

Creating Productivity + Connection (Turn Panic Into Peace Series #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 my chickens. I hope you are all doing well, staying healthy and inside if you can, and that you are caught up in this series. You can totally listen to these out of order if you want, but they are going to build on each other. So if you haven't listened to any of the others, you may want to go back at least after this one and listen to them to kind of get the background.

The other thing I want to ask you all to do is if you found this limited series helpful, to share it with a friend or a family member or a loved one who you think could use some support right now. I really designed this mini-series to be a great introduction to a lot of these concepts for people who aren't as familiar with thought work.

So if you've kind of been wanting to figure out how to help the people in your life who are really freaking out during this time or struggling, we don't want to coach other people without their permission. They haven't signed on to the concepts. But sending them this little limited series can be a great way to offer them some support, and then of course, always up to them if they want to take you up on it.

Alright, so in the last episode, I talked a lot about why your mental and emotional health are so important and how counterproductive it is to ruin your mental and emotional health, stressing out about your physical health.

And so if we understand that our mental and emotional health are what are going to create our experience of this time, or any time, whether it's during

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this pandemic or before or after, it's always our mental and emotional experience, our thoughts and feelings that kind of constitute what something is like for us, that create our experience of it.

So if we understand that, then we can start to take these tools that I've been teaching you and build and kind of like Legos, stack and connect them together to understand how we can create the emotional experience and results that we want to create during this time.

And so today, I want to talk about I think the two things that people need and want the most during times of upheaval, and those are, one, how to stay focused and productive in some area of your life, which produces stability and helps with that feeling of chaos and things being all over the place, and two, to feel connected to other people in a time when a lot of us are self-quarantining or self-isolating and we're also - so we're physically not around other people as much, although if we're with our families, we're around them all the time.

But we're also kind of mentally sometimes getting isolated because when you go down a rabbit hole of news and anxiety, you're kind of self-isolating mentally from positive connections. So those are kind of the two things I want to talk about. So let's start with how to stay productive.

Now, I think that there's kind of two types of people here who really turn into the same type of person. One are people who are like, "Fuck it, I'm not doing anything. This is just a stay-at-home vacation, or even if I'm not enjoying it, I'm not going to try to be productive, I'm not going to try to do anything."

I've actually seen a lot of kind of social media and posts talking about how it's like the tyranny of capitalism to say we should be productive during a pandemic, and I see where those messages are coming from. I understand

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what people are saying. I don't think that this is a time to be like, I'm going to triple my output of whatever I was doing before.

But at the same time, if we could rely on your brain, unmanaged, to just have a super relaxing and restorative quarantine experience and that was economically and emotionally feasible for you, okay, then fine, but most of you, that's not what's happening.

It would be one thing if what you were doing was like, working on your projects, your craft projects and making art and cooking meals and taking long naps and really restoring and relaxing, but that's not what most people at least listening to this podcast are doing with their time. So trying to be productive and trying to create something is not about kowtowing to productivity as a kind of capitalist value or as being the most important thing in the world.

It's about having some structure for your human brain so that you have something to do with yourself rather than just sit around and freak out. If we leave your brain to its own devices, that's what it wants to do. And just like small children, most humans need some structure. They need a project; they need something to do. They need to feel like they are creating and contributing and producing something.

I think that that is just something that is innately human for many of us. And okay, it doesn't always mean producing memos and Powerpoints as our nature's true passion, but I do think that we have an internal desire to create, to contribute, to produce, to do something with our mental and emotional energy, especially something that we can put in the world for other people, that benefits other people.

So I do think it's important that you not just kind of throw up your hands like, okay, everything's chaotic and so I'm not going to do anything. I'm just

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going to descend into a time blur of Netflix and news and snacks and naps. Maybe for two or three days, then it's time to get to work.

On the other hand, the other extreme is having this kind of perfectionist fantasy that you can both, you and your partner do your jobs at 100% while also homeschooling your children who are all in the same room. And also cooking gourmet meals every night and also repainting the house.

We can go the other direction and have these unrealistic fantasies of productivity that are also not helpful. So what I really recommend is what I always recommend, what I teach here in The Clutch, stick with what I teach you about how to calendar and organize your time, and if you're not, we have Unfuck Your Brain episode number six as an overview of what I teach on time management.

But the basics are I recommend that you plan what you're going to do with your time, so it's like, eight to nine, I'm doing this, nine to 10, I'm doing that, 10 to 11, I'm doing that. I recommend that you plan your time, but that you plan it realistically. So if you have small children in the house and you know they're going to need you, don't have an unrealistic plan for what you can accomplish.

Because here's how the two types of people end up the same. When you set up an unrealistic plan and then it can't work, then you just say fuck it and you give up. And then you don't do anything and then you feel bad about yourself, then the whole cycle repeats.

So reasonable plan. Practical productivity. That's what we're going for. Not being the most productive and amazing necessarily you've ever been, if all of a sudden you now are providing childcare for your own children while also trying to work. Or if there's someone sick in your household you're taking care of or whatever has changed for you, whatever is going on.

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But we also don't want to just throw up our hands and decide that we can't get anything done and there's no point and we're just going to stare at our phones all day. I saw a hilarious meme that was like, here's my schedule, this is what allows me to feel kind of focused and in control, and the schedule was just like, 9am to 2am, stare at phone. That's what we don't want to be doing.

So I really recommend that you plan your time, plan what you're going to do, but be reasonable and flexible about it. Have an hour or two of free time, at least that you can move around as you need to. Don't get super perfectionistic about your children doing exactly what you planned exactly when you want them to.

Create a plan and then have some grace and flexibility with it. But don't fall into the trap of either trying to be perfect during this time, or just going to an I can't be perfect so fuck it, I'm not doing anything. We're going for - I usually teach we want to do A- work. I think in this case, we want to do B work. Let's try to do B or B+ work. Not A+ and not D. Let's just go for that middle, which for a lot of perfectionists is very uncomfortable.

I do recommend that if you are not working, if you don't have a job to be working at, that you pick a project to work on. And it should be something not - obviously if you have multiple small children that you're caring for and that takes all your time, maybe it's going to be a smaller project. If you are now not working or on a break from working and you have a lot of time, it can be a bigger project.

But I do think it's important that you pick something that you want to accomplish during this time. For most of us, this period is going to come to an end and we're going to come out the other side and what will we have done with this time? You don't want to just give up on whatever your plans or dreams or goals were because this happened.

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Now, some of them may need to change. This is not the time to go after your goal of traveling to all 50 states in a Winnebago. We have to adapt to the circumstances. But I really want to recommend that you pick something that you want to do. Maybe it's something you've wanted to do for a long time or that the conditions weren't right before.

Maybe it's just something new. It almost doesn't matter what the thing is. It's just picking something to give you some structure and meaning and direction and to give you a sense that you are still creating and contributing and engaging your brain at a higher level. We want to get your prefrontal cortex working and engaged and have you doing some complex thinking and creating so you're not just living in your primitive brain and scanning for danger all the time.

So that's how to stay productive. In terms of how to feel connected, the good news is that connection is a feeling created by your thoughts. It happens in your mind. It is not actually created by circumstances, by other people around you.

That is a - for some of you, that's a concept you already understand from the podcast. For some of you, that might be a record screech, what-the-fuck-is-she-talking-about moment. And if you listen to the rest of the podcast, I go into this in depth in a lot of other episodes. But let me just - I can prove it to you quickly.

We have all been in a room full of other people and felt very alone. Most of us have had the experience of being with the person who's supposed to be closest to us and feeling very alone, whether that's a friend or a romantic partner or whatever else. And at the same time, we've all been alone and thought of someone we love or a friend and felt so connected to them.

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So it's not the physical presence of other people in your life that creates a feeling of connection. It's not even interaction with them. It's your thoughts about them. I do think staying connected in this time is super important, but the good news is that you don't have to be physically with people to feel connected to them.

You can create connection by just thinking about how much you love someone, what you admire about them, what you enjoy about them, the good times you've had with them, whatever else it is. You can create love for other people and it actually doesn't even have to be for specific people.

For instance, some Buddhist traditions teach a meditation called a compassionate loving kindness meditation. It has different names. It's basically about creating love and compassion for everyone in the world. And you don't have to meditate to do that. You can actually just think about that.

You can think about feeling love for all the other people out there who are dealing with the same situation, the people in your town, for the people you knew growing up, whoever it is. I really recommend that you take some time to mentally produce that connection.

So of course you should also or can also have phone dates with your friends and get on Zoom. So interesting. I've heard from a lot of my students that they're actually connecting way more with their long-distance friends than they were before this crisis because now everyone's home and everyone's looking to connect with the people in their lives, and so they actually are having more connection now than they were before.

Just one of the kind of funny ways that things can turn out to be opposite of what we fear. But the most important thing to remember is not to kind of focus on the idea that you're alone, that you're isolated, even if you live

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alone. You can feel connection with whoever you want by thinking about feeling that connection, and you can even just feel connection with people as a whole, even if you don't know.

So I recommend that you take some time every day, even if it's just five minutes, yes, reach out to a friend, make connection that way, but also just think about someone you love, someone you care about. Create that feeling of closeness for yourself. The more you do that, the less you will even notice that you may be home alone or that you haven't seen those people in person.

We don't know how long some of us are going to be practicing social distancing or spending more time alone or just with a few people who are around us already, and there's no better time to start practicing the ability to connect to other people and to feel that love and connection with them whether they're there or not.

And that is such a beautiful thing about the human mind is that we can have that relationship with that person, even if we're not directly in contact with them. Many of us have that relationship with people who aren't even around anymore. We still love people who have passed away or who we're no longer in touch with.

So just remember that yes, social connection is important to humans and for many of us, it's important for our lives, though not all of us, but you don't have to be able to go to dinner or go to brunch or take that trip or even talk to the person in order to feel that connection that you want to feel.

So if you focus on creating something, on being productive in some way that matters to you a little bit every day, and you focus on creating a little bit of connection with other people in your own mind every day, I promise you,

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it's going to make every day feel a little bit more normal, a little bit more stable, and a lot more fulfilling.

For however long we're in this particular situation, every day can have those elements, and so every day can feel a little more grounded, a little more rewarding, and a little more of the whole life that you want to have. We don't need to try to put our lives on hold just because the circumstances have changed.

In fact, that's so counterproductive. And spending all of our time worrying about what the future will be means we're never actually present or enjoying the only time we have, which is now. So how can you produce, create, contribute now? How can you feel connection with others and yourself now?

Those are such powerful questions to ask yourself and they're so much more useful than reading the news or asking yourself when the last time you might have had a cough was. Focus on that experience that you want to create, the emotions that you want to create, those results that you want to create.

You have to do that intentionally. You cannot just rely on your brain to do it for you because it will not, my friend. At least my brain certainly has not yet. Alright, that's it for how to stay productive and feel connected. I recorded this podcast and several others today for my productivity and I feel connected to all of you. I love all of you so much and I hope that you will take a minute to love on yourself and someone else today too. I'll talk to you in the next episode.

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

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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.

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