

## Ep #74: Loving Your Toddler Brain



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**Natalie Brown**

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This is *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown, episode 74.

Welcome to *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you're a successful woman who is ready to stop struggling with your weight, you're in the right place. You'll learn everything you need to know to lose weight for the last time in bitesize pieces. Here's your host, Master Certified coach, Natalie Brown.

Hello everybody. I did a podcast, episode 37 called Parenting Your Toddler Brain that might be useful to listen to just as a refresher before diving into this one. Just to kind of familiarize yourself with this concept of our toddler brain versus our adult brain.

We're going to look at it from a slightly different angle on this podcast today, but I thought if you hadn't listened to that, might be a good one to check out. My firstborn turned 20 last week. My first baby that made me a mama is now in his 20s.

I can hardly wrap my brain around it even though he really hasn't been a kid for a while. He's quite the responsible adult at this point. For some reason, now that there's not a teen at the end of his age, he seems so grownup.

I was thinking about him as a toddler as I was preparing for this podcast and that was partly what inspired this new angle on the toddler brain. He was such a sweet, compliant, loving little boy. And I often talk about our toddler brain, it's a little different take, a more tantruming, impatient, irrational lens, which is true of it most of the time.

Sometimes we roll our eyes at it, sometimes we're a little sarcastic about it. Sometimes we find ourselves annoyed or frustrated or angry that our toddler brain is at the helm. But as with most things, it is multifaceted. Not totally one dimensional.

The toddler brain is the part of our brain charged with our immediate survival. It is what is in control of our fight or flight response. Its primary

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purpose is to be constantly looking out for this moment, specifically what danger is present, what threats are happening right now.

Part of what our brain is perceiving as a threat is the ever-present famine mode that we are stuck in because of all of our food rules, another podcast episode 18 to check out, about what we can and can't eat, what is okay and not okay, what is good and bad, what is off limits and acceptable, et cetera, et cetera.

If you listen to everyone, you would eat nothing, right? Some people say carbs are bad and you should eat all protein and fat, and others say you should switch to a plant-based diet, and then others say you will be deficient in vitamins if you're a vegetarian, and then others say be moderate and live a little, and still others say sugar is poison and you should never eat it.

And that is just what is healthy versus not healthy, not to mention all the theories about what to eat and not eat to lose weight, right? It's no wonder our brain is in constant fear of danger since it seems to be lurking around every corner.

All the things we're not supposed to do/eat, our toddler brain is interpreting as dangerous. At the same time, when we decide to eat less of whatever or not eat certain things, our brain is interpreting that as a threat to our opportunity to eat sufficiently to survive.

It makes sense that it spends a lot of the time freaking out and driving us to overeat random things. That's what I want you to think about. Your toddler brain, when it is feeling like it is in constant danger will overreact. Not because it is against you. Because it is for you.

It thinks it is taking care of you. It thinks driving you to eat Oreos instead of feel shame is helping you survive. It thinks driving you to eat until you're stuffed is keeping you from dying of starvation. It is being guided by the misconception that shame is danger because it feels so terrible and that since every other day you swear you were not going to eat blank, or every

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other month of your adult life you have put yourself on a 1000-calorie diet, that you are in danger of starving to death and therefore must eat as much as possible when presented the opportunity.

It makes perfect sense. Our toddler brain is doing its best with what we're giving it. Ironically, the behaviors it's driving are not the most useful or helpful in terms of our survival. Overeating and burying our feelings under food are not in reality helping us survive.

The large majority of the "danger" our toddler brain is trying so hard to escape is not actually life and death. Just a misperception. Nonetheless, there needs to be some changes in how we view our toddler brain as it does its job and how we respond as well as what we are thinking about food, our bodies, et cetera, that triggers the freaking out in the first place.

Back to my 20-year-old as a toddler. He wasn't a tantruming, defiant toddler. But he would act up and get really whiny and teary when he wasn't getting enough love and attention and validation. He needed to be held and cuddled. He needed my undivided attention for a little bit throughout the day. He needed to get some fresh air and hold my hand and go for a walk to see the horses that live next door sometimes.

He needed to know that I was there. He was important, his needs were seen and met. He was understood. He was taken care of. I have plenty of regrets and was far from a perfect always attentive mom. Don't get the wrong idea here. There were times when I was at capacity with all I had going on and I couldn't pick him up and hold him, so I let him cry and whine.

Or I had to finish a paper, so I couldn't cuddle or play. I graduated from college when he was about two, so there was a bit of that in his toddler life for sure, but for the most part, I did what I could to nurture his security so he was confident that he would be taken care of and was loved.

I watched a documentary about love recently and in it was a heartbreaking story about an orphanage where a vast majority of the kids had developed

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attachment disorders and other serious issues due to the lack of contact and attention they had received as babies and toddlers.

There was a video of all the children sitting in a room together, they were all older than toddlers, grown up a little bit, and they were all rocking and doing other repetitive movements that they had developed to try and calm and comfort themselves in an effort to deal with the lack of nurturing.

They hadn't been picked up and loved, and so they had tried to compensate in order to survive. An extreme example I know, but that is in essence what your toddler brain is doing, without reassurance that everything is okay, that there's no need to panic, that it will be cared for, it turns to food and overeating as a solution.

This journey to our health goals, to the body that we want to move around in the world in, it's a healing journey. Healing our relationship with food, healing our relationship with our body and our body image, healing our relationship with this toddler part of our brain and learning to value and appreciate its contribution and learning to work in concert with it instead of being frustrated with its tendency to freak out.

It's freaking out because it thinks we're not going to have enough and that all these foods are dangerous and are threatening us and being fat is threatening us because then we're not going to be accepted, not to mention all the non-food related stuff in our lives that is also perceived as threatening us.

We basically live most of our lives in sustained fight or flight, with our cortisol levels through the roof and no end in sight. Our poor toddler brain perceives us as constantly under attack. It's doing its best. It is trying so hard to have our back.

We want to love our toddler brain through the freaking out and the healing process and learn to do things another way. The way we heal our relationship to food is by showing our brain that we always have full permission to eat whatever we want.

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This doesn't mean we always choose to eat whatever we want in whatever amounts. But over and over, we want to open up to the truth that we can. There is nothing that isn't an option. The choice is ours.

Check out episode 63 if you want a deeper dive into this. Lots of podcast plugging today, you're going to be busy listening. We also want to show our brain and body that we will always give it what it needs. Enough food and rest. Love and healing go hand in hand, especially when it comes to our body and how we experience it and view it.

Part of healing our relationship with our bodies is first accepting them. I have several episodes about this topic. Episode 11, 53, 66, 72. And then learning to honor and trust our bodies. I recently found a new book I am completely in love with. It's called The F It Diet, only spelled out. This is a clean podcast so I'll refrain from saying the full title.

And just a warning if you're interested but you're sensitive to language, it has language, as you might guess from the title. But it is a fantastic book full to the brim with awesome insight and some really great exercises to assist in this healing process.

I feel like the author, Caroline Dooner and I have very similar experiences and philosophies. Here's a complied quote. "Your body exists to heal you. Your body's signals, cravings, and appetite exist to keep you alive and to take care of you. Your exhaustion, hunger, stress response, and immune response all exist to keep you well. So if you can't have trust in the big picture yet, begin to put some trust in your body.

We are convinced that left to its own devices, our body will betray us time and time again. Every single thing your body has ever done has been to protect you. Our mistake has been believing that there is something wrong with having an appetite or having a body that isn't extremely small.

In order to trust, you have to take a leap of faith. Ask yourself what you really believe to be true in your bones and then act on it. Start listening to

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your appetite. Start following your cravings. Learn to trust by listening to your body's signals. Your body will not let you down.”

One of my favorite tools she teaches is the 10-minute lie down. It's literally what it describes. Taking 10 minutes, sometime throughout the day, to lie down and do nothing. To slow down, lie down, and calm down. Not scroll Instagram, not watch TV, not make to-do lists. Just be.

I love to use it as an opportunity to relax. Like go through a body scan type meditation and relax from my scalp to my toes. I can't believe how much tension and tightness builds in my face alone. Seriously, I almost always notice I'm clenching my teeth when I lie down.

So I spend a good amount of my 10 minutes focusing on the different parts of my face and consciously relaxing them, my temples, my eyelids, my jaw, my forehead. One area at a time, I breathe into it, and I consciously relax it as deep as I can.

The crazy part is that someday I get back up to the top of my head and it's back to clenched jaw and tension, but that's why this is so valuable. Part of our toddler brain freaking out and thinking it must always be in fight or flight is the non-stop, no breathing, constant go, go, go of our lives.

Slowing down to relax, even for just 10 minutes is critical to our health and our healing journey. This pause to breathe and just be also shows our toddler brain there is no need to panic. We were not meant to live, let alone thrive in a constant state of emergency.

It's supposed to be reserved for actual emergencies. If every minute of every day is perceived as an emergency, and our brains and bodies are reacting accordingly, it's no wonder we're always worn out, right? We need to take some time to chill out.

So when you notice your toddler brain panicking, driving you to eat all the things, to overeat all the things, ask why is your brain reacting this way? Where is it interpreting danger and famine where there is none? How can

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you start to heal and relate to those dangers in a new way? How can you chill out instead of freak out?

Okay everybody, I have a new group of women starting out their weight loss healing and health journey with me at the end of July. My program is called The Last Beginning because my clients learn the tools and the skills they need to change their relationship with food and their bodies and themselves for life. I have a few spots left.

So if you want some help on your way, head to [itbeginswithathought.com/apply](http://itbeginswithathought.com/apply) to fill out your application and schedule your call with me. I'd love to be a part of your journey. See you soon.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you want to learn more about how to lose weight for the last time, come on over to [itbeginswithathought.com](http://itbeginswithathought.com). We'll see you here next week.