

Ep #242: Feeling Your Feelings Somaticly (Part 2)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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Ep #242: Feeling Your Feelings Somatically (Part 2)

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. Last week, we talked all about feeling our feelings in our body, and the myriad of reasons why feeling our feelings can help us to live richer, more fulfilling lives with more connection to ourselves, and the people in our world.

When we feel all the lousy feelings, all the complex ones, all the ones we go, "Ugh, I don't want to feel that," it creates capacity in our nervous system to feel the feels we most want to feel, which may, for example, be joy and pleasure, excitement, love.

I know for myself, once upon a time, I had three basic settings, mad, sad, and glad, and did not deviate too much from there. And now, that I've encouraged myself, allow myself, support myself, and just really go for it with having all of the feels, now I have all of the feels. So yeah, when I go dark, I go dark.

Life is just happier overall, with gratitude. It lights me up and fills my chest. Love? Oh, I am so in love, and it just feels like... here, let me feel into it... Oh, it feels like champagne bubbles, like bright blue champagne bubbles filling up my chest. Oh, that feels so beautiful. Food tastes better, sex feels better, biking feels better. My sense of smell? My olfactory experience of the world is heightened.

The more I feel my feeling somatically in my body, which is the practice that I teach all of my clients, with everyone I work with... We practice Somatic Experiencing, the work of Peter Levine and Kathy Kain. We learn to feel our feelings. We practice it together every single week in Anchored, in the

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Somatic Studio. It's the goal of being able to show up for our whole selves. For the depths of who we are, and as a way to overcome emotional outsourcing; our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits.

So, I'll pause to define that. I define emotional outsourcing as chronically and habitually sourcing our sense of wellness, worth, safety and validity from everyone and everything in the world outside ourselves instead of from within.

Instead of just believing "I am worthy" we look to others to prove it. And so, of course, we manipulate their emotions. Of course, we people please. Of course, we try to show up as perfection. Which, you are perfection, but I think you know what I mean when I say we show up in this perfectionist way, infallible, which often means not having feelings, right?

And so, the more we are in touch with our feelings, the more we feel our feelings in our body, the more we are present for the sensation of them. Where we are able to name them, get real with them for ourselves. Then, slowly, ever so slowly, we are able to begin to voice them to safe people in our world.

I started with my dog; let's be real. I'd be like, "Francis Bacon," she went by Frankie, "here's what I'm feeling." Slowly I was able to tell a friend, and then a one step removed friend, and then the person I was dating. It rippled it outward till, now, I just tell it like it is.

Which is not how it used to be. I certainly did not tell it how it was. Because I wanted everyone to like me, and people who get told how it is often do not like the teller. Right?

So, last week, we talked in detail about how it got this way, why we don't feel our feelings. Part of the reason for really going deep on that was to

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really drive home the message that not feeling your feelings is not a failure on your part. It's not an eff up. It's not a problem, in the sense of, you didn't do anything wrong.

Your child self, your most loving self, you were trying to protect yourself for whatever reason... and whatever reason, I went over like 20 of them... but you're just trying to protect yourself. Frankly, I think that is laudable; to be celebrated, to be applauded. It's not something to feel bad about.

I don't regret, and I don't feel bad, that I didn't feel my feels for all those years. I know that my body, my nervous system, my inner children, believed it was really dangerous and downright dumb to do so. And so, I am grateful to them for taking care of me, and keeping me out of a felt experience that would have wildly overwhelmed my nervous system capacity.

I did not have the window of capacity, the nervous system literature calls it a "window of tolerance," in my nervous system to be with those big feelings. I would have freaked out. It would have been way too much. Now, it's not. And so, I'm grateful for what was, and I'm darn grateful for what is.

So, my loves, you listened to the show last week. You heard me saying, extolling, the virtues of feeling your feels, and you're like, "So, that's cute. Super cute and all, but I'm sorry, exactly how do we do this? Feeling the feelings thing that everybody's talking about?"

Let's walk through it. Yeah. First of all, before we even begin there, clarion call for patience. My sweet buttercup, my sweet little kitten, you didn't get estranged from your own nervous system and somatic experience of life overnight, and you are unlikely to just snap your fingers, wave a magic wand, and ba-da-bing, reconnect with it.

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It's a skill that takes the three C's, compassion, curiosity and care, in order to really have real change created within your nervous system. For that, we need a whole lot of patience with ourselves.

I think it's really important to say that this work, at first, can come with a not insignificant amount of 'feeling a weird tingling in my left pinky. But oh my god, I have no friggin clue what emotion that is.' That experience is normal, natural, expectable, and is totally okay.

My beauty, this is a process; AKA a process; for our beloved Canadian audience. It is one that is not to be rushed, because it's all about making deep change in the nervous system, and that is slow and painstaking work. The more gentle you can be, the easier it is; I promise.

My nerds, think about it. When you're being gentle with you, patient with you, compassionate, curious, loving with you, you're staying in ventral vagal with you. It all make sense, right?

So, I will encourage you to *not* go in with a perfectionist 'I'm going to feel the feels so perfectly, so good, right away' kind of energy, or all you're likely to feel is some really painful, sympathetic activation, failure vibes. They're going to kick you right into dorsal. If you're like, "Wait, what are these words? What are you saying?" You're going to want to check out Episode 174 "Polyvagal 101."

My beauties, if you're listening to this and you're on the subway, you're driving, you're at work, you're doing stuff, listen all the way through so it can sort of settle into the back of your brain. And then, I want to encourage you to listen at a time when you can really listen. When you can really, really be present with it, for it, and can experience this process I'm going to walk you through. Okay?

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Again, obviously, if you are driving heavy machinery or a school bus or whatever, please don't do the meditation part of this. Safety first. My friends always joke, "Safety fifth, fashion first; two, three, and four are up to you. That's what we used to say. I would change it to, "Safety fifth, style first." If you don't know the difference between style and fashion, check out my episode with Judith Gatton. That woman's a goddess! Feminist take on style, not to be missed.

Okay, my darling, I want to invite you to find a quiet place, a quiet moment. Perhaps you light a candle or some incense. Perhaps you're in the bath. Perhaps you're in bed or under your bed.

Take a moment to get present to yourself. To remind yourself that you've got your own back. That you're in an experiment, you're in a practice. There's no need to do it perfectly, and that you can stop at any point.

I will invite you, first with eyes open, to orient. This is the process of reminding your nervous system who, when, where, you are. Because trauma lives in the 'not here and now.' Trauma takes us back to an old time, an old place, an old version of ourselves, when life was less safe than now.

Before we connect in with our nervous system, with our feelings, we take the time to come back to the here and now. And so, the simplest way to do that, is to simply look around the space you're in and see where your eyes land.

Perhaps there's a beautiful bit of sunshine coming in the window, a bird on a wire outside. Perhaps the Q-train is going by and you can see the people smiling on it. Perhaps there's a picture of a loved one on your desk, or your favorite comforter on your bed.

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Remind yourself of who you are; I'll say my whole name. "Nervous system, my name is Maria Victoria Albina Corvedo." I'll say my age, I'll say the date, and I'll say where I am. "In the Hudson Valley, on occupied Lenape territory. In my home, where I live with Ziggy Star dog, the parable chihuahua, and my beloved, beloved, Billey."

Orient your nervous system. Let your nervous system know you're grown and you're somewhere safe for you. Next, promise yourself and your inner children that you do not have to stay with this process if it's overwhelming, if your nervous system gets flooded. Take the shame of stepping out of the equation upfront, and see how much more space there is in your body to actually stay with the feels.

Three, designate a glimmer, a resource, to come back to if you do feel overwhelmed in your nervous system. We talked about "glimmers" in Episode 62. In short, glimmers are the opposite of triggers. Triggers take us out of ventral vagal, into sympathetic or dorsal, and glimmers bring us back in.

I have a picture of the world's bestest girl. The bestest dog that ever was, Francis Bacon, right on my desk. I have a piece of my childhood blanket. I have a picture of my beloved. I have objects, things, that helped me to come back to the here and now should I get overwhelmed. I recommend that you do the same.

So, with that promise made, yeah, with the agreement to not push yourself, and with a resource and a glimmer decided upon, we'll dive in. After orienting, gently scan your body from head to toe, if that feels safe for you in the moment. Notice any tension, discomfort, sensations.

This helps us to connect with our physical experience. To step into sensation as a way to step out of the prefrontal cortex, the executive

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function part of your brain, the thinking part, and instead into your subcortical brain, where trauma healing happens.

To do that, you need to get to know the feelings, the sensations, that come with the emotion. So, I like to ask myself, where does this emotion and sensation live in my body? What sensations go along with this emotion? For example, is there tightening or loosening, heat or cold, constriction or expansion?

Then, I'll invite myself to describe the emotional experience and the sensation by painting a florid Victorian novel about it. What is the color? What is the texture, the pattern, the temperature? Really get to know the sensation that comes with sadness, with joy, with anger, with disappointment, with frustration, and see where it lives in the body.

As you get to know it, as you notice it and step into a deep sensation-based experience of your own feelings, next comes the most challenging bit for most of us, which is to allow the feeling. To give it space. To allow the motion to just be there in your spine, in your belly, in your knees, in your throat, behind your eyes, without trying to change it.

I like to remind myself that emotions are like waves, they come and they go. They come and they go. That nary a one is permanent. Emotions are friends to get to know, and not enemies to run from or push away. I know they can feel like really not great friends sometimes. Come on. I get it. I live here, too.

The more I remind myself my emotions are here for me, to teach me, the more that I can really stay with it and not try to take some deep breaths or change the experience. I can just be there.

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In that process, I remind myself to trust that I can handle whatever arises. Which I know is a super scary thing for those of us who have experienced trauma. It can feel like some serious b.s., but I'm here to promise you that it's not.

When you stay present, and with yourself, your nervous system will always guide you to come out the other side of an emotion. Always; because science. That's how it works. You might feel an urge to push the feeling away, for all the reasons discussed. This is a moment where staying with the emotion can lead to a beautiful deepening of self-awareness and subsequent growth.

Just reminding you, if you are overwhelmed, stop. Nothing's gone wrong. You're doing beautifully. So, my beauty, as you are able, stay with the feeling. Stay with the felt sensation of it. Stay present with it.

To support ourselves in this process, I invite my clients to have some supportive words at the ready before even starting this process. Words like, "I'm safe with me. I'm safe to feel this. I'm supported to feel this emotion. This is what my body's meant to do. My nervous system is capable. I consent to feel this even though I might not like it. I'm willing and able to feel this safely."

This is the time when using these kinds of words to remind ourselves that we're really okay can really help. I encourage my clients to write these little notes to self on a Post-It, and keep it where they can see them when they're practicing this process.

Consider reminding yourself as well, that nerdtastic research has found that this physiologic or bodily experience of emotions lasts approximately 90 seconds. I know you can support yourself to stay present, to stay with the feeling, for 90 seconds. Starting one second at a time, kitten step style, and

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working your way up to allowing the whole feeling to be present, and to be present for the whole feeling.

What you'll likely notice, having stayed with the feeling and having really allowed it, is that the physical experience of the emotion often starts to shift and change when you hold space for it. When you don't judge it or push it away, but just let it be there.

It begins to transform into something else as you stay with it, as your nervous system reorganizes around it, being safe to be with your feels. This is when I like to bring the prefrontal cortex of my brain back into the game to do affect labeling and practice, which has some pretty solid science behind it.

I'll ask myself, towards the goal of labeling the emotion, what emotion am I experiencing right now? Still, we're not judging, managing or changing the emotion, we're simply observing and labeling it. Is it sadness, anger, joy, something else, that you're feeling in your body right now?

I like to keep an emotions wheel around to help me to label it without judgment. It's like you're reporting the weather and nothing more. Having held space for the emotion, having really felt the felt sensation of it, having labeled it, once I'm on the other side of it I always take a moment, as a key part of this practice, to offer myself compassion, kindness, air, and love, for showing up for me, for myself, for my feelings.

You know me, I like to tell myself out loud... and part of that may be that I'm an ESL kid, so auditory learning really works for me. But you might want to try it on too. I'll turn to myself and I'll say, "Good job, tender bunny. Way to show up for you. Way to hold space. Way to stay with that emotion that felt really, really challenging."

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Once we've done that, and we've gotten really comfortable with that process, it's something we've practiced a lot, then we have the option to bring in thought. Which we've talked about, oh my goodness, in so many episodes from the beginning; 35, 36, 37, which are thinking, feeling, acting. I can't even name the number of episodes where I've described the thought work protocol in detail, but we can bring that in.

Once we are comfortable with really holding space for the feeling. I would really practice just holding the loving space first, and then adding in the thought work. We can do that if we want to do some investigative work.

For example, you can ask yourself: What does this emotion have to teach me? Is there an unmet need or want this emotion is pointing me towards? What thought led to this emotion? Was that thought accurate? Was it true to what was really going on? Or was it just fueled by other emotions? It's not a judgment, it's just a thing that happens.

Was that thought a cognitive distortion? Was it a projection? Is it based more in my past than what's happening now? Was it a habitual thought on cassette tape, on a loop? What is the story that comes with this emotion? Do I want to keep telling the story?

I'll remind myself that the feels are valid. And the story that led to the feeling, that comes with and from the feel, might not be one that serves me to stay with, to repeat. For example, "He's a jerk and the worst," might not really lead to better communication.

That's when we get to lean into our wisdom, our discernment, and our thought work skills, to decide what's next for you. Do you want to keep thinking the same thought that created this emotion, or do you want to shift?

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Okay, that's the process, my love. That is the process of feeling a feel. I feel like it felt so daunting, for my own work, many years ago. Until I paused and wrote it out once. This is actually pretty straightforward. Now, the experience of it doesn't always feel so simple and straightforward, right? What's the saying? "It may be simple, but it's not easy." There you go.

Again, we're going to orient. Promise ourselves and our inner children that we can step out anytime we want. We do a gentle head to toe body scan. Then notice, and step into the sensation. Get really detailed, floridly detailed, around the sensation so that you can ground yourself in the felt experience. So that the work isn't in the neocortex of your brain, but in the body for nervous system processing.

Then, allow the feeling. Give it space, without judging it. Bring in some loving words to support yourself and for staying with it. "I'm safe. I'm supported." Then, allow the feeling to just move through you; which it often will. It might morph and change, become another feeling. It might lead to crying, to cheering, to a physical experience. It may just float away.

Then you can bring in affect labeling. Labeling the emotion with an emotion word like, sadness, anger, or joy. And then, if you want, you can do thought work.

That's the process. Pretty cool, huh? Yeah. Again, people often ask me, "What nervous system tool do I do in the moment, when I'm at a board meeting and my boss is being a jerk?" I'm like, "Well, the real work is done when we're not activated. When we're in ventral vagal, and we're feeling pretty darn chill, is the best time to explore our nervous system experience of an emotion."

I'll really encourage you to put aside some time to explore your mind, your body, your nervous system. To ask your inner children what feelings they want to have felt. Really give this some practice when your feet aren't to

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the fire, when things do feel pretty chill. So that when things feel more stressful, you'll have more capacity in your nervous system to show up.

Now, last week, I told you of an important caveat on this whole, it's important to feel your feels in your body thing. This is incredibly important. This is when your body has been the site of trauma that is unprocessed. Or if you have a c-PTSD or PTSD diagnosis and the trauma is really alive within you. It may not feel safe to feel anger or sadness or even joy in your body.

Both make sense; because science; and is totally okay, because c'mon now. My beautiful little turnip, you went through a thing. It's likely to be a process to just actually feel your feelings in your body. That's cool. That's what it is. You don't have to like it, but I want to encourage you to accept it, because it's what is.

It certainly was a process for me, for sure, to be able to feel my feels in my body in a real way, because my body was the site of trauma. This is when we both kitten step the process of feeling the feels. Maybe just start with feeling the feels on the edge of your body. So, like the way you can feel the air on your skin, feel the feels there, if being inside your body is not right or too much or doesn't feel safe or feels dead-up scary.

Studies show that there is no prize given for flooding your nervous system, for freaking it out, by diving into the wreck without an oxygen mask. Slow your roll, be gentle. Perhaps where you're at is to just start with some orienting and affect labeling, and you stay out of the body and just connect with the emotion words to start.

If that's where you're at, I applaud you for knowing it and for honoring it. I want to invite you to consider working with a trained and thoughtful coach, like myself, who has specific training in things like Somatic Experiencing. Or with a trauma therapist. It's generally a good call, says I.

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I'll also add something that we see as “secret” in somatic experiencing, which is that if your body is hiding something from you, leave it be. Don't go pulling the hood off alone. No, no, no. Trust your body.

If you ask your belly what it's feeling, and it's like, “Oh, nothing to see here, I'm just nauseous, whatever. But there's no emotion,” I'd recommend just telling it, “That's okay. Great. Thanks, belly,” and then let your trauma therapist know that there's something in your belly that might need care at some point.

Back up off it, and trust that it will reveal itself as your nervous system is able to handle what it has to say. That is, please don't go pushing and shoving your nervous system around. It serves no one, and in fact, can be seriously retraumatizing.

Before we go, I want to remind you that I have a free offering, an orienting nervous system exercise. We did orienting today, together, and I go into in way more detail. It's free, so, why not? You also get in inner child meditation, a boundaries meditation, and other little goodies.

If you go to VictoriaAlbina.com, there's a toolbar at the top of the screen, you just click that, and that takes you to VictoriaAlbina.com/free-meditations. Keeping it simple here. That's where you can download the free meditations, including the orienting exercise. So, go grab that, if you haven't already. It can be really helpful in this process.

There you have it, my perfect, tender, beautiful ravioli; feeling your feelings 101. I love somatics, not just because the practices have profoundly changed, reshaped, and in many ways, saved my life. But because it's the perfect blend of science and woo; just like me, and likely just like you. Oh my god, I'm so cheesy. I love that about me.

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Thank you for joining me on this journey of self-discovery today. Together we can start to break free from the chains of societal conditioning. We can embrace our vulnerability, and can remember that our emotions and the felt sensations in our body are not our weaknesses, they are our superpowers.

They guide us towards a life aligned with our true selves. Remember, you have the power to feel your feelings, and by doing so, you can transform your life, your relationships, your communities, and the world.

If you enjoyed this episode, please subscribe, follow, leave a rating, and a written review. Share it with friends and tag me on the social media; it makes me smile. Let's empower Ito to embrace our emotions and live authentically. Want to? I do.

Alright, my darlings, let's do what we do. A gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. Remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. 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 for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling and I'll see you next week. Ciao.