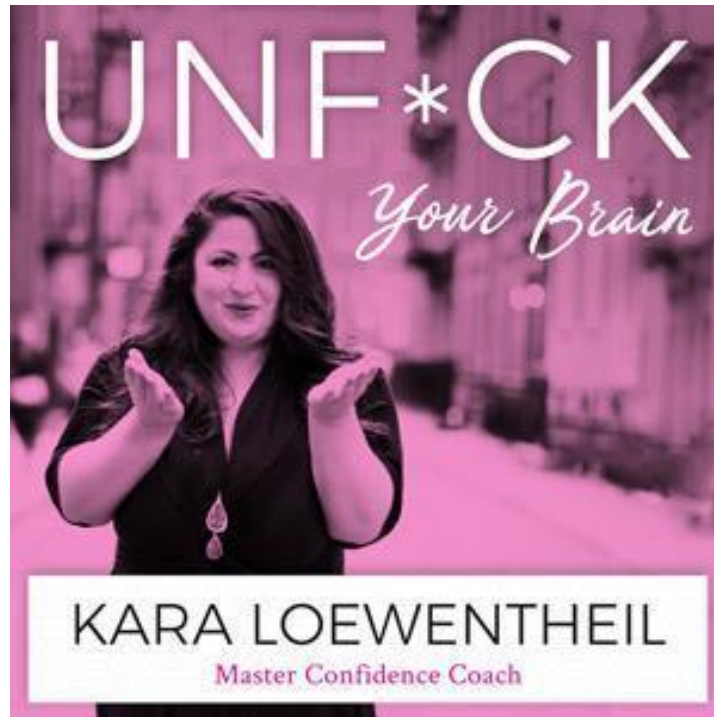


UFYB 290: Thought Work & ADHD: A Conversation with Kristen Carder



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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 am very excited today to share with you this conversation about ADHD and other neurodivergent brains. And how we can think about some of the traditional self-help, self-development, coaching advice that we get when our brains are maybe neurodivergent and don't necessarily line up with all of that advice. I think in my own experience in my life, my loved ones, coaching people with neurodivergent brains, some of what's recommended I think in coaching and [inaudible] is actually great for people with neurodivergent brains and then some of it may be not as helpful.

So we are going to dig into all of that with Kristen Carder who is an expert on this topic. So, Kristen, so good to have you. Tell us a little bit about who you are and kind of where your expertise on this topic comes from.

Kristen: Well, first, hi, Kara. Thank you so much for having me. Super pleased to be with you. I have ADHD and I have a coaching practice where I help adults with ADHD just kind of figure out how to accept themselves and their brains and make forward progress in their lives without hating themselves. I also host the I Have ADHD podcast. And I have been in the ADHD space actually for about a decade. I worked with students who struggled in school. Most of those students had ADHD and so that was my first introduction into this space.

And actually where I began to learn about my own diagnosis and what it meant to have ADHD which was very eye opening for me. Because I had already been diagnosed for over a decade at that time and then began to learn about what it actually meant to have ADHD as I was trying to help

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others. And so for the last four years I've been coaching. It's the joy of my life. I wouldn't want to do anything else. It is so much fun.

Kara: I love that. I think it seems very common, especially for people, I don't know how old you are, but I am 41, in my generation to sort of, a lot of people find out later in life, when they have kids and then their kids get diagnosed and then they get diagnosed. But I think it's such a good point that often people may have gotten diagnosed when they were younger but just there wasn't the same amount of resources out there to kind of teach you how to deal with that.

I definitely think when I was growing up, people who got diagnosed with ADHD would just be given medication and that was kind of it. You didn't really hear about ADHD coaching and learning how to work with your brain. It was just kind of like, okay, we're just going to give you a pill, which is useful for some people, not for others. But there was just this sort of one size fits all hammer of here's a powerful stimulant, I hope that works, nine year old, let's see what happens.

Kristen: Exactly. And I'm also 41. I had the privilege of being diagnosed at the age of 21. And that was exactly my experience was that I was diagnosed. The doctor said, "You have ADHD. That means you struggle to pay attention." No, dah, thanks. And then handed me a stimulant medication, it was so helpful to me. But I didn't know anything else about ADHD and so to begin to uncover that it actually permeates every area of my life and most of the things that I hated about myself were actually symptoms or impairments of ADHD. And so that kind of unraveling process was so healing for me.

Kara: I've learned a lot more about it recently since having somebody relatively newly in my life who really struggles with ADHD. But somebody who was never diagnosed as a child or is even older than I am was never

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diagnosed. And I think sort of what set this off for me was you saying, “I realized the things I hated about myself we’re related to this.” I think their experience has been a lot of that’s why I do that. Everything makes sense. This is why I struggle with this and this and this is why I’ve had these kinds of experiences in the past. It’s all kind of coming together.

Kristen: Absolutely.

Kara: So I know one of the things you work on a lot is how people with ADHD can work on setting and achieving goals in ways that might be kind of different. I definitely notice the people in my life who have ADHD that one of the things that they struggle with is sort of long term planning in some ways. It’s that kind of executive function of thinking, okay, well, I want this end result and it’s going to take 10 steps to get there and what do I need to do to get there?

And that’s such a big part of a lot of what a lot of people come to self-development for is help being organized, getting things done, hitting goals. So I’d love to hear kind of your perspective on how neurodivergence impacts that.

Kristen: Well, absolutely, that is going to be one of the top struggles for someone with ADHD is setting a long term goal and being able to persistently pursue that goal over time. And there are so many factors that go into that. Our executive function is so, so, so deficient which just effectively means that we struggle with prioritization, problem solving, planning, time management, organization, memory. Literally all of the things that allow you to be a functioning adult in the world, we’re going to struggle with it.

And so it’s so frustrating for someone with ADHD who is intelligent, who wants to make a difference in the world, who wants to be a high achiever to

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be held back by all of those executive function deficiencies. And so of course if medication is an option for you, that is the number one place to start because medically treating it, if your body can sense, that is a really, really basic fundamental great step forward. But then how do you get yourself to do the things that you know you want to do but you just can't force yourself to do?

Kara: Can I ask you a question about that actually first though? So when I think about medication the thing that I think most of us think about is it helps you focus, helps you pay attention. But what you're describing is a sort of longer term, this bigger picture thinking problem. I notice with the people in my life that have ADHD it often feels sort of like that prioritization, they're just like, it's like, okay, I have a list, I'm just moving down the list. As opposed to being able to be like, well, wait, but this thing on the list requires these three steps.

Or, I'm supposed to have that done in two weeks, then what needs to be happening now, it's very linear sort of in a way of just what's the next thing and not 360. So is that something that medication actually helps with, that level of? That's so interesting.

Kristen: Yes. So different types of medication are going to activate different parts of the brain and help with different things. Can I say the word 'different' a couple more times? I'm not sure.

Kara: They're not the same things, aren't the same things, they're similar things.

Kristen: Exactly, thank you so much. So there are different types of medications, there are stimulants, there are non-stimulants, there are medications that help you to have more dopamine which is that reward system. Because our reward system is broken. So if you know somebody

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with ADHD you know that the boring mundane everyday tasks or the things that work that they think are stupid are going to be the hardest for them to do even if they're easy, even if they're the easiest thing. Something like dishes, laundry, expense reports, all of the things.

Kara: Dishes is my personal nemesis. But thankfully I've partnered with someone where we have different ones so he can do the dishes very easily and I can do the long term planning but I cannot do the dishes. So then there's some other kind of dopamine regulation problem. I cannot ever get the dishes done.

Kristen: I totally understand and resonate with that. And medication can help with different areas of the brain that need to be activated, including helping us to regulate our emotions which is another huge aspect of ADHD that is finally being uncovered and talked about is emotional dysregulation. So the inability to identify, process, soothe our own emotions really keeps us from making forward progress. And obviously you're a coach, you spend a ton of time with your clients, I'm sure, helping them to process their emotions, identify because it's literally the fuel in our gas tank.

So if we're not getting the results that we want it's probably because of an emotion. Of course that emotion is triggered by a thought or a million thoughts. But the emotion I find for ADHDers to be particularly difficult because we're very disconnected. I mean that's painting with a very broad brush but we're very disconnected from our emotions and it's hard for us to say, "I am feeling frustrated because x, y, z and I am going to go take a time out and self-soothe and I'll be back and ready for action in five minutes." Instead it's like an explosion.

Or I'm going to self-soothe with peanut butter and Netflix for the next six hours. It's really hard for us to just calm the eff down and get moving in an appropriate way.

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Kara: Yeah. So I know that you have a theory about kind of the emphasis on consistency in the coaching world. So will you share this with us? Because I think even my listeners who are not neurodivergent, I obviously am somebody who teaches a lot of anti-perfectionist strategies and I know there's also overlap between perfectionism and ADHD. So I think a lot of this applies whether you have ADHD or not. So tell us your thoughts on consistency.

Kristen: I appreciate you asking the question and I want to preface by saying I get so fired up about this topic because I would love to take all of the consistency, what I call propaganda and just throw it into the trashcan. Because for someone with ADHD or anxiety or depression or any other mental health condition, consistency is really not going to be an option. And so as someone who's neurodivergent who is also a very high achiever, who's always wanted to live a very big life.

I've been confronted with all of the gurus, all of the people I've followed, all of the people out there in the world who I want to be like and emulate and follow in their footsteps. And what they tell me is, "You have to be consistent to be successful." And what that did for me was make me feel well, I guess it's never going to happen because consistency is not an option for me. My brain is not the same day-to-day. My body is not the same day-to-day. Something will come up for me physically or mentally to make it almost impossible for me to show up for my own life.

And I think people with chronic illness might also be able to relate to this where some days you feel great and some days you don't feel great.

Kara: Yeah. I get to experience this of some days I can get so much done and some days I'm like, "I cannot do anything right now."

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Kristen: Yes. And so we are actually in my opinion not meant to be consistent. We are meant to ebb and flow. And if we can accept that ebbing and flowing is a beautiful way to achieve a goal is the most sustainable way in a lot of cases to move toward your goal. And instead of trying to be consistent, instead be persistent, just be determined, be willing to try and fail and try and fail and try and fail. Be willing to be at day one every day. So you know we get those streaks in the apps or maybe it's fitness or mindfulness or whatever it is?

Kara: I don't know. I am always no streaks, this is a no streak movement, we're not doing streaks.

Kristen: I love that.

Kara: I mean I love persistent and I also think, the way I think of it is I'm just redefining what consistent means. I look at it as I'm consistent for the long haul, meaning if I show up 80% of the time or even 70% of the time for five years, what have I produced? Versus, well I showed up 100% of the time for the first three days and then because I had three bad days I never did it again. So the thing that I find the most helpful is I like this persistent idea too. But sort of we could get rid of consistency and we can also decide, what does that mean?

I'm trying to, if I was a mostly consistent walker meaning two-thirds of the time I went for the walk when I said I would. That over two years, five years, 10 years, 20 years, it's sort of like zooming back out to see the compound interest of the effort that you do make. And seeing that you actually are 'consistent' over a long haul compared to if you believe I have to do it perfectly and then you stop.

Kristen: Yeah. And perfectionism is always going to be a barrier to making that forward progress because as soon as we mess up we're like, "Well, I

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might as well not even try.” I absolutely love the way that you’re defining or redefining consistency. The only, I don’t want to say problem, it’s definitely not a problem. But the difference for someone who’s neurodivergent or at least has ADHD is we often will not have access to that zoomed out thinking. We often do not have access to that ability to see the perspective over the long period of time.

And so what we have is just the now. And so how do I interact with now if I can’t see, well, actually I’ve been persistent, I’ve been consistently inconsistent over time and this is actually a really good thing. We struggle to self-evaluate. We struggle with our non-verbal working memory. We struggle to understand and conceptualize time. So to zoom out is, I’m so jealous of your ability to do that. I’m like, “I want that. Can I buy that [crosstalk]?”

Kara: But I guess I will say, that didn’t come naturally. That came from a lot of practicing and thought work. So I think part of what we’re touching on is there’s some kind of spectrum. There’s where your brain is if you don’t intervene and you don’t practice any thought work and you don’t practice these skills, you don’t practice changing your thoughts. So there’s whatever your natural default state is. And so I definitely would never say, well, first of all there’s nothing really superior about being neurotypical. And I would never say that thought work takes you from neurodivergent to neurotypical.

But I definitely have seen in my students who have ADHD and the people in my life who I interact with a lot who have ADHD that certainly thought work and changing the way they think does help develop some of this a bit. Because part of it is just a habit of how you think and then telling yourself a story about how you think. Well, I can never think this way, well, then you’re definitely not going to. And to put that with enough kind of persistence of practicing a new way of thinking about it.

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So I think it's that balance, the zooming out in time is challenging, it's also not something that came naturally to me. And I don't, I mean I am not diagnosed with ADHD and there's things about the descriptions or symptoms that resonate with me and things that don't. I am very good at big picture for planning thinking. And also I cannot make myself get off the couch. Sometimes I think it's somehow a kind of dopamine regulation issue that doesn't fall into ADHD but I have some of that classic, I was infamous in college for not studying at all until the night before.

And then banging out that 30 page paper overnight. I just wrote my book draft in six weeks. That kind of thing. So I have some of the elements but not some of the others. I'm able to close a cabinet door which is something in my house that doesn't happen unless I do it. So anyway, but I think that's sort of part of the antidote to perfectionism is not going, "Okay, well this is just telling my brain there's nothing I can do about it." Wherever we are on the spectrum. It's neither perfectionism, shaming perfectionism is I should be this other way. How do I make myself that way?

But I think there's also the sort of helplessness of well, this thing is hard for me for whatever reason. And so that's that. There's something in between I think of adopting these thoughts, whether it's the way you're saying it or the way I'm saying it, practicing that on purpose. Because I think that for some people the idea of showing up, when I hear you say, "Every day is day one." The perfectionist part of my brain is like, Jesus, I'm never going to make any progress? So I think all these things, that's why you have to sort of try them on.

Kristen: Yeah, I totally agree. And when I say every day is day one, I day one myself to a million dollar business. I day one myself to all of my goals because day one is my favorite, let's go. It's day one. It's no problem at all. I'm not going to be consistent and that's fine. I don't expect that of myself. I

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don't shame myself. I don't beat myself up. I say, "Yeah, of course I'm not going to be consistent, it's day one again, let's go. Let's get on it."

Kara: Yeah. I mean I honestly think the lack of shaming oneself and the ability to start again, that's the thing that matters the most, however, whatever you call it or whatever tool or framework you use. I was about to say that's the thing most consistent between people. So let's talk about motivation because this is something I think about a lot. Because of this sort of like there's definitely something weird with the dopamine in my brain where I have that experience of yes, intellectually I know it will take five minutes to do the dishes but just I'm not doing them. That's not happening.

But also seeing part of what's so interesting to me is for my partner is that I guess we're a good match about the things that I cannot get myself to do, he actually does quite happily.

Kristen: So good.

Kara: But the things that I can't do I am much stronger in. So between us we have one fully functioning situation.

Kristen: Brain.

Kara: Yeah, exactly. One fully functioning brain between us. But I think this comes up in coaching all the time because people think, even neurotypical people have this idea that they're supposed to feel motivated consistently. So I spent a lot of my time being like, "Motivation may not be coming. Let's not be waiting on that train." But since we're talking in this sense about motivation as partly being a sort of chemically driven thing, based on your dopamine regulation. I'd love to hear your perspective on it.

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Kristen: Yeah. I mean I think you and I are probably right on that same page as far as motivation is concerned because I personally used to wait around for motivation to arrive. And so I would constantly say things like, “I really want to do x, y, z, fill in the blank, but I’m just not motivated. I really want to get this done but I’m just not motivated.” And when I really uncovered ADHD and its symptoms, and realized okay, motivation is something that I’m going to struggle with. The end. I can take medication, it will help with it.

But it’s also not something that I have immediate access to. I just can’t go pick it up off the shelf. So I am going to need to decide what I want. And then I’m going to have to go after what I want whether I feel motivated or not. And so now the feelings that I really try to generate are determination, willingness, acceptance. Those are the three. I’m like, “Just get rid of motivation, throw it in the trash, we don’t need it.” What we need is first to be aligned with our values and be making values driven decisions instead of shoulding on ourselves.

And making decisions around what other people expect or whatever, I think that is a huge thing because a lot of our ‘I’m just not motivated’ is well, yeah, you don’t even want to do that thing. You don’t even care about it. Can we just start with caring about it? And then working on, okay, whether or not motivation is here, I want to get this done. And so I am not going to wait around for the dopamine hit prior to starting. I’m just going to start building my desire. So when I go looking for motivation, what I start to do is coach myself on why do I want to get this done?

Why is this important to me? What impact is this going to make in my life or in the world? And once I start kind of going down that train track, not sure, that pathway, that’s when I start to generate those feelings of okay, I am willing, I am willing to get this done. I’m willing to take a step. I’m willing to go on a podcast and talk about ADHD and potentially say something really

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stupid because the desire is I want to make as big of an impact as possible. And in order to do that I don't feel motivated, I feel scared. I feel intimidated. I feel dread.

But the end goal is I want to make an impact for the ADHD community. So I'll tolerate the dread and the fear and I'll pull in some determination, some willingness and some acceptance. It's about not having black and white thinking but being able to be in the gray. I'm going to feel fear and I'm going to feel willing. It's both.

Kara: So do you have a theory about how that maps onto the kind of chemical level, do you think that those new thoughts are producing dopamine or do you think that you're finding a different way to take action?

Kristen: It's so interesting because like I said earlier, a typical person with ADHD is very disconnected from their emotions. And so really that's the very basics of where I start with my clients because to even ask an ADHDer, "How do you feel about that?" Usually it's sad, mad, excited or fine. Usually you've got four, that's it. And so to add in nuance to the emotional conversation is so confusing. So I definitely think there is something chemically involved.

But what happens when we start to take ownership and accountability for my emotions are my responsibility, I didn't know that till I was 38 years old. So those kinds of things is we start to see what impact we're having on it. So I can sit here and say, "I want to do this but I'm not motivated." So motivation is my villain. It's motivation's fault that it's just not here because we all know. And I think this happens across the board whether you're neurotypical or not. Sometimes that motivation just blows right in and all of a sudden...

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Kara: Yeah. I don't think anybody's served, I mean everything you're saying I coach people on all the time whether they're neurodivergent or neurotypical.

Kristen: Yeah, absolutely. Exactly.

Kara: I partner's kid the other day was like, "I can't wait on it yet. I'm waiting to be inspired." And I was like, "Oh, no, that's not how we do this."

Kristen: Come here little one, let me show you my ways.

Kara: I mean let me tell you something about inspiration and motivation. Those are not to be relied upon or waited for especially if you're neurodivergent in the way where you tend to have a lot of excitement at the beginning of a thing and then the novelty is a dopamine producer.

Kristen: And then see you later. I mean I will even get a dopamine hit and I know a lot of my clients do too, from just making a plan, not even doing the thing, we're just going to make a plan.

Kara: This is the perfectionist fantasy. I mean this is a whole, I have a podcast episode about this, people who have a tendency to get dopamine from making a plan and then not follow through. But then we just make another plan because we like making the plan, color code the calendar and put it all on the calendar and get the dopamine hit. And then they're like, "Well, I don't need to go to yoga, I got the dopamine hit from the calendar just from making it."

Kristen: Or I bought the outfit which is so cute so now I'm definitely not going.

Kara: Right. [Crosstalk] from the online shopping also.

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Kristen: I like to call bedazzling, we bedazzle our schedules, we bedazzle our calendars, we bedazzle all of it. But we're not actually doing the goal, we're just bedazzling stuff.

Kara: Yeah, it's definitely a balance. Sometimes I do too many tasks like that in the morning where I'm like, "I'm going to book this thing and I have to purchase that thing." And then I'm an hour out. So the store's empty and now I can't do my work. I know one of the things we talk about which is something I have been also learning about is what can people who are neurotypical do to support people in their lives who are neurodivergent? Especially, I think in intimate relationships, I'm so glad that I have this background because I think it makes it so much easier.

Sometimes when I describe things to my friends they're like, "Wait, my kid also has never closed a cabinet door in their life", or whatever these kind of telltale signs. But for me I didn't know, I mean I know more about it than I did before but even just coming from coaching it at least prepared me to come in with a kind of like, okay, so your brain is obviously having a different thought or way of working than mine is. What's happening? Let's try to understand this. I need to learn about this as opposed to coming into it and just being like, "Why are you like this."

Or, "I think things are supposed to be this way and your brain is that way." So what kind of advice do you have for people on how to be more supportive of neurodivergent people in their lives? Which by the way all of you, anything you hear that you're like, "Yeah." That applies to you also, you can be supportive to yourself.

Kristen: That is such a good point, I love that. I would say the first thing that you can do is begin to drop the judgment around what you're seeing in the other person which I know can be very hard because in relationships we obviously trigger each other. And we spend a lot of time trying to control the

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other person so that we can feel good. And so it's so typical of us to look at someone else and say, "You're doing it wrong. You're just doing it wrong." And so just an openness to there might be another way to do it. There might be another way to think about this.

There might be another way to make dinner and that other way I'm going to warn you is very messy and very chaotic and that is just the way. And so to look at it as I've been married to my husband for 19 years, which makes me seem very old but hopefully also very wise. And what we have done is evolved to the point where we started out with him being annoyed, feeling like I needed to make a lot of changes and we've evolved to a place of he's able to see the way I operate and see the quirkiness of it. It's very quirky. Why am I doing the steps in that order? I have no idea.

Kara: Oh my God, I just went through this last night where I was like, "I'm sorry, what is the?" It was such a weird backwards process from my perspective. But then I was like, "Okay, there must be, how did this happen?" And it was like, well, once I did it that way for reasons that made sense that one time. And then was just like, "This is how I do it now." And I was like, "Okay."

Kristen: And that's the thing because if you can look at it and have a chuckle and laugh about it and be like, "Okay, there's just more than one way to do this." It takes so much of the heat out of it. It takes so much of the judgment, of the blame and it also, it's like a two way street where the ADHD, it really is the responsibility of the neurodivergent person to understand their diagnosis, accept themselves and then help to educate the people around them on this is how you can interact with me. This is how you can help me.

But as a partner or a friend or a parent of someone who's neurodivergent, you can also be dropping your own judgment of the person, being open to

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a different way of doing things. And then just asking the question, “How can I help?” So my husband he doesn’t like to cook. So I do the cooking but it’s, I mean it’s like a shit show, it’s just crazy.

Kara: This is what I went through last night where then we rinsed the thing off after we cooked it, what?

Kristen: I love it so much, and that’s the thing is that if you can just kind of pop in and support. So he’ll wash the dishes as I’m cooking. And he helps to keep the environment, what’s the opposite of chaotic?

Kara: Organized.

Kristen: There we go. He helps to keep the environment organized. And I’m just doing the thing, I’m very creative when I cook so I’m just like, well, whatever. And he is just kind of plodding on behind me. And he’s not like, “Why are you making a mess? Why are you doing it this way?” He’s just like a partner. How about you start there?

Kara: And this is true whether you’re neurodivergent or not.

Kristen: Yes, just be a partner.

Kara: And there can be other ways. I think not surprisingly probably we often couple with somebody ideally who we complement their strengths and weaknesses and vice versa. So there’s that tweet that’s going around that’s in every partnership there’s one person who stacks the dishwasher like a Scandinavian architect. And one person who stacks it like a racoon on meth. And so if you’re the meth racoon, then you can embrace that creative chaos and not take it personally when your partner wants to organize and vice versa.

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If you're in the Scandinavian architect it's like, okay, great, I can bring organization to this but it doesn't have to, I mean one of the things I see so often is that because people are attracted ideally to people that balance them out. No, I shouldn't say ideally, if everybody wants to be a chaos racoon, that's great. If two Scandinavian architects want to have a perfectly organized home, that's great. But a lot of us are in relationships where we've got one of each and that's how we balance each other out.

So for me it's also a lot of what I do is being like, "You know what? Yes, I prefer an organized kitchen and it will be organized again." It doesn't have to be happening this minute. The chaos can happen. So we have worked, especially with having children around, we work out agreements that allow for the natural amount of chaos that these people are going to create. And also my tolerance for how long I can stand for things to be chaotic. So it's like, okay, every night though we're going to turn on the music for seven minutes and everybody's going to straighten up.

So that does not, like micromanaging every second but I also think that's, as you said, both people have the responsibility. Because just because if you're a neurotypical person it's usually the partner with a neurodivergent person you both have the responsibility to be like, "Can we both come in a little bit? How can we both push or stretch ourselves a little bit to make this work." It's not all on the neurodivergent person to change.

But it's also not all on the neurotypical person to just be like, "Okay, well, because it's neurodivergence then I just have to completely conform my life around you." That's actually kind of said in a different way.

Kristen: Yeah. And it also begs the question, is ADHD an excuse? And I think that's such an important question to ask and I always am trying to help my clients understand, it is an explanation. It doesn't let you off the hook. You're still an adult who is held accountable for their decisions. But it

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is an explanation of maybe why you got to that point or why you forgot that thing this morning. I had an interview at 9:00am. I usually start work at 10:00am. I had an interview at 9:00, completely forgot.

I had enough time to get out the door but I jolted out of bed like a crazy person and was like, "Oh my gosh, I have an interview in an hour." My kids are off school because it's spring break, all the things. I was sleeping in. And my husband immediately was like, "Okay, what do you need?" Which 10 years ago, five years ago he probably wouldn't have done. But we have worked out this system where he knows that he can do three easy things. He can get me a cup of coffee, make a quick lunch and gather some breakfast food.

Food is really such an annoying part of life sometimes when you're just like, "I need to leave for work and I have to think about food." It's so annoying.

Kara: This also seems to be ADHD specific. I know a lot of people with ADHD who have a very hard time, it's like the executive function to feed yourself consistently. There's a lot of not eating all day, binging at night.

Kristen: I could talk for hours about that. It's so tough.

Kara: We have 5pm check-in where I'm like, "Have you eaten today?"

Kristen: It's so beautiful, that's so beautiful. And for all of the partners to neurodivergent brains, it's such a simple way to nurture the person that you love is to say, "Hey, have you had any water today? Do you remember that water is a thing?"

Kara: You're not actually made of just seltzer, you actually are made, this is a fight in my household is whether seltzer's as hydrating as water. This is not related to neurodivergence, we just have a disagreement about this.

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But I also think one of the things you're saying there I want to highlight I think is true for any kind of brain which is like that whole explanation versus excuse thing. That's also true, you may be neurotypical and be controlling about your environment because of how your childhood was.

Not an excuse, it's an explanation for both things. It's about understanding why your brain works that way. You don't need to excuse yourself. There's no panel of judges doing the scorecard. When people say it's an excuse I'm just like, "I don't even, what's the point of that question." I mean I understand why people ask it. But I just think if you really think about it, what's the premise of the question? An excuse to who, who's deciding what we're allowed to do and not do and what we have to have a justification for?

All of that is made up but I think when you can understand your partner's brain and bring that humor to it, one of my ideals is I will go around the house and close all the doors to everything, close all the doors. But I get to take pictures and send them. So I call them ADHD found art. I'll go into the kitchen and every cabinet will be open. And then I'll just take a picture. So that's how I have signed up for the rest of my life, close all the cabinets. I understand that's what I've chose. But I am going to send you a picture when it's particularly funny.

And you have go be, for me it's so important, I laugh at my own brain, my partner has to laugh at their brain too. But that's what removing the stigma does I think is just allows us to be like, "Oh, wow, human brains, look what's happening here."

Kristen: And if we could all just drop the judgment of our brains and other people's brains. That's what allows for that humor. That's so connecting, isn't it to be like I see you, I see how you leave these cabinets open and it's adorable? And we're going to document it. And we're going to laugh about

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it. It's so connecting. But what happens when there's a lot of judgment involved is the ADHDer will feel shame.

Kara: Right. That's part of the problem. I will watch TikTok ADHD videos and I think it's hilarious, not in a laughing at. I'm like, "Oh my God, each of these things happens in our house." But that's because I actually don't have judgment but because the person has shame then to them it's like, I feel bad about this, I feel shame. And one of the things that we have been talking about in my household that I think, I teach this for neurodivergent people too but I think especially for something that's stigmatized. Sorry, I teach it for neurotypical people too.

But especially for something that's shamed like neurodivergence, is this concept of the human ego system. Okay, you might have trouble with long term planning and execution but I bet you're pretty good at being spontaneous and rolling with the flow and problem solving when things go wrong. And that has been really, I think helpful for a number of neurodivergent people in my life who have a lot of that shame of oh, neurotypical people might be great at long term planning and some of us are very uptight if the plan doesn't happen. And everything has this positive and negative side.

Kristen: Yeah. So I want to circle back to where you said that you were known in college to hold off on writing the paper, procrastinate, procrastinate, procrastinate and then boom, knock it out in one night. I think that is such a beautiful picture of that. So you could shame yourself for that. You could say, "Why didn't I start earlier?"

Kara: And I used to. The procrastination used to be very unpleasant and now I'm just like, I'm just going to actually enjoy this week when I'm not doing [crosstalk]. And then just write on the last day, I know that I will.

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Kristen: Exactly. And I'm going to be like, I am amazing. I just banged out a book proposal in six weeks. Who does that? I do that. You get to see the strengths in your own brain and the strengths of even the things that you used to shame yourself about because so many people shame themselves for waiting till the last minute. Now, I think that's an incredible super power. You mean you waited till the last minute and you produced this? That's amazing. You're so lucky. So good.

I do not think ADHD is a super power. So just in case anybody is worried that I do, don't worry, the super power was not meant toward the ADHD.

Kara: Okay, got you. No, but I know what you mean. It's sort of like, I mean for me all our thought work is very pragmatic. It's like, okay, this is the brain I have. Would my life be easier in some ways if I had a different brain? Maybe, and harder in others that I can't know or predict. But I may as well, if this is how my brain is, look for yes, I can acknowledge what the limitations are so I can work around them but also what are its strengths? I'm just seeing that as part of the whole.

That okay, maybe my brain does have a harder time with things that come easy to other people. But are they things that come easy to me? I've talked on the podcast before about how my partner, about how whatever our things we work on is that when I come home he's so excited to see me. And I'm always like, "Yeah, it's you again." But I'm like this is great, yes. People with ADHD struggle with object permanence sometimes. I think every time I come home he's like, "I forgot about you, I love you." And that's such a beautiful thing. Whereas I'm like, "I've been thinking about you all day and I have opinions about your shirt."

Because of the kind of oppression, neurotypicality, we only highlight what's supposedly bad or wrong or different about neurodivergence in a bad way. But if you can look at whatever and whatever your regimen is, ADHD,

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OCD, depression, anxiety, whatever it is. There is probably parts of you that are related to those parts that are actually really wonderful and beautiful and thinks you're better. And again, it's like you said, it's not about being like it's a super power or it's quirky, whatever. It's not any of that.

But we're oneself and everything that is challenging or limiting in us is also, we're still here, has made us resilient or creative or something else in other ways. And if you can try to think about yourself that way I think it helps with some of that shame and stigma.

Kristen: As a whole person.

Kara: Yeah, not just your dopamine regulation.

Kristen: Exactly.

Kara: So good. So where can people find you if they want more of this?

Kristen: Well, I host the I have ADHD podcast and you can find that wherever you listen to your podcasts. And my website is ihaveadhd.com. I have a coaching program for adults with ADHD and you can find all about it there.

Kara: Alright, thank you so much for coming on and remembering that we had this interview.

Kristen: Thank you for having me, Kara.

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