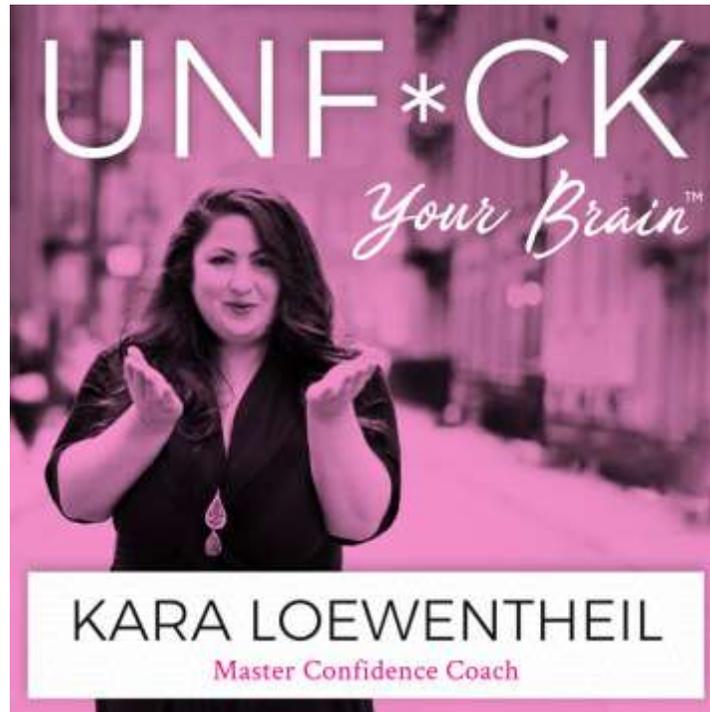


Why Mental Health Matters Most (Turn Panic Into Peace Series #4)



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 my chickens. Are you guys holding onto your chicken heads today? I hope so. I hope the first couple episodes of this series have helped you with that. So today I want to talk to you about why your mental health is the most important thing in your life.

Right now, a lot of us are very fixated on our physical health. Now, some of us have always been fixated on our physical health and the change in the circumstance is not making a difference there. We've just switched our focus maybe from whatever we used to be worried about to being worried about this particular virus.

And then for some of us, maybe we used to worry about other things, we didn't necessarily worry about our health so much, but now we're worried about it. But regardless, what we're seeing is everybody very kind of hyper-vigilant about their physical status, their physical health. We are all sitting around paying attention to do I have a cough, do I have a fever, how do I feel?

And all sorts of little fluctuations in our physical condition that we wouldn't have even noticed two months ago, like I have allergies every year and I've barely paid attention to them. If I feel at all unwell during March, April, May, I just assume it's allergies and don't think about it.

But now, a lot of us are kind of finding that primitive part of our brain that wants to scan for danger is paying a lot of attention to our physical health.

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Our physical health is totally important. We are minds living in bodies. We need our bodies in order to be alive. So I'm certainly not downplaying our physical health.

But what I do want to draw your attention to is the way in which being hyper-vigilant and freaked out about your physical health is actually really bad for your mental health. And this can be true in a variety of ways.

In the last 20 years, we've seen the rise of a new eating disorder called orthorexia, which is when people take supposedly eating to these debilitating extremes and become psychologically dependent on eating a certain way and have a lot of anxiety and control around eating that way, and sometimes actually end up with physical deficiencies also from eating that way, from trying to be perfectly healthy.

And I think we're seeing that now also. There's this irony that we may be staring at our phone, reading the news all day because we're so "worried" about our physical health and so we want to keep up to date with any new threat to our physical health, even though especially if we're inside, or even if we have to go to work or we're taking the precautions we can take, we're not learning any information that makes us any physically safer.

Meanwhile, we're spending all our time staring at a screen, which is not physically great for us anyway. We'd be better off taking a walk or doing some yoga in the living room, and we're making our mental health much worse.

So even though your brain is kind of primed to be very attentive to any danger to your physical health, that's why it's so important for us to use that prefrontal cortex to try to intervene and to redirect and understand what really is health-promoting or not, and what kinds of health are important and why.

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So absorbing a ton of news that isn't telling you anything you don't really already know and isn't giving you any actionable information that would change anything you're doing is not actually protecting your physical health. But that's what's so crazy about your primitive brain.

Your primitive brain thinks that reading that news constantly is going to be protective for your physical health. It thinks knowing all that will help you and will protect you from danger, but it's the opposite. It's not physically great for you, but it's also really terrible for you mentally and emotionally, and your mental health matters as well.

And not only matters as well, but your brain is the thing that decides what you're going to do with your body and what you're going to do with your time, and how you're going to get through whatever time you have on earth, short or long, which none of us truly know how much time we have left.

So you have to get your mental health in order, and it's so important right now, especially yes, of course, take whatever precautions you can take to protect your physical health, but your physical health is not something that you can 100% control. And if you try to and you just sort of allow that hyper-vigilance and that fixation on your physical health to run rampant, you're going to feel less and less healthy, especially mentally and emotionally.

So you have to be prioritizing your mental and emotional health. That's what really matters, especially if in any given moment you are physically safe. Or you've taken whatever precautions you can to try to increase your safety, but that's all you can do. Continuing to fixate on your physical health is not going to serve you and meanwhile, you're really undermining your own mental and emotional health.

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Everything that you can create in the world, all of your experience of the world, all of that comes from your mental health. I think it's so interesting to contemplate why do we want our physical lives to continue? So that we can have some kind of mental and emotional experience. We want to be alive because we think we enjoy being alive.

But right now, you're alive, and if you are not enjoying it, if you're spending all of your time stressing yourself out and reading the news and worrying and catastrophizing and panicking and drinking too much or watching too much Netflix or whatever it is you're doing to cope with your anxiety, you're not really enjoying your existence.

So there's this paradox where we think, "Oh, I'll just make myself miserable now with worry to protect myself so that in the future, I can be happy." That's not how it works. Your mental and emotional health, they exist in the now. That's the only time we have. And that's where we have to prioritize them.

When you prioritize your mental and emotional health, that is when you can actually have all that we ever want, which is to feel safe and calm and peaceful and positive. That's all we're going for. We just want to feel okay. We just want to feel better, but that comes from our mental health. It actually doesn't even come from our physical health.

We all know and have experienced being physically entirely well and being emotionally very upset or angry or sad or anxious or whatever, and not enjoying our physical health at all, and vice versa. There are many people, myself included, who live with some kind of chronic condition or chronic pain or chronic illness, or who've gone through very intense bouts of illness or cancer or something else, who will tell you that it was their mental attitude that mattered the most, that their mental strength is what got them through that experience.

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And that their physical health and their physical state was not more important than their mental health and mental state, and in fact, the mental strength is what helped them get through the parts where their physical strength was tested. Your mind is so much stronger than your body in many instances.

I'm not saying - this is not a - I believe in science. I went to Ivy League schools. This is not a like, your mind determines everything about your body. I'm not saying that. I'm not saying you can keep yourself from getting sick by just thinking positively. None of that.

But obviously, your mental strength has a lot to do with what your body physically is capable of, and we know what you believe impacts your physical body. That's why the placebo effect exists. The placebo effect means that you can give someone a medication, it can be a sugar pill. If they believe it's the real medication, there's a demonstrable effect.

It's not always and usually not as good as the full medication maybe, the real thing, but it's better than nothing. Your mind has an effect on your body. Your mental and emotional health have an effect on your physical health and your mental and emotional health are really all you want. That emotional experience you want of feeling safe or feeling happy or feeling fulfilled, that's all mental and emotional. It's not created by physical health.

So that's why I believe that your mental health matters the most. I mean, you need to be alive to have any mental health. Again, we should all take the precautions we can take to try to make that more likely. But your mental health is so much more important.

And so it's so important to shift from this hyper-vigilance and hyper-concern about your physical health, which is destroying our mental and emotional

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health right now, in order to pay attention to and care for and prioritize our mental health as well.

When you do that, that's when you are able to have a different experience, which is the only thing you want. Reading the news constantly, looking for all the information, just so we can try to feel safe or optimistic. Or just so we can feel like, okay, I know what all the dangers are, now maybe I can rest.

It's your primitive brain. But you can use your brain on purpose to create those more positive emotions, like I talked about in the last episode, creating emotion. You can do that on purpose so that you don't have to be constantly scanning and reading and producing a lot of anxiety for yourself.

When you take control of your mental and emotional health and when you prioritize that, you will see how you can approach a situation so differently. So think about going through this period, this crisis right now, and the difference of living from fear versus living from love is such a different experience.

Some of the actions are probably the same. You could stay home and practice self-isolation out of fear, and you'll never feel safe. You will just get more and more nervous about smaller and smaller threats, and be hyper-vigilant about everything happening in your body and be fixated on the news all alone and feel worse and worse and worse.

Or you can stay home out of love for yourself, for your family, for all the people you don't know who you are trying to protect by slowing the spread of the virus, and that feels so different. That feels so expansive and open and loving. That difference comes from your brain. Nothing is different in your physical circumstances. Nothing is different in your actions.

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But your mental and emotional state inform your entire experience and create your entire experience. The other reason it's so important to invest in your mental and emotional health and to give those energy and take care of them, the same way that you're trying to take care of your physical health, like if you are pounding vitamin C and taking supplements and trying to eat a certain way and trying to move your body to maintain your physical health, whether you're doing that or not, you need to be also putting that same amount of time and energy and investment into your mental and emotional health.

Because this is going to be a challenging time for a lot of people. There's a lot of drastic change happening very quickly. And some people's livelihoods and families and whatever are going to stay the same, and some people's are going to change a lot. And your mental and emotional health determines what opportunities you're able to find. What opportunities you're able to see or create.

If all you are doing is replaying frightening stories in your head over and over again, you have no mental or emotional energy for anything else. You are just putting yourself in constant survival mode. But if you tend to your mental and emotional health and you take care of your mental and emotional health, you are going to have the resiliency and resources to see what opportunities there are for you, whether that's emotionally, to connect with your family differently, whether that's financially, to finally start your side business, or move into a different industry, or find a way to make money in the short-term to tide you over, whether that's just personally, the opportunity to say, start cooking for yourself instead of ordering takeout all the time, or to finally create that standard meditation or yoga practice that you always thought you didn't have time for.

Your opportunities may be big or small, but you're only going to be able to see them if you are prioritizing your mental and emotional health. And

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those again, I cannot stress this enough, that's what is going to determine your whole experience of the world.

There are incredibly physically healthy people out there who are miserable, and there are people struggling with a lot of different health conditions who are happy because your physical being, your physical wellness is not the only thing in the world that matters. It's not the only health thing that matters, and it doesn't determine your mental and emotional state.

So especially in a situation where hyper-vigilance about your physical health and fear about your physical health is actually creating negative mental and emotional health outcomes, we have to intervene in that process if we want to feel any differently.

Your brain is not going to do that on its own. It is up to you to take charge of that. So you're already listening to the podcast, that's a great step. I want you to practice everything that I am talking about in the podcast. Don't just listen to me talk about it. I want you to practice it. That is a way of investing time and energy into your mental health.

You can start listening to the other episodes of the podcast that are not in this series if you're a new listener. Practice what I'm teaching you. That is the best first step to really starting to take control of your mental and emotional health so that your experience is one that you get to create on purpose. Not something that just happens to you from scrolling the news or social media or staring out the window and just catastrophizing and whatever else.

If you're in The Clutch, we have so many extra resources right now for you to be taking advantage of and putting that time in. Most of us are home right now. A lot of us have some free time right now. This is the time to go back to that work, to use those resources, to do the self-coaching course,

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to watch the call replays, to listen to the bonus podcasts that are inside the membership site.

This is the time to use those resources. And if you are new to this work but it's clicking with you and you want to know more, I do invite you to come check out The Clutch. That is my coaching community and that's where you can get a lot more support. It's just unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch.

And I really encourage those of you who are in The Clutch to make use of these resources. This is your time. This is the time that we all can rise to this occasion and show ourselves and our loved ones and the people around us what is possible when you manage your mind, when you use the part of your brain that can reason and exercise control and show up from love, when you use that part of your brain to drive the show while everybody else is running around just like an amygdala on chicken legs.

So I know it can sound easier said than done to switch from living from fear from living from love, so I'm going to be doing a free live coaching call for all of you where I'm going to be coaching a couple of people on whatever is coming up for them around the current pandemic, whatever it is that they're struggling with.

It's going to be on April 2nd at 6pm Eastern and you can sign up at [unfuckyourbrain.com/free call](http://unfuckyourbrain.com/freecall). Or you can just text your email to +13479971784. When you text us your email, we'll text you back asking you for the code word and you can just give the code word FREECALL.

So once you register, you'll get an email that will confirm you're registered and we'll give you all the instructions for applying for coaching if you want. We're going to be taking requests ahead of time, and then I'm going to be selecting who to coach based on what will be the most useful for everyone

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in terms of learning how to apply these concepts that I'm teaching to your own brain and your own life.

You will find that there will be something super powerful and helpful for you in every single coaching conversation that we have. So I can't wait to share this work with you and I hope that you will register and join us. Again, unfuckyourbrain.com/freecall, or text your email to +13479971784 and use the code word FREECALL when you're prompted.

That's it for today. If you take nothing else away from this, just remember at least not to sacrifice your mental and emotional health in favor of worrying about your physical health because that worry does not improve your physical health and it certainly doesn't improve your mental or emotional health either, and I will be back in a couple of days with the next episode. Bye.

If you're loving what you're learning in the podcast, you have got to come check out The Clutch. The Clutch is my feminist coaching community for all things Unfuck Your Brain. It's where you can get individual help applying all these concepts I teach to your own life and learning how to do thought work to blow your own mind.

It's where you can learn new coaching tools not shared on the podcast that will change your life even more. It's where you can hang out and connect over all things thought work with other podcast chickens just like you and me. It's my favorite place on earth and it will change everything, I guarantee it.

Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. Or you can just text your email address to 347-934-8861. If you text your email address to that number, we'll text you right back with a link to check out everything you

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need to know about The Clutch. 347-934-8861 or again, just go online to www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I cannot wait to see you there.