

**Ep #237: Grief and Grieving: It's Okay to Not Be Okay  
with Krista St-Germain, Charlene Lam, and Briana Simmons**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

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## **Ep #237: Grief and Grieving: It's Okay to Not Be Okay with Krista St-Germain, Charlene Lam, and Briana Simmons**

This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love; let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. This week, on the show, we are going to be talking about a topic near and dear to my heart, which is grief. As many of you know, I was a hospice nurse for a hot little minute in San Francisco, at the Zen Center, the Zen Buddhist center's hospice there, in the Lower Haight.

It was an absolutely beautiful, magical, incredible experience for which I am so grateful. I deeply believe that a huge part of my path, and the reason why I'm here on this planet in this current incarnation, is to be of service to those in transition. I worked as a birth doula; and worked in birth for a while. I worked at an abortion clinic at the same time I was doulaing, which that felt really dope to be on both sides of the choice conversation.

Like, I actually don't care what you choose, I just want you to be happy and healthy, right? I care deeply about that. But, your choice. You do you. I'm a birth doula. I'm an abortion doula. Let's go.

Yeah, so one of my big purposes is to be here for the big transitions, for those big shifts, those big moves. Particularly those moves between veils, between worlds, between 'not yet born' and dying. I've been super grateful to be able to do that work, and for that to be one of the guiding lights in my path.

It's similar to the work I do as a coach all day with my clients in Anchored, and the work I teach my clients about in the Somatic Studio. What we're working on is transitions. Is shifting from one pattern within our nervous

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system, one way of thinking, one way of being, into another. Rewriting the narrative, the story of our lives, which is what birth and death does, right?

I love being there for those transitions. I love being part of the shepherding, part of the guiding, part of the support. It is truly an honor and a humbling, humbling gift to be able to be there as a life coach, formerly as a doula of all sorts, and hospice nurse.

So, grief is something I think we don't talk about enough, and so I brought together some friends, some colleagues, some amazing people, and I'm so excited to pass the mic to them so we can start this conversation.

I want to hear from you. If you enjoy this conversation, if it's helpful, if it's supportive, drop me a DM @VictoriaAlbinaWellness on the 'Gram; I give good 'Gram. You can drop me an email to [podcast@VictoriaAlbina.com](mailto:podcast@VictoriaAlbina.com). Let me know what you think of this show if you're enjoying this series, if you want me to keep doing it, and if you want these three to come back, in particular. Because my vote is very much yes.

I really enjoyed this conversation, so I'll likely have them back, maybe even later this fall, early next year, to keep diving into the theme of grief. I particularly want to talk about non-death related grief. I think that's really, really, really important, and we're definitely not talking about that enough. Right?

In my life, the grief of immigrating, and having this robust intergenerational family life where there were three generations living in the one building, back home in Argentina, and then poof, here we are in the U.S., just alone. Just us. Just my nuclear family. There's a lot of grief in there. And so, it's something beautiful to explore and to explore together.

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All right, my loves, I could very obviously talk about this topic forever, but I shan't. All right, my loves, without further ado.

Victoria Albina: Thank you all so much for being here. I'm so delighted to jump in and talk about grief. I sound rather chipper for our conversation about grief, right? I'd love to get started with you all introducing yourselves, and I think we should do it alphabetically, by first name. So, Bri, you want to go first?

Briana Simmons: Sure thing. My name is Briana Simmons; I also go by Bri. My pronouns are she/her, and I am the owner and creative director of Unearthing Tradition. It is a holistic wellness organization that exists to create unapologetic healing spaces that center on Black folks, and offer an opportunity for folks to exhale, especially around sacred transition. Thank you for having me.

Victoria: Thanks for being here. Charlene.

Charlene Lam: Hi, I'm Charlene Lam. I'm am a Certified Grief Coach, curator and the founder of The Grief Gallery. I help people to deal with all the physical and emotional stuff after the loss of a loved one, using the lens of curating and creativity.

Victoria: I love that. Krista.

Krista St-Germain: I'm Krista St-Germain. I work with widowed moms and help them figure out how to love life again after losing their spouse. That's what happened to me.

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Victoria: Thank you. So, I want to dive right on in with this question I've heard you talk about before, Krista. I think we can all speak to it. Why do we suck at grief?

Krista: I can't wait to hear what other people say about this. But I can tell you, for me, I sucked at grief because everything I thought I knew wasn't actually accurate or helpful, right? I had never heard of anything besides the Five Stages of Grief.

In my mind, it was going to be a linear experience. I was going to go through some stages. There was going to be an end to it. I also thought time had something to do with healing. I had heard... Well, maybe the perfectionist in me had heard, this might not be universal... but there's a right way to do it. Right?

And so, it turns out, none of those things are accurate or hopeful. It's not linear. There aren't really predictable stages. It doesn't really end, and there is no right way to do it. But that's what I believed going in.

Victoria: Yeah. I think that is the popular myth, and popular lore. I think that's across healing, right? You do some magic treatment, take some silver bullet, some magic thing, and then it's just all fixed. Yeah, if only, right? If only. Even as I say that, I'm like, then we'd miss out on the magic and the majesty of being mired in the muck and figuring out who we are in our deepest, darkest shadow moments. Bri, what do you think?

Briana: As almost what you started to allude to, I think that as complex as we are as human beings, and the full range of emotions that we go through, especially in a process like grief, we've only begun to touch the surface of that complexity. And so, I think we suck because we're still learning and unlearning all of the things that we're supposed to feel and that are supposed to shape the different experiences like grief.

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I know for me, it's almost been like an unveiling in experiencing grief, doing away with the shame and stigma of such a deep, emotional process, that has allowed me to come closer to right relationship with grief. So yeah, I think we're just complex. Just accepting that, I think, has a lot of opportunities for us. What do you think Charlene?

Charlene: I loved hearing Krista rant about the Five Stages of Grief on Kara's podcast. I mean, I think it's a rant that a lot of us who have done some research into grief theory have.

I think on a personal level, when we experience loss, why we might not be great at grief, one, is we don't talk about it. It's this universal experience that we're going to have of losing people and yet, we don't learn anything about it in school; it happens to us. And then, we wind up Googling.

When my mother died suddenly from a stroke, the first thing I did was go on Google, because I didn't know how to handle any of it; the practical or the emotional part of it. And then, in terms of being good at handling other people's grief, one, we don't talk about it; we're getting better about it. But also, I think there's very much this very human response of being uncomfortable with other people being in pain.

People deal with that in a whole range of ways. So, it's such a human response. We can do better.

Victoria: What does doing better look like?

Krista: If we come into grief, which I definitely did, thinking that feelings are problems to solve, then we have no capacity to be with other humans who are experiencing feelings. So, we say stupid shit, because we think we're trying to make them feel better, but they receive it as minimizing.

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Like, for me, I heard, "You're young. Don't worry, you'll find someone else. He's in a better place now." All those kinds of things where you're like, "Okay, I know you mean well. I know you mean well. I know you mean well, but really, I just want to be told this sucks. I'm so sorry that this happened. I love you," and somebody to be with me in that emotion.

Briana: Yeah, people underestimate the power of just physical presence. You don't have to have say shit to me, just be there with me in the room, hold my hand, massage my back. Just showing up in a physical presence goes such a long way when navigating grief. I think we could do better at showing up for each other.

Victoria: Yeah, I think to be able to do that we probably all need to learn how to regulate our nervous systems. And that's what's missing for most of us. I mean, I'm curious when's last time y'all used your high school calculus? When did you use that?

Charlene: Mine was 1996.

Krista: Never.

Victoria: Yeah, I mean, in the 90s, to pass an exam though, right? And then never again. So, we learned that, we spent years learning that. I'm a nerd who's out here learning for the sake of learning, yes, and we need to learn how to regulate our nervous systems. Or how do we even show up and hold space?

I know my nervous system, when I was neck deep in emotional outsourcing and codependency, the idea of sitting next to someone grieving and not trying to fix them... Your girl didn't say fix "it." Fix "them" because they were having emotions, so that's a problem. What you were saying, Krista, the physical, the felt sensation of that, it's almost like some nausea. Right?

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Krista: It doesn't feel good to be on the receiving end of that, at all.

Victoria: Of course not.

Charlene: No. There's fixing them and fixing it, right? The whole range of, "Oh, no, something's wrong with them. They're sad, I need to fix that. Grief is something that needs to be fixed." There's a whole range of misconceptions there, and I agree with the regulating of the nervous system.

Both as someone who's trying to support someone who's grieving, and dealing with, "Oh, am I making this about myself?" Because often, people are. They're like, "Oh, no, how can I show up as the best friend that I can be, or the most supportive coworker I can be? What if I say the wrong thing?"

So, I always encourage people to meet the person who's grieving where they are, and not make it about you. Even though, again, it's so natural for that to happen. But also, for the nervous system, I've been finding that in order to actually grieve you have to feel safe to grieve. And regulating your nervous system is such an important part of that. So, that's something that I learned from you.

Victoria: Thank you.

Krista: I loved it when Briana said earlier... I think what you said, Briana, was you create a space for people to exhale? Is that what you said? So, that's not possible if we don't feel safe.

Briana: Yeah, exactly. That's the true intention behind it. I create spaces specifically for Black folks to exhale, because in the world that we live in...



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It sounds like we're going to talk a little bit about patriarchy, some white settler colonialism later, and...

Victoria: We can go there right now. We can go there, let's go. Let's go.

Briana: ... In a world that is predicated on anti-Blackness, Black folks really don't have a space to exhale. There's a constant cycle of exposure to firsthand or secondary trauma and grief, so my intention in doing that goes right back to what you were saying about safety.

Just having a space where you see other people who look like you, who may have had similar experiences, or vastly different experiences, but we can hold each other in that and really bring cultural elements into that space that affirm the experiences that we're all navigating.

The exhale part is very visceral, in that to witness and experience the dropping of the shoulders, the slowing down of the breath, and the regulation of your nervous system has such a huge impact. It's been helpful to me, in my own healing journey, since losing my mom. So, I just put it back out there into the world for folks.

Victoria: It's a beautiful thing to do with a human life. It really is. I mean, what the three of you are doing is just magnificent. I spent time as a hospice nurse, on the before side of it, and I would call people at 3am and let them know their person had passed, what the next steps were, their grief process would start, and I would attend to the next patient.

So, for me, it feels particularly poignant to be sitting here with you all, who do such beautiful work to support the people I used to call in the dead of the night.

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Krista: I kind of want to hear everybody else's story, too. Charlene, something you said was so true for me too. You go to Google when you can, when you don't have the resources, and then you don't actually find what you're looking for. Which, for me, is a huge part of why I do what I do. Because I don't want other people to be in that same situation where they're looking for something and what they find doesn't fit what they need.

Charlene: Well, my mom died 10 years ago, and I do feel there are more resources now, which I'm glad to see. At the time, what I found was checklists, "here's what you do." And that actually did fit in really well with my natural response. I'm much more of a cognitive processor versus an emotional processor.

So, at the time, I was like, "Oh, good, a checklist. That feels very soothing to me. I will go through the checklist now." But it took me but a number of years to really kind of tap into the emotional side of grieving. So, I think that's kind of what we're talking about today, too, about feeling safe enough to access that.

I very much had the story of "I can't grieve. I can't fall apart. There's too much paperwork to deal with. I need to figure out what to do with the house. I cannot afford to fall apart." And then, when I actually did feel like I needed to grieve, it was hard for me to access those emotions.

Briana: What you're speaking to is so important because I think it's so crucial that as things are starting to change and evolve a bit, it's so important for people to have some semblance of who they are and how they process these types of things. To know what kind of provider would best balance them in this work; or coach or facilitator or guide or whomever.

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For example, knowing that you aren't going to magically process things that way, would it have been supportive to have a person who could help hold that emotional container for you, while you also handle the logistical, practical aspects of grieving your mom?

I tend to approach [inaudible] in that way. In knowing who I am as a facilitator and provider, but also recognizing who they are and what their needs might be, and how we either work together or perhaps I'm not the best person for you, and here's a full list of resources where these other guides might be more suited to support what you're going through. So, thank you for sharing it.

Victoria: Thank you.

Charlene: I love the all of us who are on here, we're not therapists. I love therapy. I love my therapist. But I love that there is this range of support that's available for people who are grieving, because not everyone needs a therapist.

Having a range of approaches... Bri, you have a very different approach than I do. Krista, you have a different audience than I do. Speaking of the different styles, I think it's not an accident that most of my clients are also people who tend to be living from the neck up. They tend to be super responsible, competent people, like me, who feel responsible, potentially, for other people and their emotions.

So, it's been really interesting to recognize how I can provide that space for them to feel safe to access their emotions, when they feel ready to access their emotions. As I've been doing this work more, it's been interesting to see how our families of origin... It's been interesting to see how our families of origin, our cultural expectations, are playing into that.

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I did not grow up in a very traditional Chinese family. But I'm having more clients come to me where they're referencing the expectations from their family; about how they grieve, about whether or not they should be expressing their emotions.

So, I think the more of us who are providing services from a range of experiences, makes it so much better for all of us who are out there breathing and hurting and needing support.

Krista: Yeah, it is also good to know too, that what you need now might not be what you need in the future. And it's totally okay if that evolves over time. Sometimes it's therapy or a grief group. Or something is amazing for you at one point, and then later, it's just not what you need anymore. You'll kind of have to figure out how do I advocate for what I need next? Who is the best provider for me at that point?

Victoria: To your point, Charlene, that your familial expectation of what your grief should look like may resonate at first, and it may not later on. It might resonate again, and it might not later on. And that's okay, too.

Charlene: Do you find in your work, that you're doing a lot of giving permission, and allowing people to experience whatever they are experiencing? I know a lot of people kind of beating themselves up for not grieving the way that they think they should.

Victoria: Yeah. I'm curious to hear more from Krista and Bri about that.

Krista: It's a huge part of the coaching that I do. And it continues to amaze me. I've just done it so many times, validating people, I think I sometimes get frustrated that they're even in that place in the first place.

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How did we get there? How did we get to the place where we have to feel bad about feeling good? Or we're supposed to reach a particular stage, and if we're not there, there's something broken about us? If we could just allow ourselves to have the experience that we have, without making ourselves wrong.

Victoria: Yeah, that's 97.64% of the coaching I do too, right? It's like, no, you grew up in a family with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits. Of course, you feel this way. Please stop being mean to my teddy bear about it, you know?

Briana: I completely agree. I would say a lot of that has started with myself having to affirm my own feelings. Giving myself permission to be down and depressed or anxious, or to be in just sheer rage about whatever it is that I'm grieving. And doing that process for myself again and again, definitely opens up a lot of doors to hold that space for the people that I'm working with.

I named those particular emotions specifically, because there's so much stigma around those emotions, particularly in the Black community. I think over the last... I don't know, I'm 30... so maybe, in the last 10 years I've actually paid attention to it, folks are making more space for reclamation of the humanity of us all, when those emotions come along with it.

Krista: I love that you said you'd do it again and again. I think that part's super important. Because I think it's like the example that you set, when you show people that it's not a 'one and done,' that it really is an 'again and again and again.' It just humanizes what is reality, as opposed to what I think some people are doing, which is painting this pretty, "I had this ugly before and now I'm at this beautiful after." As though, somehow your humaneness is no longer there and you don't have to keep doing it. Because that's just not the way that it goes.

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Charlene: No, no, we just graduate. We go through the stages, we graduate, we get a certificate, and then...

Krista: And there's a rainbow and a medal. I think we get a prize.

Victoria: Are there puppies?

Krista: And we never feel bad again.

Victoria: Okay, wait. I'm sorry, where do I sign up for that one?

Charlene: One of my favorite talks is called "F\*\* your rainbows." Because there's so much insistence on those rainbows and silver linings, especially when people are trying to make people feel better. But no, I was speaking to the humanity of it. There's starting with compassion and curiosity. I love how you've talked about how yeah; we have to do it again and again. That it's a practice, a daily practice.

This was the 10-year mark for me. This Mother's Day was kind of hard, it was harder than previous ones. And that was really interesting to notice.

Victoria: Yeah. What are some of the ways that you were able to support yourself this Mother's Day, or for anyone with any grief anniversary? And do you call it a grief-aversary?

Krista: I call it a death-aversary. For me, it's always about not expecting myself not to be a human, and letting however I feel be okay. And however, I want to respond to that day, spend that day be okay. It doesn't have to fit in somebody else's box.

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To Charlene's point, if it's more intense at one point than it was before, I've learned I don't have to make that mean anything. That doesn't mean I'm regressing. It doesn't mean I'm going backwards. It doesn't mean I'm doing anything wrong, it's just that's how it is to be human and that's how it is to experience grief. It's fine.

Briana: I don't know. I don't call it anything. I think every day, a certain level of grief is there. And so, especially around holidays, and we celebrate holidays... I'm not a big holiday girl, but Mother's Day has become a day where I intentionally celebrate my mom.

So, I'll usually receive or buy her favorite flowers. This year, my sister-in-law bought some carnations for my mom, for me, which was really sweet. I bought her some roses, and all of those things. I posted a picture of her, that I recently received from another family member, that I hadn't seen before. It's just such an adorable picture of my mom.

And so, I was just celebrating that... I think related to Mother's Day specifically, if I'm being super transparent, I'm in a place after 11 years of being able to celebrate her, more so on that day, rather than battling it, and going into a grief spiral. Which that might change next year or next month, who knows.

But now my grief is showing up differently in that I desire to be a mom myself, and it hasn't happened yet for me and my partner. And so, now I'm sitting with, "Oh, what is this feeling?" What is this grief that is coming up, in desiring, with my mother in the ancestral land, on the soul?

I think, just like you said, Krista, it's just showing up, for however things happen around those anniversaries. I used to make plans around it and now I just kind of let things unfold how they should be.

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Charlene: I think a lot of my own journey with grief and process of healing... that can be a loaded word for some, but I like it... has included a lot of learning to really take care of myself, self-parenting and re-parenting, after my mother died. I think I'm pretty good at it usually, doing this work.

Sometimes it can be a balance, because you're trying to support other people who are having a hard time, and then noticing what it might bring up and you. So, I always do a creative ritual; that's a really important part of my work.

I always throw flowers in the river, in memory of my mom. It can be in the East River when I lived in New York. I now live in Lisbon, in Portugal, so it's the Rio Tejo. This year I included the mothers of other people who are in a motherless daughters community. It was 20 flowers and the names of 30 moms, so it was a lot. But it's really beautiful. I think it was just allowing the beauty and the sadness to sit side by side.

Victoria: That's really beautiful. Thank you for sharing that. Thank you for supporting those other women, and throwing flowers for their mothers too. That's beautiful. I love it. So, you know those moments when there's like 4 million questions in your brain, and you want to ask all of them at the exact same time? I'm having it.

When I have these three incredibly brilliant experts with me, I'm like, I want to ask everything. Always, but right now. I want to make sure we get back to systems of oppression. But first, I want to... Bri, you talked about grief spirals, and I don't want to let that escape us. One of the things that I do on *Feminist Wellness* that's really important to me, is give a lot of remedies and a lot of support and antidotes to the things that are really challenging.

By antidotes, not meaning make it go away. But how can we support ourselves? So, what advice might you all have for someone who is in a

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grief spiral? Maybe you all can define that, if that's a term you use, or whatever version of it you use, and help the folks out if they find themselves there.

Briana: A couple of things that are coming top of mind for me, Charlene, you just talked about it, is having some kind of ritual, whether that's from a faith or spiritual tradition, or a process that you add intention to. Creating a ritual community, like leaning on community.

People often say, "Well, let me know what I can do for you. Let me know how I can help." And so, it takes a lot to do that. But if we can challenge ourselves to do that, I think oftentimes, we're surprised at how much people will show up for us. I would just say leaning on community is something that I've challenged myself to do more.

To actually reach out to the people in my life, whether it's family, friends, or whomever, and let them know, "Hey, I'm having a hard time. Could you sit with me? Can we go do something fun to take my mind off of the thing, or just feel some different kind of energy right now?"

I find also, what you mentioned, Charlene, creative outlets to be really, really supportive. I used to journal quite a lot, and I'm starting to get back into that practice. It's been interesting to just dump all the things that I've been thinking and feeling onto a piece of paper.

And so, any creative outlet, whether it's journaling, or dancing, or singing, can be helpful to take what we're experiencing physically and put it somewhere else, so that we can be supported in processing through that grief spiral. What about you?

Krista: I've never actually used the term "grief spiral." I love the idea, but as I was listening to you, Briana, I love the dual process model of grief for

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exactly what you just said. Because if left to my own devices, I would not allow myself to do something else and take a break, necessarily. I would be like, "I must focus on solving problem currently," related to whatever it is.

So, I will remind myself, no, the healthy balance is to be found in intentionally taking a break, and it is okay to have a Netflix binge. It doesn't even have to be productive, right? Productivity culture is deeply seated in me. And so, to consciously decide, now I can actually take a break. And that is good for me. So, for sure that resonates.

And then also, for me, I'm always going to be tapping. That is just what helps me. Yesterday even, I was having a griefy thing happening, unrelated to my husband's death, but I totally needed to spend a good 20 minutes to create some safety for myself. Because I just felt like the world was ending, for a while there. Tapping for the win.

Victoria: Tapping for the win. Knowing your own nervous system and what brings you back into ventral vagal, that's the real flex there. It's knowing how to map your nervous system, know what's up, and what supports you. I love that you pointed us towards conscious distraction, right? Which is, for me, is entirely the difference between a buffer, which is the mindless Netflix, and conscious distraction, which is the super intentional two hours of Netflix. It's vital.

Krista: Yeah, or go out in the garden and pull weeds. That actually feels good.

Victoria: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Krista: Get my feet on the ground.

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Victoria: Right, connect with nature, connect with Pachamama, with the earth. Yeah, it's really important to give the prefrontal cortex a break. You're ping-ponging between the prefrontal and the limbic system, your amygdala is getting triggered, and you're just like pwe-pwe-pwe... It's like pinball up there.

Krista: I wish somebody had told me that a long, long time ago.

Victoria: Which part?

Krista: Well, I identified with what Charlene said. Just always being in my head and not really even realizing how easy it is to spend time there and think that that is the solution; to think it, think it, think it. And just realize that it's not.

Victoria: I mean, let's throw Descartes fully under the bus here, right? I'm always delighted to point to the problem with mind/body dualism, right? It keeps us out of our truth, out of our humanity, out of our wholeness. Charlene, what were you going to say about grief spirals?

Charlene: Oh, no. I was just nodding along about... Yeah, I would probably default to thinking that I can logic my way out of it. Or I can talk myself out of it, rather than talking myself through it, whether it's out loud or on paper, like Bri said. I like what you said about what's supportive for you; giving myself permission to say, "Well, actually, what kind of support feels actually supportive to me, right now?" And trusting the answer.

I think it's learning to trust what comes up for us. Checking in with our bodies, checking in with our inner children, if need be, right? If that feels right. And listening for what comes up rather than trying to reason my way out of it.

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I like asking questions, well, I like asking questions that bring up helpful answers. So, what hurts, specifically right now? What hurts? Name it. List it. What was it? What could it have been? Is it what will never be? Name it, and then ask, what helps? Then trust the answer that comes up, if it's something that feels supportive to you.

So, whether that looks like going for a walk, calling a friend; I love having ice cream, that is my treat. I do not deny myself that one. Trusting the answer that comes up for what is most supportive to you.

Victoria: That's such a grounding question: What hurts? It gave me full shivers in my spine, because it just brought me so into presence, and then give my brain what it needs, which is the permission, allowing it to 'Yeah, I'm doing some future tripping. I'm rocking and rolling out in the past.' And providing some validation that that's okay, that's what brains do. That's your job, little brain. You're doing the right thing. You're doing your thing.

Briana: I love that too, Charlene. I feel like it's responding to a grief spiral with curiosity. It's how I kind of contextualize what you said. Yeah, wow, that brings up so many opportunities, and so many individual and unique paths for everyone. It's just being curious when you find yourself in a grief spiral. Being curious about what's there and why it's there, and what you need to do about it. I love that. Definitely taking that with me.

Victoria: So, we were just talking about our humanity, right? Stepping out of that Cartesian mind/body b.s., and back into really honoring ourselves as mammals. And so, I think that is a beautiful way to segue into a conversation about the roles of the patriarchy, white settler colonialism, and late-stage capitalism on how we experienced life, death, loss, and grief. Because in my worldview it's part and parcel, but I want to hear from you all.

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Krista: I didn't realize it was going to be such an issue until I started coaching. Honestly, I think I didn't even appreciate how much I was struggling with it, until I saw it reflected back to me in the struggles of other people. But for the women that I work with, what I see a lot of is, they don't really know how much they've been sold this bill of goods, that partnered is somehow superior to not partnered.

They don't understand it actually is genuinely possible to be happy without being partnered. The goal is not necessarily to just hurry up and make your body look better for the male gaze, so that you can attract someone else, so that you can be happy, right? Many have lived most of their adult lives in a partnered situation, so they don't realize how much of their confidence and self-concept and identity was wrapped up in the person.

Most of the women that I work with are cisgender, straight women. So, it's really interesting, right? There's so much drama about taking off the wedding ring. What does that mean? What will people think? I'm damaged goods. I no longer fit in. Something is wrong with me. I'm broken. Because of that; because of what we've been taught.

Or decision making, not believing they're good at money, right? Not believing they're good at managing whatever it was that the spouse managed. That they were taught a male versus female gendered thing. So, that's how I see it showing up, primarily because of who I work with, for starters.

Charlene: For me, it's been seeing that all my clients have taken on roles and responsibilities without even realizing it. When my mother died, and I'm an only child so I knew I was going to be the responsible one, that I would have to fly back and figure everything out, with some help from my aunt. I knew that most of the decisions and the responsibility would be mine.

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But it's been really interesting to see how a lot of my clients are women who are in that role by default. That they have been assigned that role by other members of their family because they are women. Because they are the oldest daughter. And there's this assumption that they're going to be the caretakers. Maybe a parent is aging, and they're managing that, as well as the estate.

There's this assumption that they're going to deal with all the physical stuff, and figure out who gets what. And by the way, they're going to be responsible for other people's emotions and their wellbeing. So, that's been really interesting to see all of those assumed roles.

A lot of the work that we do is, yes, the physical stuff like deciding what is theirs versus what is other people's. But more and more, we kind of go into the emotional stuff: What is theirs? What is actually their responsibility, and what is other people's?

It's interesting to tease apart. Why is there that assumption that you have to be responsible for this? Whether it is because of your cultural upbringing, or because of this assumption that women are caretakers. It's really interesting to examine that.

Briana: Yeah, I work with a lot of Black women and femmes. That same kind of notion, of an assumed caregiver, is definitely present. There's the trope of being a strong Black woman, that a lot of Black women and femmes, including myself, are very committed to not aligning themselves with. Wanting to create space for themselves to be resilient and soft, hardworking, and be given permission to do nothing. The “and” of it all.

I also have seen and experienced the ways... We talked earlier a lot about how the family structure and cultural understandings of grief, shaped grief properties themselves. But also, in thinking about late-stage capitalism, all

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the -isms, we can't not talk about work. This idea that we're supposed to be present at a particular space for eight hours a day, and there's no room to be human in that.

This expectation that a big life event happens, and we're supposed to return to work and be at our best. And so, in the spaces that I'm a part of, and seek to be a part of, there's a lot of resiliency happening, yes, but also reclamation of joy in that.

There's a lot of assertion of life. I'm a birth worker, as well as someone who guides folks at the end of life. And so, considering the maternal health crisis that this country is in, that assertion that life, Black life in particular, is valuable and deserves respectful care.

Other conversations that folks are having around the law, that end-of-life side of things, there is an energy that is wanting to make space for dignified transitions, and where violence is rightfully addressed. There are so many ways that question lands in my mind or body.

Victoria: We can do a part two. We can bring it all back, right? Because I think there's so much more to talk about, and there's so much more to unpack and really dive into here. Right? Particularly talking about the patriarchy, white settler colonialism, and our detachment from our cultural norms. And what loss practices and rituals looked like ancestrally for folks before migration, forced immigration, before being enslaved, etc. etc. etc.

That's been lost, for so many of us. So, I think we're going to have to do a part two. I hope y'all are game because that'd be really fun. Because I'm also sitting here as an immigrant....

Charlene: I'd love that.

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Victoria: You'd love it? Okay. Signed you up. Done!

Charlene: I want to interview all of you.

Victoria: I know, right? Let's all talk, for hours. I think there's really important parts of grief to talk about that are so far beyond an actual death loss. I remember as a girl... We immigrated from Argentina when I was a kid. I had so much, both survivor's guilt, because we made it out during the Dirty War. And just so much grief from missing my people.

Like you do, in Latin America. We all lived together in one building; it was like three generations together. We went from that to being the only South Americans we knew of in Providence, Rhode Island. So, there was this other kind of grief where no one had died, but a part of me had died.

This cultural legacy of living in Argentina, and asados and football and bananas and maten, etc. So, let's have you all come back, and let's talk about what it is to apply this lens of nervous system based, somatically embodied, grief and grieving. Yes, to death but also to life. How does that sound? You game?

Krista: Amazing.

Victoria: Okay, sold. Perfect. Done. Bri? You in.

Briana: Let's do it.

Victoria: Okay, great. I mean, I'm not busy. Y'all aren't busy, right?

Krista: No, nothing going on, ever.



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Victoria: Nothing. 0% of things. Okay, cool. Great. Done.

Charlene: That sounds brilliant. I think that also touches on, when we talk about death related loss, for what you do, grief is also such a full body experience. But it's also a full spectrum, full life experience. So many kinds of loss, and secondary losses, related to death we're only starting to acknowledge. So yes, so much we can talk about.

Victoria: So much. Beautiful. Thank you. I would love to close this up. If there's anything that you want to say from your brilliance, your wisdom, your experience, your open hearts, to folks who are deep in the grief right now, or those who are maybe a couple years out? Y'all were talking about, it's been a couple years and these waves come. I'll just hush and let you take the floor. What do you want to say to the good listener who's going through their grief?

Krista: I would just say what I wish somebody would have said to me, which again, is you can't do this wrong. Stop trying to do it right, because you can't do it wrong. Whatever you're feeling and whatever's going on internally for you is not a problem that you have to fix, right?

It's just something that you want to allow to flow through; that is humaneness. There's no finish line, it's just all okay. I just wish somebody would have said that.

Charlene: Always just permission... Permission to be wherever you are with your grief, whether it's been five months or five years. Going on your own timeline, that often, when people come to me, they want to take action, they want to start curating, they want to do something beautiful right away.

Not everyone's ready for that. I think there's a lot of pressure now. Maybe with all of the information about grief, the flip side of that, is people think

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they need to have post traumatic growth, or they need to find meaning or make meaning. But if you're still just trying to make sense of your significant loss, it's okay. You don't need to be making meaning right now. Do what feels right for you.

Briana: What's coming to mind for me, is the notion that it's okay to not be okay. That sometimes the most powerful life that we can be in is in the present. That what has happened, has happened, and what will happen tomorrow, we have no idea. And so, being in the present, sitting with your grief, and allowing it to be. As Krista and Charlene shared, it's okay to be just right there.

Victoria: Thank you all for being here. Thank you, once again, for the work you do. I'm so grateful that each one of you exists, and that you're out there supporting people in their moments, their hours, their months, their years of need. It's truly beautiful work. I'm just really grateful.

I know everyone listening wants to follow you, wants to join your course, wants to do your thing, so would you be so kind as to tell them where they can do all of that, please? Let's go alphabetically again. Bri, you want to start us off?

Briana: Sure.

Victoria: Poor Bri, you're going to change your name to Xavier Roberts, like tomorrow.

Briana: Okay. So, I can be found at Unearthing Tradition on Instagram, and my website is [UnearthingTradition.com](http://UnearthingTradition.com).

Krista: If you don't have a podcast, you need one.

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Victoria: Agreed, like 1,000%.

Briana: I've heard that so many times. It's funny.

Krista: Yeah. When she talks, I just relax.

Victoria: I feel wrapped, like all my attention is, "What else, Bri? What else? Will you say it again?" Bri, I actually just subscribed to your podcast. So, I also wrote a rating and a review. You might want to actually...

Briana: A pre-subscription.

Victoria: Pre-subscription; pre-rating, five stars; pre-review, "Changed my life." You're welcome. No, but actually, thank you. Hey, Charlene, where can they find you?

Charlene: My website is my name, CharleneLam.com. I hold a free monthly grief gathering on the last Wednesday of every month. So, you can sign up for that there. I'd love to meet you. You can learn more about why curating, why a gallery, for grief. I'm on Instagram @Curating\_Grief. I've just launched the *Curating Grief* podcast. It has only been in the works for two years.

Krista: Now we all actually do have to rate and review and subscribe.

Victoria: Subscribe, rate, and review. Done and done, count on us. Oh, Charlene, that's so exciting. Yay. Krista?

Krista: I am also a podcaster. My podcast is called *The Widowed Mom* podcast; which I realize is extremely niched. However, I always recommend it. If you're just interested in grief, or post-traumatic growth or

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whatever, come listen. And then, CoachingWithKrista.com is my website, where all the socials can be found. You know, the socials.

Victoria: The socials. Thank you all, once again, for being here. You are incredibly dope. I'm incredibly delighted to know you. Thank you, thank you, and we'll do it again soon.

Thanks for listening, my darling. What a beautiful, powerful conversation. I'm so deeply grateful to have these women in my life and to have this conversation together. It is such a gift to be surrounded by such brilliant thinkers, such open loving hearts, just such kind, incredible, magnificent, caring people. I am a lucky little bunny, indeed.

Thank you for listening. Thanks for being a part of the *Feminist Wellness* family. Thank you. Thank you for giving the show a rating and a review wherever you get your podcast.

Let's do what we do. A gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. And, when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar](http://VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar) for a free webinar all about it.

Have a beautiful day my darling and I'll see you next week. Ciao.