telling or tarot card reading is somebody offering you thoughts to think and you get to decide.

And I think that you're really conflicted about whether to believe because you say you know intellectually you shouldn't listen to fortune telling, but you also say that you just got a reading and then you decided to sell your house because of it. So I don't think you're clear on whether you want to believe or not. So your sort of want is, like, believe but not be so bothered by it.

But that's not really an option because if you believe that it's true then your brain is going to fixate on trying to forestall it or avoid it. So I think that you have to decide what you really want to think about tarot cards. It's totally fine if you want to get readings and believe them, then go all in.

But if you find that that's not serving you, then I think you have to look at consciously choosing how you want to think and feel about tarot cards and about fortune telling, rather than this wishy-washy thing you're doing here where you get readings, you make big decisions based on them, but then you wish they didn't freak you out, right? That's not really possible. So I think you have some thinking to do about that.

Okay, this next one is a great question because this comes up a lot. "Dear Kara, thank you again for helping me so much with your podcast. I have done a lot of growth using it. I have a question though. I just finished listening to the podcast about not controlling other people's feelings. I'm a preschool teacher and want to teach this to my four-year olds. For example, if child one hits child two, how would you do this? Are they too young to understand this concept?"

I don't think that they're too young. So number one, I think that hitting is usually a boundary violation. Now, a four-year-old can't come up with their

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own boundary violations, then your job as a teacher is to have those for the class and enforce them. It doesn't mean that children hitting each other is fine.

You get to decide if that's fine in your classroom. But I just think you treat it like any concept you want to break down for a child. So I think children can understand things like another child might be thinking a different thing than they are, or what another child might have been thinking, why they took that action. Any concept, I think, you can break it down.

But I don't think they're too young to understand it because we start teaching them super early that other people cause their feelings. Like, oh, apologize, you hurt her feelings. Don't do this, it will make someone feel bad. We teach them that really young, so I don't see why we can't teach them the opposite.

And that doesn't mean that you don't have rules for children or you don't try to inculcate certain kinds of behavior. But the big work is really for you to manage your mind about whatever the kids are doing, and then secondary, to try to teach and model that for them. But as a preschool teacher, I'm sure you're used to breaking down concepts into child versions and I don't think that any age is too young to learn it because children are learning, all the time, our unconscious models of doing things, so there's no reason we can't teach them conscious models.

So I hope that that's helpful in this situation. One child hitting another and saying you don't control other people's feelings, I'm not sure those totally go together, so that's why I feel it's a little hard to answer this question specifically. But certainly, in terms of, they said they don't like me and now I'm sad, you could talk to them about why they're sad, what is their thought about it, and show them that their thought is what's making them sad rather than the other person.

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Okay, let's do a dating question, "Hi Kara, what do you do if you like a guy, you've been on three dates..." I don't think this is hypothetical. Let's just put this in the first person. "I like a guy. I've been on three dates, but then I got scared and texted him that maybe we shouldn't see each other more, even though I like him and there's a lot of chemistry. I've gotten messed around a lot in the past from men, and from listening to your podcast and doing mindfulness, I'm now more in control of my emotions but I'm worried because not getting a text back quick enough or hearing a response and having an emotional reaction to it is making me feel weak again. So how do you deal with that?"

Okay, so what you're experiencing is that we do some work on ourselves and then something challenging comes up, and then it turns out we haven't finished the work. And that's totally fine. But then, of course, our instinct is to get rid of the circumstance.

So we do work on loving ourselves and then let's say we get rejected on a date and then our immediate idea is, well I just shouldn't date, I'm not strong enough. But you'll never get strong in isolation without experiencing challenges. So you're a strong woman no matter what, but if dating is bringing up thoughts for you, then those are thoughts for you to work on.

It's not about this guy at all. You've only been on three dates. You barely know him. It's about you having this intense response to having thoughts and feelings come up and judging yourself about them and thinking that they mean that you're not strong or that you're too emotional.

We are always evolving. You are always going to be experiencing new challenges and, kind of, encountering new situations that are going to bring up thoughts and feelings for you. And that's fine. That doesn't mean anything has gone wrong. It's just the next level of the work.

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So this just means that the next area for you to do this work in is your thoughts and feelings about dating and what you are making it mean when someone doesn't text you right away or doesn't send the response you want or whatever it is. So I think this is perfect. This is exactly what you need to be working on and it's exactly what the universe is bringing you.

Okay, one more for today. Don't worry, there's many more coming. "Hi Kara, I love your work; always very insightful. Thank you so much for doing what you do. I just listened to the last podcast with listener questions and answers and one of them struck a chord. It's actually the closest to my situation that I have heard you advise on. The woman who wrote you the question had an ex-boyfriend who yelled and was verbally abusive. So my brother has been verbally abusive my whole life. In the last year, things took a turn for the worse and he threatened my husband and I on social media, on our business accounts, email, and to friends. Within a year, I had stopped asking him to stop. I completely cut off contact, blocked him on all accounts. He still found ways to get through to us or harass us. We got a restraining order against him. I'm trying to deal with the pain of losing my brother this way and grieving the end of our relationship. Is there any thought work tips for setting boundaries when your life has been threatened and your family, mom and dad, are still in an abusive relationship?"

Okay, so boundaries are boundaries and there's a whole episode on boundaries, so you want to listen to those. It sounds like you have set a boundary, a very strong boundary, which is he's not allowed to talk to you. You've got a restraining order; that's a pretty strong boundary.

So the boundary work doesn't depend on whether or not he threatened you and whether or not your mom and dad still have a relationship with him. That doesn't really have anything to do with it. A boundary is always for you.

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I think that it sounds like you are processing the pain and grieving the way the relationship is, but in terms of setting boundaries – a boundary is a boundary is a boundary. It's not about, like, how bad the other behavior was or whatever, do other people have a boundary with them, it has nothing to do with that.

Whatever your boundary is about your brother, you just have to respect that for yourself. And if your boundary is to never be around him and your parents are going to invite him over for the holidays, then you don't go. Or you go and you leave when he comes, or whatever you decide your boundary is.

But it has really nothing to do – I think it sounds like you think you need specific tips for setting a boundary when your life has been threatened and when your mom and dad still have a relationship with him. And those two factors don't really have anything to do with your boundary.

I mean, the threats he makes might inform the boundary you want to have, but what your parents are doing has nothing to do with your boundary. You just have to decide what your boundaries are with him and then you have to be willing to keep those boundaries out of love for yourself and even for him. You can love someone and have a boundary that you're never going to speak to them.

So that's kind of my answer to that is that I think it's not going to, kind of, serve you to think like, oh I need extra information, or this is a special situation for a boundary. It's just a boundary. You just need to decide, what is my boundary here? What behavior is not acceptable around me or directed at me? What action am I going to take if it happens? And be willing and ready to enforce it. That's really all there is.

Okay, actually, I'm going to do one more because it kind of relates to this and it's kind of a quick one. "Kara, I've a question about *Unf*ck Your Brain*.

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Is it ever acceptable to try to change other people's behavior to help them, for instance, an intervention for a loved one with an addiction problem? Can an intervention about someone else's behavior be compatible with managing your own mind?"

Sure. Managing your mind does not mean you never make requests of other people to act differently. Managing your mind means you don't put your emotional state on whether or not they comply.

So if I have a loved one with addiction and my opinion, my belief, my thought is that the addiction is ruining their life and that they need help and I feel good about that thought, like I've chosen it consciously – I'm not just believing whatever I think but I've really sat and done thought work about it and I believe I'm coming from a clear place and I choose that belief and I believe it's true and I want to tell them what I think and ask them to get help – for sure, I can totally do that.

What I don't want to do is believe that it's my job to control them, that whether or not they go to rehab, or whatever the intervention is, means something about me, that I should be able to make it happen, or that if they don't do what I want, that I have to be upset or angry or devastated or whatever else. So the key is to not to make your emotional state depend on what other people say or do.

So you can totally have an intervention out of love, for yourself, for the other person, but you go into it knowing that they may very well say no and that they are allowed to say no and that you are not going to make them saying no mean anything about you or even about them. You're going to be able to stay in a place of love and you're not going to be coming from a place of trying to control them and giving them the power over your emotions based on whether or not they're willing to go to rehab.

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So the summary of it – and it's the same concept, whether it's like an intervention for alcoholism or whether it's like asking someone to take out the trash. You can always make a request, but you want to watch your mind so you are not requiring, in your own mind, the other person acts a certain way in order for you to feel okay. That's what you want to divorce; your emotional state from what they do and whether or not they do what you've asked.

Alright, my dears, it's always fun to hear your questions and I hope that that was helpful, both for those of you who wrote in and those of you who are listening, and we'll have another one of these in a few weeks; bye.

Thanks for tuning in. If you want to start building your confidence right away, you can download a free confidence cheat sheet at www.karaloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence.