

## Ep #275: Embracing Safety



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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## Ep #275: Embracing Safety

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. By now, you've probably heard me say it about 473,000 times, emotional outsourcing develops as a survival skill in response to a felt or experienced lack of belonging, worthiness, and safety, generally during our developmental years.

That is, generally speaking, the root cause of our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits to get through life comes from not feeling like we have all the basic things, emotionally speaking, that we really need to feel okay in the world as little ones. And recognizing that really explains the way our nervous system understands and reacts to the world. Why we're not so present and tend to live from habit, not intentionality.

Because being present is often way too scary when we fear being abandoned, rejected, or being smothered and not allowed to have our own experiences or feelings in life. However you come by your own emotional outsourcing habits, the way to move towards interdependent living, which is my goal in all of this, is to cultivate ever-greater safety.

And that's our theme for today. My muse on this theme is none other than, you guessed it, Ziggy Stardog. Ziggy is a 12-ish-year-old Chihuahua/Pug/Jack Russell/potato demon mix. He weighs about 10 pounds, and he wears diapers at all times when indoors. Not because he's incontinent, oh, no. But because he's a schmuck...Chihuahuas... He owns the entire world.

And so, we'll come in from this long walk in the woods, and he peed all the peeing that he could actually have to pee, and he'll look you right in the eye, lift his leg on the couch or the dining room table or your shoes, or

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whatever it is that he wants to affirm his ownership of. So, he wears a cummerbund. We say that he's always ready for a black-tie event.

But he does not like to be pet unless he wants to be pet. And he is, as is very much common of Chihuahuas, he's both... not ridiculously, I don't want to judge him... but intensely, deeply, intensely scared of the entire world. Subsequently, is very aggressive and will bear his teeth and growl and snarl to let you know, "Petting time is over. You're too close to the food bowl," whatever.

At first, many a moon ago, I could not even put his leash on without him snarling or change his diaper, or honestly, even give him a treat. And slowly, over time, we built up rapport and enough safety for me to pet him sometimes. The "slowly" part was key for him.

I bring this up not just because I want to talk to you about the cutest, sweetest, most perfect and amazing hot mess of a chihuahua I've ever known, but because slowly is the name of the game when it comes to nervous system healing, my darling, darling angel pants.

Zooming out, growing up in emotional outsourcing often means growing up with emotionally immature or unpredictable caregivers, which we talked about in Episode 167. It could also mean growing up with demanding parents that put that perfectionist 'A+ or nothing' kind of mindset into your noggin'. Unstable, unsafe, or unreliable grownups or adults who were super deep in their own emotional outsourcing, their unwellness, their addiction, their distraction, their whatever.

That means they didn't have the capacity to be fully present with or attuned to us. Who didn't really know how to parent or attune, because they probably, likely, weren't parented in a way that was good for them by parents who weren't parented well, on and on ad infinitum. And when we don't get those cues of safety, when we don't get coregulation in our

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formative years while our sweet nervous systems are developing, ages 07ish, the world can come to seem like a minefield.

For some of us, home was a pretty darn safe and secure place, which can make the nervous system dysregulation we feel as adults quite confusing. Some explanations there can be, acute or shock trauma; that can be like an accident. Or medical procedures or interventions, even if they weren't necessary lifesaving, even if we're all super grateful that you got whatever surgery when you were a little baby.

Those can be coded in the body as trauma because a kid's nervous system doesn't know what to begin to make of blood draws, surgery, anesthesia, all of it, right? There can also be epigenetic or ancestral inherited trauma. And for folks living in marginalized or racialized bodies... queer and trans folks, disabled, or otherwise oppressed bodies... the world might not be the safest place.

And our nervous system can come into hypervigilance due to the vigilance that was actually called for in order to survive. Well, I said "was", but "is" called for to live in the patriarchy, white settler colonialism and late stage capitalism.

Whatever the reason we have come to have unsafety coded and encoded in ourselves, a cellular understanding of the world as a place that is dangerous is the inherent result. And so, of course, we have our hackles up. Makes sense, right? I pause to get really clear on that. To say, if you're like, "Oh, girl, it's me," there's nothing wrong with you. You're not broken. There's nothing to fix about you.

I know from firsthand experience just how uncomfortable that can be. And I'm excited to support you to shift that experience of life. I will also say that the etiology, the 'where it comes from,' is less important in my lived experience than managing our day to day and connecting with safety now.

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Because no matter where the stress, distress, or trauma comes from, if your body acted to protect you, through nervous system activation, then that incomplete stress response, which we talked about way back in Episode 17, that lives still within your body.

Our smart and self-loving nervous systems, that are always seeking to protect us, get and stay jacked up in sympathetic fight or flight. Or might shut down frequently into dorsal disconnect. Or, like my nervous system, it might adopt functional freeze, which we have discussed in so much detail in Episode 246-248.

Which is that combined state where you ping-pong from fight or flight to dorsal; to shut down, disconnect, freeze; back and forth and back and forth. Or both at once. And that feels great; j.k., no, it feels terrible.

So, what happens when nervous system safety is lacking? Well, one of the most challenging parts of this, for us with our emotional outsourcing thought habits, is that we tend to only look outside of ourselves to attempt to source safety. That's just not how it works.

We have to work with our own nervous systems and our bodies, while also building loving, safer community, when our goal is to rewire our internal landscape and our habitual perception of threats, aka "neuroception". Which is a term from Steven Porges PhD, who describes our subconscious ability to detect danger and safety; safety - danger, safety - danger.

If our neuroception is skewed by past trauma, our body might react with fear even when our mind knows we're safe. When our nervous system doesn't feel safe, chronic stress and anxiety become our constant companions. And things that our brain is like, "That should be simple," like making decisions without consulting the entire peanut gallery, becomes really challenging because we doubt ourselves endlessly.

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Things like resting, relaxing, pausing, being present, when we don't feel safe we live in a constant state of tension. Sometimes, barely perceptible low-grade tension, but it's still there. It makes it nearly impossible to relax and truly enjoy life. And so, of course, our emotions become a roller coaster.

Small triggers can set off overwhelming feelings of anger, sadness, frustration, fear. This emotional instability or lability makes maintaining relationships and a positive outlook on life incredibly challenging.

Physically, the toll is just as heavy. Chronic stress can lead to headaches, digestive issues, heart problems, a weakened immune system; which can mean more susceptibility to viruses and other infections. Our bodies are not designed to handle prolonged stress, and eventually they start to break down.

When we're stuck in survival mode, our ability to make sound decisions diminishes. So, it's not only that we don't trust ourselves, our prefrontal cortex, the part of our brain responsible for rational thought and decision making, literally doesn't function optimally. This leads to impulsive choices, clouded thinking, the kind of ho-humming that we see so often.

And so, yeah, our relationships suffer because we become overly reactive, distant, mistrustful. It's hard to feel authentic connection when we're always on guard. Leading to strained interactions, and leaving so many of us feeling isolated, alienated and alone. Perhaps most poignantly, we miss out on joy. Chronic stress dampens our ability to be present and engage in activities we love. Life feels dull, and we struggle to find fulfillment and purpose.

But the good news is, cultivating nervous system safety transforms our lives. It did for me, and it has for hundreds of people who have gone through both Anchored and The Somatic Studio; my two programs.

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With a regulated nervous system we can respond to stress with greater calm and clarity. We're less likely to be overwhelmed by our emotions, and are more capable of handling stressors gracefully. Physically, we thrive. A safe nervous system supports better immune function, lower inflammation, overall improved wellbeing.

Our bodies, our guts, our thyroids, our reproductive system, our endocrine system, everything can rest and repair. Leading to increased energy, vitality and just feeling more better. Our relationships can flourish. Feeling safe within ourselves allows us to connect more authentically with others. We become better listeners, more empathetic, less reactive, which strengthens our bonds and deepens our connections. And so, through that process we rediscover joy and presence.

A regulated nervous system allows us to be more fully present in our lives. When we engage in activities that bring us happiness and find fulfillment in our daily experiences, life becomes richer and more meaningful. Our decision making and creativity can soar.

With a calm nervous system, our prefrontal cortex, slowly, over time... Slowly is the theme here, right?... goes back to more optimal functioning. And we can think better, make better decisions, and tap into creative potential to be innovative and adaptable.

At the same time, we build resilience. Nervous system safety equips us to bounce back from setbacks and navigate life's challenges. This resiliency allows us to grow and thrive even in adversity. And ultimately, we find inner peace.

Cultivating safety within our bodies brings us a profound sense of calm and security. We can feel more grounded in ourselves, no matter what's happening around us. Bringing more inner peace, which brings balance and fulfillment.



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Please note, mama did not at any point say we are 100% zen; I've talked about this probably a couple bajillion times on the podcast. The goal of nervous system regulation is not to feel chill all the time, it's not to feel zen; it's not. Because we need nervous system activation.

If you didn't have sympathetic activation, you'd just walk into traffic. You'd walk up to a lion and start petting it. Listen, we need to get those signals of "Hmm, no," but we need them in balance. It behooves us to have some capacity to manage our experience, so that we don't stay really stuck in the anxious fight or flight, and we don't get depressed and sort of stuck in the frozen, checked out, disconnected.

In my programs Anchored and Somatic Studio, we work on this. We work slowly and steadily to cultivate internal safety, in a loving collective environment. This is not work that can be rushed, or you risk overloading, overwhelming, and flooding a nervous system that doesn't actually have that capacity to stay chill, because of all the reasons we just talked about.

So, the work really is to titrate, or slowly increase, the amount of stress exposure. To work with the nervous system and not against it. Like how I had to sit with a little treat in my hand for ages when Ziggy first came into my life. I let him come to me while I stayed stark still. I certainly did not go up to him and hand him a cookie; I love my fingers way too much for that. Plus, it wouldn't have been kind. Had I walked up to him and tried to engage him, it would have flooded his nervous system and freaked him out.

So, I let *his* nervous system take the lead. When we are working to cultivate safety in our bodies, we need to do the same thing for ourselves. This is particularly important for those of us who live with emotional outsourcing. When we rely on others to manage our emotional world, it's often because we don't feel safe within ourselves.

If you've been conditioned to believe that the world is dangerous or that you're fundamentally unlovable, seeking validation safety from others is a



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brilliant survival strategy. Hear me, brilliant. And the problem, of course, is it can lead to a perpetual state of anxiety and insecurity as our sense of safety is tied to external validation, which isn't always forthcoming, rather than an internal sense of self-worth. She says it's the same coin, am I right?

So, we have to move slowly in cultivating safety, remembering from whence we come. If you're a person who has never felt safe to be yourself, to be introspective, because you've always been scanning everyone else to feel safe and okay, and someone who thinks they're helping you to heal and grow encourages you to be curious about your thoughts, without talking about felt safety first, that's likely to backfire. Right?

Because for those of us who are still entrenched in survival mode, that can be way too much input way too fast. And having even more awareness of our painful and self-meany-pants thoughts can be way too much for a nervous system that doesn't know how to come back to neutral, only knows how to live in overdrive, or to slam on the proverbial "brakes." Yeah.

And so, how do we cultivate safety in a system dominated by fear? Well, the process is gradual. It requires patience. See, winning over a rescue Chihuahua. As always, if you're currently in a genuinely unsafe environment, like Ziggy Stardog was, presumably, before he came to us, and addressing these deeper layers of healing needs to wait until you get yourself to safer ground. Okay? Please, don't override your nervous system to feel safe in an unsafe environment.

Okay. So, how do we cultivate safety? Let's walk through some practical steps; I love a good remedy. The first is what we've been talking about, titrating. Which means very, very, very, very gradually exposing yourself to small amounts of stress or discomfort, to build resilience without overwhelming your nervous system; a.k.a. don't dive into the deep end.

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For better or for worse, the only way to shift these intense emotional experiences of distress, distress and trauma, is to feel the associated feels. And I do not recommend going into the deepest, darkest pits of despair, A #1 by yourself, and B #2 to start. It's not a self-loving choice, because the alarms are going to go off throughout your body.

And so, instead, I want to recommend that you go slowly by attuning to and being present to sensation that's not connected to distress, distress and trauma.

Because what I've learned in the 20 years I've been studying the nervous system and working with patients and clients, when we are shut down to the big feelings, or get overwhelmed by the big feelings, we tend to rock out the extreme. So, the black or white, the all or nothing. Like, "I cry at the drop of a hat. I haven't cried in 20 years." We don't let ourselves feel the middle, we often just feel the rage of selfabandonment, right?

So, start to check in with your body and notice sensation throughout the day. I like to use the "small habits technique" from UC Berkeley. It's one of the UCs. You can Google; I trust you can Google. But it's a really cool, evidenced-based way of building new habits, by linking them to something you already do.

Every time you pour yourself a glass of water, check in with your body. "What are the sensations that are present in my body?" Name the sensation. Give a name to what you're feeling. So, you might say, "There's a tightness in my chest. There's a knot in my stomach."

If you can get present with another layer of adjective awareness, it brings us out of our brains and into our bodies more. So, what color is it? Does it have a texture? "There's a knot in my stomach. It's like a dark blue and it's hot." Name it, give it adjectives, really be present with it, and stay for a moment. When I say a "moment," a few seconds, sit with it. "I'm present

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with this feeling in my stomach. I'm aware of it. I'm feeling it radiate down my legs and up into my chest. Oh, my hands just got tingly.”

The goal is never to make the sensation go away. It's just to be present with it, to become more familiar with it, to build self-intimacy. And that's what we're here doing. Notice the sensation may change, it might go away. It might intensify, right? Remind yourself that you can always get out. If it gets too intense. Open your eyes, snap your fingers, clap your hands, do something to change the energetic. Shake it off and come out of it. Yeah?

But if you're able to stay with it for a few seconds before the discomfort is too much, return to neutral. Bring your focus to a neutral or pleasant sensation in the body. I like feet on the ground. If you join me in The Somatic Studio, one of the things we train around is, “Where are my feet?” Because it's a reminder to connect with the earth, with Pachamama, or Earth Mother.

To connect with a present moment. You can connect with the texture of your clothing, or the sound and feeling of your own breath. But really having those micro moments. “I'm pouring a cup of tea; how does my body feel? I'm putting my shoes on to walk the dog; how does my body feel?” Really linking those things. Every time I pee, while I'm washing my hands, I connect with my body.

And I want to encourage you to connect in with yourself in these micro ways. I think two to three times a day is good. Don't push it, right? Remembering that time at task, and it's going to take patience; like winning over Ziggy Stardog. So, go gentle, go slowly, but make the decision. Listen to the episode on the minimum baseline. Reacquaint yourself with that concept, of building self-trust. I'll put links to all of these episodes. But take the time, it's really worth it.

So, a really important tool to have in your pocket at the same time is orienting. Which is connecting to the present moment. When we go into the

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trauma we go into the past, right? We go to when the thing happened and we had a huge reaction. And so, orienting is when we remind our bodies, “I’m here, I’m now, everything’s okay.” It grounds us in the present which is crucial for cultivating safety.

I like to make it as simple as looking around my environment and taking note of five things I can see. I just do that. “I have five fingers.” These exercises are important to do when you’re not worked up or shut down. But when you are worked up or shut down, the simpler it is, the better. So, five things. I look around: Flowers, pens, you, microphone, lamp. Bada-bing, done.

I would go much slower if I was stressed out or was feeling anxious and wanted to calm myself, but that’s a really simple way to do it. It really helps us to anchor in the present moment and remind our nervous system we’re safe. We can also... If you want to make note of different things in your environment, go for it.

So, five things you can see. Four things you can hear: The hum of the fridge, the birds chirping, traffic, my own voice, music... Those birds are going wild. I hope you can hear it. It sounds amazing... Three different textures: My sweater, my hair, the desk. Two things I can smell: I can smell my wife’s coffee. I can smell that the neighbors just cut their lawn. I can smell that. One thing I can taste: I just had a mint before I recorded.

You can walk through your sensors, that can really be helpful. I just recommend keeping it as simple as humanly possible. So, to support you, in your goal of orienting your nervous system with ease and grace, I made you a for-free downloadable audio orienting guide. You can keep it on your phone or your computer, listen to it whenever you want and need to. And I do recommend orienting to the environment frequently, not just when you need to, need to.

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There is a link, for those of you watching the video, right below. And there's a link at [VictoriaAlbina.com/275](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/275), which is this episode number. You can download that for free.

So, we did orienting. We did, naming the sensation, staying within sensation, coming back to neutral, right? That's the cornerstone of what we're going to do.

What really helps us to cultivate safer experience of the world, to have more regulation and safety, is to really build a routine of consistency. The nervous system really likes the safety of predictability, as opposed to tigers jumping out of trees, right? One thing to experiment with, to see if it works for you, is to establish daily rituals that reinforce a sense of safety.

For those of us with ADHD or other neuro-magic, which is a term I do believe I coined. I've never heard anyone else say "neuro-magic." I really do think we are superheroes and we have a superpower. But anyway. The thought of a long-term routine is generally a massive "No thank you" for us, and I get that.

So, I want to invite you to think of this as an experiment. As something temporary and not a forever thing. You can decide to do this building a nervous system safety routine for a week, a month, whatever. But I do recommend seeing if you can do three months, to let your nervous system really see you as a person that can trust to say what you'll do and do what you say. And listen, it can't hurt, right? But yeah, if you're neuro-magical, don't force it. Just see if it's an option.

Some of the things that can be really helpful is to start your day with a few moments... I didn't even say "minutes," I said moments... of quiet reflection. Set an intention for the day. Do a quick body scan to check in with how you're feeling. That's level one.

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Level two, keep your phone in another room and don't check it for 30 minutes before you wake up; 90 minutes is optimal. Get 10 minutes of sunshine before 10am. Take a break in the middle of your day to stretch breathe and orient yourself, even a few moments can regulate your nervous system. Create a calming evening routine that signals to your body it's time to relax; reading, yoga, a warm bath.

I get it, folks work, sometimes, many jobs, have kids, have elders they care for. I'm not you know one of those, I don't know, podcast bros that are like, "Get up at 4am and do some perfect routine." Come on, now. Gentle, loving. What are touchstones you can have morning, noon, and night, for your nervous system to see you paying attention to you, connecting with you, carrying with you, for you, right?

That can also mean reaching out to one beloved person a day, or every three days. Having a social connection. I'm always talking about interdependence. Safety is not something we need to or even can cultivate entirely on our own. Community and social support systems play a crucial role in helping us to feel secure and connected.

So, connect with others. That can mean joining communities like the two that I run, Anchored and Somatic Studio, so you can have support from folks who are actively in this work. Seeking professional help, that builds community, right? Therapists, coaches, and well-trained somatic practitioners can offer guidance, support, and can point you towards community.

If you are dealing with complex emotions and complex trauma, professional support is really key. Engaging in community activities that foster a sense of belonging are incredibly supportive for the nervous system. So, joining a club, volunteering, attending local events. It really helps our social engagement system to know we're not alone. Because nothing is scarier to our nervous system than alone.

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And it is crucial to understand that systemic issues like the patriarchy, racism, socio-economic factors can exacerbate our sense of unsafety. They, generally speaking, created it. These external pressures can significantly impact our nervous system, making the internal work even more challenging, yet essential.

This is why identity-based spaces are so important, and I want to encourage you to find one that resonates for you, and is supportive for you; i.r.l. or online. There is a ton more I can say about building safety. I have run months-long programs where it's the focus of what we do. It's the deepest goal of my work, for all of us to feel safer in our own minds, our own bodies, our own experience of life.

We'll pause here for today, towards the goal of not overwhelming your perfect nervous system. Remember, healing is not an instant fix. It's a gradual process of training our nervous systems to recognize and trust safety, by gently and lovingly being with our stored survival responses in a contained and titrated manner. Small, incremental steps that build our capacity to handle more significant challenges are the only way I know through.

Each time we successfully sit with and navigate a wave of sensation, instead of buffering against it and pushing it away, we strengthen our internal sense of safety and our capacity and our nervous system to be with ourselves. As we do this work, our neuroception... Remember, our ability to sense safety and danger... begins to recalibrate. We start to feel safety, not because the external environment has changed drastically, but because our internal landscape has shifted.

So, start where you are. Be patient and kind with yourself. Celebrate each small victory, each moment of presence with your sensations. This is how we build true, lasting safety; one breath, one sensation, one moment at a time. You are your own sanctuary. And with time and practice, you can create a safe haven within yourself.



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If you want my expert guidance as you work to build more capacity to feel safer in life, safer in your body, safer in the world, I want to invite you to head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/tss](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/tss), which stands for The Somatic Studio. This is my 12-week somatics education program and we're starting up again soon.

Everyone loved it the last time I ran it; it's been about a year. And I'm really excited to offer it again, because it was so supportive for folks. This is my lower cost offering. I'm so excited to share it with you, and I know it will be supportive. I have poured my whole heart into it, as you know I always do.

Thank you, my love, for listening. Thank you for being here. Thank you for being part of this community. Let's do what we do. 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. Ciao.

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](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar) for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling and I'll see you next week. Ciao.