

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

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 am so super excited about this interview and I know that a lot of you are too. Because when I shared on my social media that I was going to be talking to my guest today, I got so many DMs from people who either listen to her because she's a parenting expert and they have children, but also so many people who, like me, follow her and listen to her for themselves even though they don't have children, or both.

So my guest today is Dr. Becky Kennedy and we are going to get real deep into how your own ability to emotionally regulate yourself shows up in the way that you parent your children and the way you parent yourself. And I thought that this episode would be a really good touchstone for all of us as we are heading into the holiday season.

We may be dealing with family members, we may be dealing with ourselves and how we think and feel at this time of year. Just emotions can be running really high. And so I think now is a great time to have an in-depth exploration of what it means to parent more skillfully, but whether that's parenting actual other children or just reparenting or parenting yourself, the way that you respond to your own big thoughts and big feelings.

So I'm so excited for this interview. It was such a good conversation and I cannot wait for you all to hear it, so let's get into it.

—

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

Kara: With no further ado, let me introduce clinical psychologist Dr. Becky Kennedy. She is a mom of three and she was recently named the millennial parenting whisperer by Time magazine, rethinking the way we raise our children.

And she's an expert in parenting and child development, and she has a platform, which I'm sure she'll tell us a bit more about towards the end called Good Inside where she equips parents with tools to strengthen parent-child relationships, decrease problem behaviors, and build more peaceful homes. So welcome and is there anything you'd like to add about yourself?

Becky: Yeah, well thank you for that. What would I like to add? I guess two things that are really on my mind. Number one, whatever we end up talking about here, whatever I end up saying that might seem like a good idea to try, I just want everyone to know it's my personal disclaimer, I don't do these things myself 100% of the time at all.

Kara: I thought you were going to say never. Like I've never tried it.

Becky: I don't know about never. That would probably be a little odd. But people, especially when they're like, I'm stressed and what can I do, or my kid's doing this, what can I do, and often when I hear about other people's struggles, my brain works really well because my body's not activated by their stress because it's not my stress.

When my kids are having a tantrum, when I'm having my own meltdown, it's not like my brain 100% of the time says I'm going to do this amazing coping strategy. I do something totally destructive and then try to catch myself, say something compassionate and come back. So that's my personal process.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

The other thing I'll say and it kind of goes off what you began with is my private practice is only adults. People are often surprised to know that. I actually no longer - I haven't for a while actually worked with kids in play therapy or anything like that.

And I used to say I was not a child clinical psychologist because my clients were adults. And one of the things that happened as I became a parent and started to work with more and more parents as they were therapy clients is I really started to see an arc in terms of okay, the things we struggle with as adults, how did we get here?

No baby comes out of the womb thinking, "I want to end up being an adult who has really self-destructive coping mechanisms." That's never happened. So we're all doing the best we can with the resources we have available in that moment. And yet so many of us by the time we're adults say, "Okay, these things aren't working for my anymore but I also am having a really hard time changing course." That's just fascinating to me.

And so I take the assumption that also given we're animals, we're trying to adapt and we're learning. And so everything that is a symptom in adulthood was at one point an adaption in childhood. And it's in childhood that we are wiring our bodies.

So it's almost unfortunate, we adapted in a way we had to, but those adaptations end up working against us. And this actually is all my work with my adult clients who've let me into their lives. This is what gives me the best ideas for parenting because I think if we take what we know, I can reverse engineer this back to parents now.

So we can hopefully help wire kids in a way that will be adapted still when they're adults. So all of this to say for all of your listeners who aren't

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

parents, as you mentioned, everything we're going to be talking about is really about rewiring ourselves, or you would say training your mind.

Lingo schmingo. Parenting at the end of the day and the parents in my parenting community, a huge percentage of them are not parents. They're adults who say yeah, I do have parenting to do, parenting, reparenting of my - whatever you want to call it. My inner child, or things that have happened that no longer work, and now I'm the adult that I always needed and never had until I realized I could start doing that for myself.

And this is the way we change ourselves, and this is literally the only way we can make changes with our kids. Because we can't give out what we're not giving in.

Kara: There's so much good stuff there that I want to follow up on. I think brains can hold up to three things, so I have three things. Let's see if I remember them all. Your operating gram, I learned that from David Allen, Getting Things Done. That's why I was like, write everything down, your brain can only hold three things at most.

So number one, I love that disclaimer because I think - I don't know how much you see this but certainly a lot of my students are kind of perfectionists who think, "Well, I learned this thing and yet I'm still doing the behavior." And I'm like, yeah, of course, because application takes time.

And my experience, it just sounds a lot like what you're describing, has been when I see something new and want to change a behavior. At first, I can only see it after I've done it. I go into activated state, it happens, then afterwards I'm like, I did that thing again.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

And then eventually I'm able to kind of see it as it's happening but I can't stop it yet. I'm like, okay, I'm doing it, nope, can't get the horse back in the barn but at least I'm aware earlier. It's only the third step of the process where I'm at all able to sort of put on the brakes midway. And the fourth step is having done it enough and worked it enough so that when it starts to happen, I can see it and head it off.

But I talk all the time about what I half-managed mind I have and yet people's perfectionism is so strong that often people will say to me, "It's such a relief to know that you don't have a perfectly managed mind," even though I'm like, on here every week being like, let me tell you what crazy shit my brain said yesterday.

Becky: That just resonated with me so strongly. It's so similar to things I say all the time, which is we start changing first in retrospect. And much later proactively. The proactive change before the behavior - I'm waiting for a lot of those moments.

Kara: Totally, and it's so normal. If you think about anything, it's like, I don't know, if you were studying some kind of monkey or virus outside or whatever, you're like, oh shit, a problem's happening, we only see it afterwards. And then we can start to reverse engineer. I love that.

Becky: That's exactly right. And it's actually why - and this is really the same for parents and non-parents. We underestimate the power of repair as the first change, which is I just saw myself yell at my kids, or I just watched myself again, I said I was going to work out today and I didn't.

Well, guess what? You think you didn't change. There's a moment for change right there. In the repair with yourself. One second, what would happen if I added an element of compassion right now? That's a change in

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

my body, as opposed to berating myself for not working out or for yelling at my kids.

That's change. We so often are caught into the idea that change is only exactly visible. Well, I didn't get to the gym, okay, well guess what, our body registers so many things that aren't overt behaviors. And if you pause and say I'm a good valuable person who didn't get to the gym today, that's huge. That's a huge change.

Kara: That's everything. Yeah, I think we're teaching exactly the same things, just in different words. Because I'm constantly talking about - we have a weird metaphor in the Clutch just because I said it on a coaching call once but it was like, a llama inside an electrified fence.

The llama is whatever the behavior is and the electrified fence is the shame. Sometimes the llama's not a behavior, it's even a thought pattern. But then there's judgment and shame on top of it. And it's like you always have to do that.

I'm constantly saying I don't give a fuck, why do you ever go to the gym? I care about how you talk to yourself about whether or not you go to the gym. That relationship with yourself. And you're so right, that's the transformation.

That happens after you didn't do the thing, or after you yelled at your kids, or after you didn't go to the gym, or after the whatever. That's the moment where you have a chance to turn it around.

And so often, whether you're yelling at your kids or going to the gym, people are like, the way to escape my shame is to change my behavior. So

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

that's what I need help with. Let me just learn how to stop yelling, then I won't have to feel shitty about myself afterwards. It's the other way around.

Becky: You're making my brain fire in so many directions so I'm now kind of - collect myself. This is amazing. I don't know if I've ever thought this thought but I'm just thinking it now, that the opposite of change isn't behavior change. It's curiosity.

And shame stops curiosity. You can't be curious when you're ashamed because you're in such a bad person state that you need to use all your energy to just try to escape and avoid. And curiosity is a marker of change. To me, it's the single most important attribute.

I wonder why I didn't get to the gym. There's a part of me that wants to go. There must be a part of me that if it doesn't want to or just has so many difficult feelings, can I get curious about that part? That's change. The behavior takes care of itself when you fill yourself up.

Kara: The way I teach it is the action, everybody's always on the action line, but your thought and feeling are what drive that. And curiosity is exactly what I always - if your refrigerator's broken but you think it's going to punch you, you never look at it. You can't get close to something when you're judging it or ashamed about it, so you can't ever figure out what's going on.

This podcast is just going to be the two of us saying the things we say like, yes, that's exactly right. But to hear it from the other perspective. Curiosity is - I think that's right. I think maybe the opposite of shame you could also say is self-compassion.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

But curiosity is the only way to get there. You can't - we're so judgmental of ourselves that we will do whatever we can to avoid getting to know our own thought processes or looking into it, but that is the only way that you can change it. So I'm curious, how do you feel like that impacts parenting in the parenting relationship?

Becky: So much. So I mean I think in general, we think our kids are going to heal us. It's a probably unconscious thought. But we go into parenting thinking they're going to fill some hole or they're going to heal us. And what ends up happening is our kids trigger us. They trigger...

Kara: Just kidding. Opposite.

Becky: Exactly. Then you have this kid and you're like, well, this ain't a convenient truth.

Kara: This is not what I ordered.

Becky: Okay, that's interesting. Parenting, it's really this journey of self-discovery while you're taking care of another human and hoping to raise them in a way that you want to. And what ends up happening I think is that we see in our kids all the time, all the different things they're dealing with, all their different feelings, all the different range of reactions.

And the reason they trigger us is because it holds these really intense, whether we want to say bodily memories or parts or dissociated experiences that were never put together for us from our childhood, it literally pulls them out.

So I see my kid tantrum, I'm in my kid's presence, and what's really happening in my body, we think we react to a tantrum, we don't. We react

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

to the sensations and feelings and memories inside of us that get evoked by a tantrum, which really means how were these moments when I was a kid responded to?

Was there a place for big messy feelings? Were big messy feelings, did they lead to connection or did they lean to aloneness? Maybe the opposite of shame I think is connection.

Kara: Disconnection.

Becky: Exactly. So if I grew up in a family - and it's so interesting because parents often say, "I don't remember. Am I supposed to remember what my parents did when I was two?" And I say we have such a limited view of memory, as if it's just what we can say.

You are telling me, you're coming here to me because you're saying I have a really hard time staying calm during my kid's tantrum, I really react, and now you're telling me you don't remember how your parents reacted to you. Your body's telling you that memory.

It's telling you what was tolerated, what was allowed, what was safe, what led to secure moments of attachment, and what were encoded in your body as moments of terror. Not because of the thing you were tantruming about, but because you were totally alone or judged or pushed away when you were in that state.

And so if we look at parenting through that perspective, the things inside me that I was left alone with, alone, whether they were ignored, they were never brought up, they couldn't be named, or they were time-outed, or they were punished, we were actually ridiculed, or we were massively invalidated for our reactions.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

These are all forms of aloneness. Well, my body is going to activate that fear of aloneness when I see those same moments in my kids. And we said before, we cannot give out what we don't have in. And probably what we don't have in with a little bit of excess.

This is not what our body does. And so that reparenting work, which doesn't necessarily mean - I'm not saying, do I have to go to my parents and have a tantrum in front of them as an adult and have them hug me?

Kara: I do not think my parents would respond too well to that.

Becky: Yeah, most parents are like, no thank you.

Kara: Maybe they're not available to do that.

Becky: Exactly, for a million different reasons. No. That's not what I mean. There can be so many different ways we can do that work. I'm deeply inspired by internal family systems, I think they have very actually concrete models for how to revisit things from our past but in ways that actually feel very practical I think and very real or looking at things now.

Like we just said, what is it like when I start panicking now as an adult? Can I pause? Can I see my panic off to the side? What would it be like to join that panic versus judge it? Not join it meaning double down on it, but join it, sit next to it.

Kara: Hold its hand.

Becky: Exactly. Can I talk to my friend instead of tell myself it's not a big deal?

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

Kara: I think not as a parent, but I have been doing a lot of this work around chronic pain and in my romantic relationship also. And I think the thing that I have found the most helpful is when we talk about the body holds it, there's obviously all these different theories about what that means.

But the one that I have found the most - makes the most sense to me scientifically but also accords with my experience of how to resolve it is that you sort of - it's not like it's in your left thigh. Your nervous system gets patterned to experience certain things.

Safe certain things, unsafe, and I think a lot of us as children, if when our nervous system was activated we received certain kinds of responses, let's say, or we didn't receive other kinds of responses, we learn to shove that down, to power through it, to not allow for it.

So one of the things I've found for me has been really helpful - I've been doing this with working out actually. I have a very nervous system aware trainer, she's great. But even with all of that, I found that I was like, three years in, still dreading every workout, which something weird is happening then if we're still dreading every single one.

And I realized that even at a low level, my nervous system was getting activated often because I have a lot of trauma around childhood movement and exercise stuff. So even small scale ones was getting activated and I was pushing through it. So it didn't feel safe and I dreaded doing it every time.

And so one of the things I have been working on and creating a new body work around that I haven't shared yet is what are those self-practices you can do to create that safety in your nervous system now, right?

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

Becky: So if we use that as a jumping off point, I don't think you need extra work. You're doing all the work. But I can't help myself when I think about how...

Kara: We're all about any additional practices.

Becky: So I wasn't trained in internal family systems in my PhD program and I came across it, Dick Schwartz, the author of IFS, the founder, he originated the theory, he was a family systems therapist and realized that the way our bodies work inside of our bodies actually mimics kind of family systems and that we have internal family systems.

And he very much takes the same view that we're always trying to help ourselves. So what is going on when my brain knows working out, it's going to end up feeling good? I like so many things about it, it works for me, so why am I dreading it three years later?

So I won't speak for him anymore because he's a genius. He would say something much better than I'm going to say. But what I will say is the perspective I would take around that is there's a part of me, the parts language is so key to everything we do.

There's a part of me that must think it's protecting me in this moment. There's a part of me that's saying working out's going to be great, there's a part of me that's protecting me. You referred to this yourself. That part, it's not just that we learned to shove things down. We actually develop parts of us to do the shoving down.

They're actually their own part. They're a part, they're a persona in a way that have a really important function to our overall system, that we don't just learn to shove things down. Someone's actually keeping away the distress.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

And I actually think this huge shift happens whenever we notice them, sounds like you're aware of it, some version of here's that dread, when we actually start by thanking that, some version of thank you for your years of service, you really have helped me so much for so many years when I needed you, you figured out how to and then the curiosity comes, or our personal knowledge of ourselves.

It wasn't safe, it didn't feel good to move my body, and how truly kind of creative for you to generate dread in advance of something. So I would be less compelled to take myself into a dangerous situation. And this is just pure IFS in terms of parts and even the understanding of movement.

One of the things I talk about a lot is one, you've really made a connection with that part. It's a little more generous toward us. And we can literally ask it to move back. And I always picture Inside Out here, you know what I think is the greatest movie of all time.

Where there's this control tower and the different parts of us are either at the control tower leading, or they're not killed off, they maybe stepped back.

Kara: Gone on a little lunch break.

Becky: Exactly. And just like a little kid who's trying to get your attention and annoying you when you're on the phone, at some point you have to say to your phone call, "Okay, one second," and connect with that kid. There's something really important, you want my attention.

And usually, if you do some version of, "I need you to wait one minute," after the connection, your kid's much more likely to, than if you were like,

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

“Stop annoying me, stop annoying me.” Because why? Everyone just wants to feel seen and good inside.

And if we talk to our protectors, who maybe used to be our protectors now hold us back, with that same loving compassion and connection and appreciation, they’re then more likely to appreciate the boundary we’re trying to set, which is some version of I’m going to ask you not to take the reins.

Kara: I love that. I’m curious since we are all about the transparency that we’re all a work in progress here, what’s a place that you - if you’re comfortable describing a place, you struggle in your parenting? What’s a place that you feel like you’ve made a ton of progress? It used to be like this and now it’s like this, and what’s a place that you’re still kind of in that four-step somewhere of seeing it afterwards, seeing it during but not being able to intervene, et cetera?

Becky: This all comes back to me, so I’m definitely a still recovering people pleaser I guess. I think I’ve made great strides in that to the point that I feel very good about my ability to hold boundaries. But anyone who doesn’t know my history would probably be then be surprised to know I was just such a good kid.

And there was no external easily labelable moment in my childhood or series of moments, that’s why I had to be a people pleaser. So many tricky things in family birth order and kind of just things...

Kara: And gender socialization.

Becky: Gender socialization, 100%. And so with my kids, one of the things I really delight in, I really do with them is that they’re strong. All of them.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

They're pretty strong minded. They like to say what's on their mind, then they don't easily back down.

And so they want to know why? Why mom are you making this rule? Or here's how I feel about it. And I love that about them and I definitely get triggered by that too. Because again, what is a trigger? Our body looks to shut down something in someone else that we had to learn down to shut down in ourselves.

And the part of me that had a strong want, desire, I'm less concerned with what you want of me and more concerned with what I want for myself, I had to develop a different part that kept me distant.

So I will say to my kids, can you ever take no for an answer? Can you make a situation easier? Just one time. And my husband, he's like, "You should read Dr. Becky's post, you would really them."

Kara: My boyfriend does that to me. He's like, I heard this great thing the other day. No thank you.

Becky: Exactly. I'm not in that mindset right now. So that's a work in progress. And I think where does the work start? Not by telling myself I'm going to say this thing next time, but actually by gazing in and noticing all the places outside my kids, where I can start relating to my own desires and whether or not they get met.

At least reminding myself I'm allowed to have them. Those are mine, those are good, those are interesting. I think many times when we're triggered by our kids, we basically react to them thinking, can you stop doing that and be more like me?

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

Kara: Can you follow my manual, change your action, and then I'll feel better.

Becky: Exactly. And yet to look at a trigger with anyone, definitely a kid, anyone, and say, I must be seeing something in them, maybe I need to grow that part of myself, maybe I need to become, maybe I need to close the gap between us not by shutting down that thing and them, but by further developing that part in myself. It's literally a 180. And it's actually really empowering.

Kara: It's such a gift when you can get past that judgment and fear and actually when you get triggered be curious. It's back to curiosity. I definitely feel like six months to a year into doing this work was the point where I was sort of like, I wonder what's going to set me off next.

I was so curious. I almost miss that. Now it's so much less common that when it happens, I do the normal human thing of being like, ugh, this person should just change. But there was this great period where I was so excited about the work that every time I got set off, I was like, oh, that's so interesting, what's going on?

But to make it concrete, I love what you're saying, which is so if you are a parent, although really if you're not a parent, if you feel triggered by something anybody is doing, especially your children, it is that - we know there's a whole episode on the podcast, it's like when you get triggered, lean in, get curious about what it is that's setting you off.

It's not just that kids should or shouldn't do this thing. It's not that it's objectively embarrassing if your kid has a tantrum. It's not that a kid should objectively be x, y, z. It is really you, what's your thought about it, what is it bringing up for you, are you feeling activated.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

You see this in adult relationships. I see this working on my romantic relationship right now is that the different things that when he gets activated then sometimes, I'm totally chill and sometimes I get activated. All depends on what I see as a threat or not as a threat to the relationship to me.

So whether it's a kid or not, starting to notice, oh, I'm getting activated, what is it in my - what am I making this mean? What is this bringing up for me?

Becky: I think that's exactly right and I love getting really concrete too. So I think taking on this naive scientist role, like scientists love to collect data and every piece of data is good data, and they wait to put it all together because they know they can't until they kind of keep collecting data.

And so let's say your kid has a tantrum in public and you realize after, yeah, I know I didn't react the way I would have wanted to, I know I wasn't the parent that I would have wanted at that moment. Okay, I think the first step is note the guilt and shame, because there's definitely bad mom, bad mom, bad mom, there's definitely the fast forward, I fucked my kid up forever, I fucked my kid up forever.

So just I think parents often say, "How do I get rid of those thoughts?" We don't. We can start to notice them, and then the relationship changes. So even just start by saying hi. Hi fast forwarded thought, hi bad parent thought, I'm just going to put you in a room, you guys can talk to each other, I'm pretty sure you have a lot to say so just give me the Cliff Notes after. I'll be back to you soon.

And then seriously, you just get a piece of paper and I would start to write down exactly what happened. Well, you were in the cereal aisle. Where was I zero to 10? I was at a - actually it wasn't a zero, you know what

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

happened that day? Well, the painter gave me a bill that was higher than I thought.

Oh actually, so you realize what you go in with. So we're walking down the cereal aisle and then my son said, "I want Fruit Loops," and I said to him kindly, "We're not going to get Fruit Loops today buddy," and already I'm thinking I'm already activated. I'm just thinking, please don't tantrum, please don't tantrum please don't tantrum, okay, I'm there.

Am I in that shame, this is the worst moment ever spiral? No, not yet. Okay, interesting. So really track. And then what happened? And then he looked at me and crossed his arms and said, "You're the worst mom ever," and then I don't know, maybe one parent's like, I still wasn't there.

Then I said back to him, "You're the worst kid ever." Okay, that is. And then what happened? And then how did I feel? And then what did I do? And then what did I notice around me? And then what happened? Then did I worry about the judgment? Really tracking it. And all the while though, probably having to pause and, oh, remember, shame and guilt, just join that room.

Kara: Breaking out of their room. Keep trying to get out and hang out.

Becky: Join your friends over on aisle eight. And really collecting data, what the idea of my body just remembered something, my body just went through a defensive process, it's no longer defensive, but it must have been at some point. My body is remembering something.

And to me, I love the word important. Something important just happened. I'm a shitty mom, or I'm the worst parent. Important really honors

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

something without glorifying. I don't think you have to say, what an amazing learning moment because we don't feel like it at the time.

Kara: It's not always fun.

Becky: But I think we know if our body ends up saying something that we didn't want to say. It's kind of always interesting to me. Like, I know I don't want to tell my kid he's an awful kid. Every parent says I don't want to do that. So if I do that, something insanely powerful must have taken over my body in the moment. Wow, let me try to just start to put the pieces together.

Kara: I love that. So I know that you strongly believe there's no kind of right way to be a good parent. I'm curious how you think about that term because I think that comes up so often, like I want to be a good mom, I want to be a good dad, I want to be a good parent, and it's obviously so arbitrary and subjective and so culturally contingent.

I'm curious whether you sort of like using that term and redefining it for ourselves, or whether you think it's more useful to just not even use that term. You're just a human parenting and some days it's amazing, some days, not so great.

Becky: Yeah. A couple things. So these labels, I'm a good parent, I'm a bad parent, to me, they're all part of a very behavioral focus. They're all - those judgments are based on something observable.

So I yelled at my kid today in the grocery store and so I'm a bad parent. Yeah, I don't find those labels useful. I frankly don't find many labels useful. I find them very reductionistic and therefore they get in our way of being curious. I feel the same thing about psychological diagnosis. There's a person inside.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

Now, what's interesting because I've actually had this conversation with someone when I came up with this name, I guess good inside, is you're someone who doesn't like to talk about good parents and bad parents. And yet, I do very wholeheartedly believe in the name good inside because I think it actually speaks to something very different.

That on our inside, at our core, there's a goodness that's totally separate from our behavior on the outside. That doesn't mean, oh, I yelled at my kid, I guess I'm good inside, so who cares? I just don't know any human being that - that's just a negative view of human behavior.

Kara: At least nobody's listening to our podcast and trying to figure things out.

Becky: They're not podcast listeners.

Kara: If there are people out there, they're not listening to self-improvement podcasts.

Becky: Definitely not. To me, it actually goes to curiosity again. The reason I think considering this idea of my kid is good inside, I'm good inside, is actually not only grounding but so compelling, is it creates the gap between okay, so if I'm good inside, why did I yell at my kid?

If my kid's good inside, why does he keep hitting his younger sister over and over? And when we have a gap in understanding, in a not knowing, we can then enter into curiosity.

Where saying my kid's a bad kid, they keep hitting their sister, there's no curiosity. There's judgment. Saying I'm a shitty mom, no curiosity. So I think...

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

Kara: Here's the explanation, here's why I did it, because I'm a bad mom, because they're a bad kid, here's my explanation.

Becky: Exactly, period.

Kara: Nothing to be curious about.

Becky: So I shirk the idea of good parent, bad parent. What does that even mean? I very much identify with like, we are all good inside and really grounding ourselves in our internal stable goodness is what allows us to be curious about our not so ideal behaviors, which is what allows us to change.

Kara: This is what we call on this podcast like, having your own back. Meaning you know that you're not going to criticize yourself, you're not going to abandon yourself, you're not going to judge yourself. When you that have relationship with yourself, and I think this sort of brings us back to where we started but where it all comes back to, which is - and I'm sure you see this too.

I see so many people in my program or my students who are like, okay, I really want to make sure that I am giving my daughter a positive body image. My body image is shit, but I want to make sure hers is good.

Becky: That's my next week's podcast.

Kara: There you go. So it's this sort of, I've abandoned hope for myself but I want - or I want to create this relationship with my kids that I don't have with myself. But it's impossible. How on earth are you going to model something that you don't know how to?

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

I would never be like, I'll teach you how to build a car, because you know what, I have no idea how to build a car. And even if I read some books on it, probably still can't teach it if I haven't done it.

Becky: 100%. And I think it's why thinking about the language of parts to ourselves, a part of me is like this and a part of me like this, what ends up happening is then we really understand the idea of an internal relationship.

Even I would say we are sometimes critical about ourselves, but we can take a curious - if I'm good inside, why have I developed this part of me that in these moments is so harsh about forgetting to go grocery shopping today? Whatever it is. We can take an approach of curiosity and compassion with the parts of us that are non-curious and non-compassionate toward ourselves.

Kara: It's that meta level. Whether you call it a thought pattern or a part of yourself or whatever, it's that you can even be curious about why you're being an asshole to yourself.

Becky: Yeah. So for all the listeners here, parents, non-parents, to again make this one more level actionable and concrete, just to pause and to think about where is a part of me? What part of me can I identify? That can be really critical about myself.

And you actually don't have to be critical about that. For all we know, all of us will have that part until the day we die. That's actually - it's not a problem. Can I even say to that part right now, I'm going to start to be more curious about you and less critical of you? Because you probably developed for a reason.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

You in some ways think you're helping me. That's so interesting. You think you're helping me when every time I make a mistake at work, you say, oh, you're going to get fired, you're going to get fired, first one fired. If I start saying, instead of, "I'm making myself so anxious," huh, what is that? I even sometimes name it. Like...

Kara: I know somebody who named hers Helga. We call it the lizard brain sometimes.

Becky: Exactly, Marsha, hey. Like I just - I basically missed two commas and you're like, off to the races. And what that helps us do in our own life is it helps us change, it helps us get grounded and actually make active decisions. But what it also helps us do with our kids is when they come home saying, "I lost my jacket," I don't know any parent who's like, I want to start telling my kid they're spoiled, they're irresponsible.

No one actually thinks it's a good idea. So if we've taken an approach to kind of getting to see and name and even have maybe a playful relationship with our Marsha, that Marsha is going to come up to yell at your kid. But instead of Marsha taking over the control tower in your body and determining what you say, you're going to be able to notice her.

And instead say some version of, I feel it coming, like you said. Or maybe it does come but because we're more aware, we're able to go to our kid and say, "I'm really sorry I said that. I wish I could have said, ugh, bummer, well, I'm sure you didn't mean to lose it, so let's just try to think of a little jingle or a way for you to whenever you leave school remember it for the next time."

Kara: Can we talk more about this? Because I think this is so important because I think that what perfectionists do is you do something you don't

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

approve of, something that, even if you don't criticize yourself, whatever, it's not aligned with your highest self.

And then what we want to do is just vow to be better next time. It's like, okay, but next time I'm going to do it perfectly, from now on let me listen to another podcast, read another book, let me vow to do this differently.

But you actually I think especially when it involves another person, that doesn't really resolve the rupture or the rift. It's just you vowing to be perfect going forward. And sometimes we'll vow that to our friend or our partner or whatever. Like oh no, I know I did the thing but I'm never going to do it again.

So I'm curious how you recommend people - and also a lot of us maybe aren't used to the idea of parents apologizing to their children or didn't experience it or whatever. How do you recommend parents handle it? You did say you're the worst kid in the world in the grocery store, whatever happened.

Then how do you recommend that they - we've talked about what they need to do for themselves that they can come to it in a different way. You're not going to be able to repair well when you're still berating yourself. But if you have done that, how do you repair?

Becky: So I think first of all, we have to answer the why. Why am I really repairing? And I'll answer that. Why am I going back to my kid? Because so many parents will say to me, "I still did think about it but honestly an hour later my kid seemed fine. I don't want to bring it up again."

I want to say to parents that's not a thing, bringing it up again. Your child has registered an experience in their body. We don't get new bodies. The

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

body is the same throughout, so the body doesn't lie, the body has that experience in them.

So either we leave our child alone with that experience, and I always think about it as that's now the ending of that chapter. Or we can go back and layer something different next to that experience. And therefore, we actually change the ending to the story.

We teach kids, not just between us, but also because that is the model for how they think about every relationship. When people treat you in a way that doesn't feel good, you can expect them and maybe even you should expect them going forward, you are someone who deserves to be approached about that.

Two people can have a deeper understanding of something and can connect after moments that feel off and feel bad. You don't have to expect to be alone in your relational distress. That can then be actually, again, a point of deepening in a relationship. That's why.

There's no such thing as my kid forgot it. That's just not happening. And the terrifying thing about that is I don't know anyone who says, "You know what I really want for my daughter when she's 28? I want her partner to say something awful to her and then I want her to have the ability to dissociate that and then have a smile and keep going."

Sorry, I don't know anyone who says sign my daughter up for that. Well, if we don't repair, we are not only telling our kids that that is the model of close relationship, that that's what love is. The scary thing, and this is probably for another podcast, is all attraction is is an activation of our earliest detachment pattern.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

So forget being normalized. Your daughter will now start being attracted to the type of people who could not apologize and will not acknowledge something. Forget they'll tolerate. They'll actually be attracted to those people. That always gives me the heebie-jeebies.

So that's a big why. So having said that heavy statement, we have to repair with ourselves first. We have to either get curious or repair with ourselves. I am still a good parent, I did not mess up my child forever. And you actually have to feel a tiny shift in your body before you go back to your kid. Or else you're going to...

Kara: I teach this all the time. So if they've been listening they know to believe a thought means your body shifts, you feel a little difference in your physical state.

Becky: Exactly. Because if not, you're actually asking your kid to do a service for you, which is not fair for them.

Kara: And it's not going to come out the way you want it to. I mean, it's driven by the feeling, so if you're still agitated, it's not going to feel repairing.

Becky: And then to me, a repair means going to your kid, I think you can say the word sorry. I like to say the word sorry, but I actually think the best repair sometimes don't need them. It's actually you're sharing a reflection of what happened and you're validating for your kid in that moment, that thing you thought happened really did happen. You're not making it up in your head, and I'm letting you know that because I'm not ignoring it.

And I would say to my kid, "I'm thinking about what happened in the grocery store earlier. I had a really big reaction and that was not your fault.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

Just like we talk about your big feelings, I'm still working on managing mine. And I'm really sorry that it came out in those words."

And then I think you can go in a lot of directions. You can pause, pausing is always good with kids. See where they are. So many parents will say to me, "My kid's going to look up at me though and say can I have my pretzels now?" And yeah, that doesn't mean they don't get it. That means they're just letting it sink in. So just trust that.

Or I think if we feel really grounded, we can say, "I'm sure that felt really scary for you and I'm actually really open to hearing about that because that's really important for us to talk about," all the while watching guilt, bad mom, bad mom.

But our kids' ability to voice their honest experiences with us is - if there's anything we can cling on to as evidence on the outside of "good parenting," let's hold on to that. Our ability to hear our kids' honest, sometimes distressing feelings about how they experienced us. That's such a marker of intergenerational change if we can start to do that.

Kara: I love that. So there's two things I want to say about that. So one is just because I know how the brains work who listen to this podcast. So one is I think that there is that whole conversation about romantic and social attachments based on childhood attachment.

I do want to sort of say for the people listening who are now thinking, "Well, my parents didn't do any of this so now I'm fucked." We can shift and change those things. I've talked about this on the podcast a lot because it's a deep work I've done myself. But when you heal some of that stuff and you shift your attachment style, you will actually be attracted to different people.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

I am in a very different relationship now than I've ever been in before, and it literally is because who I was attracted to changed when I did that work. So I'm imagining now the people listening to my podcast who are like, "Well, my kids are already 17 and I guess I missed that whole chance so now what am I supposed to do?" I'm curious if you have any words of wisdom for that.

Becky: I think number one, one of my very, very foundational beliefs in parenting and reparenting, it is never ever ever too late. And here I think is the best evidence for why. Everyone here who's a listener, forget your kids for a second, even if they're 18 or 30, however old they are.

Think about something from your childhood that didn't feel good. Just anything. Maybe it was a pattern of things. And you don't have to - just anything. It could be, yeah, I do wish my parents used to knock on my door sometimes and to say hey, how you feeling right now? Something hard just happened.

Or I do feel like my parents are so critical, anything. Just imagine your parent. Forget you being a parent. Imagine your parent now, or if they're deceased, when they were alive, coming to you and just saying, "Maybe this seems kind of random but I keep thinking about how I never came to your soccer games. I keep thinking about how I'd often say things like where were those over five points, instead of..."

Kara: That was my family.

Becky: How do you feel about that? What matters about that to you? Imagine if your parents told you they'd been thinking about that. And again, maybe there's a sorry, but just the power even of I want to let you know I've been thinking about that and I wish I had done this instead.

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

I don't know one adult who would say to me anything but, "Oh my God, that would just feel really powerful." And so if that would feel powerful to you with your parents, you literally have evidence that it will still feel amazing to your kids because they haven't been going through a relationship with you as long as you have with your parents. The repair would still feel so good.

So many people in my parenting community, they say this to me. They say, "What really inspires me to go back to my teenage kids or my older kids is the thought that if my dad would have come up to me and said I was really harsh about the people you dated, and that actually wasn't anything about you or them," whatever the story is. I would take that in a heartbeat. That would be amazing. So I think that's how we really know.

Kara: It's never too late. And the truth is not all of our parents are going to do that for us or can't, they've passed away, whatever it is, we never knew them, but we can try to give that to ourselves. It's that same thing, you're not going to be able to give it to your kids unless you forgive yourself. And I think that's why it always goes back to what is that relationship with ourselves.

—

Thank you so much for joining us. You can find Dr. Becky on her podcast, Good Inside, or at learning.goodinside.com. You can follow her on social media and make sure that you learn and listen from her as much as you can. I'll talk to y'all next week.

If you're loving what you're learning in the podcast, you have got to come check out The Clutch. The Clutch is the podcast community for all things Unfuck Your Brain. It's where you can get individual help applying the concepts to your own life.

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

UFYB 216: Parenting Yourself (+ Kids If You Have Them): A Conversation with Dr. Becky Kennedy

It's where you can learn new coaching tools not shared on the podcast that will blow your mind even more. And 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 your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. That's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I can't wait to see you there.