

Ep #197: Urges



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With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Well hello my friends. Today I've recorded a podcast for you on urges. And the reason I'm recording this podcast is because so many of my students give in to confusion when it comes to urges and managing urges. And so I want this to be a resource for you to be able to come back to, to understand what's going on when you experience an urge.

Here's the thing I want to tell you. Everything that you do as it applies to buffering, which for some of you is overeating, overdrinking, OCD behaviors, looking at your phone too much, checking your email too much, any obsessive cleaning, anything like that that you're struggling with, I want you to know is easy to stop doing. You just stop doing it. You don't respond to the urge. This is not difficult. What's difficult is the feeling that you will have and be left with if you don't follow through on an urge.

So I want you to think about the model. A thought is going to cause the urge. So you may have a thought, "I need to clean that", "I need to eat that", "I want to drink", "I want to taste that", "I want to smoke that", "I want to see who called me", "I want to see if anyone liked my photo". All of those thoughts cause that urge to pick up the phone, pick up the food, do whatever it is that you are complying with that urge. Again, not doing the thing is easy. So not picking up the phone, not picking up the cookie, that's all easy, you guys, that is not the hard part. It's not hard to put the fork down, it's not hard to not pick up the food. What's difficult is dealing with the emotion, dealing with the urge when you don't comply.

And here's what I want to say about that, is that urges demand action. They demand it. But an urge has no authority. So it's kind of like if I say to you, "Pick that up. Pick that up. Pick that up. Pick it up right now, hurry up, pick it up. Pick it up, pick it up, pick it up, hurry up, pick it up, pick it up." Now, if I have authority in your life, you may pick something up. Especially if I'm urgent and demanding about it. But if I don't have any authority in your life, if I'm some random stranger telling you to pick it up, pick it up, you're not

[The Life Coach School Podcast](#) with Brooke Castillo

Ep #197: Urges

going to do it because I don't have any authority. It doesn't matter how much I yell at you, how much I scream at you, you are going to not comply with my urgency, with me urging you.

This is also true with urges that you have within your own mind and body. Urges demand action but they don't have any authority in your life. They're like toddlers demanding candy at the grocery store. You do not need to comply. And no matter how loud they get, no matter how overwhelming it feels, you do not have to ever comply with an urge. So, that's really step one, is just understanding that urges happen and that you never have to comply with the urge and it's actually easy not to comply with an urge. What is difficult is what I call allowing an urge without responding to it. So the action of not responding is easy, the experiencing the unanswered urge, the emotion of the urge is what's difficult.

I think this is why a lot of attempts to change behavior doesn't work, because most people are trying to figure out how to deal with the behavior that the urge causes, instead of dealing with the urge directly. So if I have an urge to overeat something, I can spend a lot of time talking about the overeating, I can spend a lot of time talking about the food and what to replace it with and how to avoid it and how to keep food out of your house and all of those things. But what that does is it tries to control the environment and tries to control the behavior that the urge is causing. And what I teach and what I recommend is that you don't concentrate on the effect of the urge. You concentrate on the urge itself.

So question number one is really what is an urge? Why do we give urges so much authority? If that urge, that emotion is like a toddler in a grocery store, why are we constantly handing out candy? Why are we constantly complying with this urgent urge that is within us? Most of us haven't even questioned it. Most of us feel as if we have no control, so we're just constantly complying with every emotion that we have, with every urge that we have, with every immediate desire that we have. We feel as if that urge is irresistible, and sometimes it is.

Ep #197: Urges

And here's what I mean by that. When you have an urge that is irresistible, it means that you can't resist it. And this is what most people try to do with urges. They try to resist the urges, they try to avoid the urges, they try to replace the behavior that the urge causes, and when you have an irresistible urge, you're going to feel like you're out of control, you're going to feel as if you are doing things against your own will. And that is why my friends, resisting an urge doesn't work.

An urge is just a desire, it is an intense desire caused by your thinking. And what happens is we have a desire, and then we reward that desire, and that perpetuates the desire. So the more we reward the urges, the more intense the urges get. We want a cookie, we eat a cookie. Then we want a cookie even more. Then we eat a cookie. Then we want a cookie even more. We have the urge to smoke a cigarette, we smoke a cigarette. We get the urge, right? Because when smoking, we get the reward of the nicotine, we get the reward of the dopamine from giving in to our urges.

So what started as simply a thought and a desire, turns into a perpetual rewarding urge thought cycle. And what simply caused the urge in the beginning, which was a thought that was probably conscious, becomes an unconscious thought pattern that we aren't even aware of. A lot of my clients deal with this in the evening with alcohol. So they come home and they don't even consciously decide or think about having alcohol. That thought has been thought so many times that it's actually unconscious and the urge is just really, really intense.

And when they go about resisting that urge, they find that the urge is irresistible. So what is the answer? What do you do if you have an urge? You do not react to it, and you do not resist it. So what do you do? You allow it. Now, your brain will immediately want to be confused by this. What does it mean? If you're not reacting to the urge, which means you're not complying with it or giving in, and you're not resisting it, what exactly are you doing?

So let's go back to the toddler in the grocery store. Toddler screaming urgently, urging, urging, urging, urging. So you give it a candy bar. Toddler

Ep #197: Urges

stops urging. But what has toddler learned? Screaming, freaking out, demanding, being urgent, causing urges, works. So the more I'm urgent, the more I cause the urge, the more candy bars I get. So the more you give that toddler a candy bar, every time you go to the grocery store, the more demanding that toddler's going to be for that candy bar. That is when we react to urges, we give in to them.

Option number two is we resist those urges. So the kid's screaming, the kid's yelling, we're yelling back at the kid, we're pushing on the kid, the kid is pushing back on us, the kid is freaking out. If you ever watched a kid go into like, full on meltdown, it totally wears you out, right? And eventually, many of us give in and react to it, or we resist and exhaust ourselves from it.

The third option is simply allowing the urge. Allowing the kid to have a fit, allowing the kid to freak out, allowing the kid to demand it, and to not react at all, and to not try to get the kid to stop crying, not try to resist it, none of it. Just let it be what it is. And what you will notice with a toddler and with an urge is that when you just allow it to do what it does without resisting, without complying, without reacting, it eventually extinguishes itself. A toddler will learn that throwing a fit does nothing. There is no reward for creating the urgency. There is no reward for creating the urge. And so it extinguishes, and this my friend, is exactly what we need to do with our urges for drinking, for eating, for all of the things that we do that are buffering against our own will.

Here's what happens when you have an urge and you answer it, it intensifies. When you have an urge and you don't answer it, when you just allow it to be there and you don't resist it, it dissipates. And the more you allow an urge without rewarding it, the less impact it has in your life. The less meaning it has in your life, and eventually, it disappears.

I know that so many of you can relate to this. So many of my students that were overeaters that now aren't, that used to smoke that now don't, that used to obsess over that boy in high school and now don't ever think about that boy at all. That is what happens when we stop rewarding the urge. We

Ep #197: Urges

stop encouraging the urge, it extinguishes itself. It's just like those Pavlovian dogs when we stop giving them food after ringing the bell, then the urges go away, the drool goes away, even when we ring the bell because we're not answering it with a reward.

So to summarize, an urge is simply a desire caused by a thought in your mind. If you're having a lot of urges and they're very intense, it's most likely because you've had multiple urges and rewarded those urges and it's become unconscious. What causes urges is our thinking and rewarding the urges. If you have an urge, you want to allow it to be there without resisting it, and without complying with it. It has no authority in your life. It can kick, it can scream, it can freak out, but you are not going to comply or resist it. It will not feel good to do this, my friends. Allowing an urge to be there, allowing a toddler to scream at the top of his lungs in the grocery store is not pleasant. But eventually the toddler stops screaming, and eventually, the urge goes away, and if you do it enough times, you will completely extinguish the urge to do the thing that you keep on doing.

This is why moderation often doesn't work. When we give in to urges sometimes but not all the time, the urges are still intense. When you give in to the toddler sometimes but not all the time, the toddler is still going to throw the fit. But when you allow an urge to be there without answering it, consistently and over a long period of time, eventually those urges go away. And so some of you may ask, "Does this mean I can never drink again? Does this mean I can never eat candy again?" And my answer to that and to all things that are compulsive, which simply means irresistible urgings, is that you can do those things, but only if you plan them ahead of time.

You want to make sure that with all things that you are using for buffering, if you want to include them in your life, that you never give in to an urge, you never reward an urge. You simply plan it ahead of time and decide ahead of time to do that thing. And here's what I mean by that. If you want to drink, you decide I'm going to have a glass of wine with dinner tomorrow night. You are not drinking because of an urge, you're drinking because

Ep #197: Urges

you planned ahead. And when you do it this way, you are not perpetuating or rewarding urges. You're using your prefrontal cortex to plan for something ahead of time and therefore you maintain authority over it. This is not the same as giving in to an urge and rewarding the urge.

That's what I have for you on urges today. Please listen to this many times so your brain can't pretend to be confused about urges if it's something that you struggle with. The answer is to simply allow and not resist or react to an urge, and eventually, it will extinguish itself. Have a beautiful week everyone. Talk to you soon. Bye-bye.

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