

Ep #304: Why Somatic Education Matters



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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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. How's winter treating you? I have been loving it. I mean, I've lived in the cold most of my life, right? There were those early years in Argentina. I'm from Mar del Plata, which is about four and a half hours south of Buenos Aires. It doesn't get cold-cold. It gets like a cardigan, jean jacket, light scarf kind of cold in the winter. No big deal.

Then move to Rhode Island, greatest state in the union. Except for my years when I was studying at UCSF and I guess early in my 20s when I was like bouncing back and forth from Boston to Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba, etc. I really have spent most of my adult life and most of my life living in places that get winter. And I feel like I have just now completely perfected and like what's perfected, but I have perfected my winter apparel. Like I've got all the right gear.

I went to this amazing place that sells secondhand winter gear. I love, I love getting stuff secondhand. Like It's such an amazing move for the planet, for my pocket. It feels so good. Anyway, I digress, but it's a day that ends in Y. Yeah, now I totally look forward to going out for a morning walk, getting that sunshine on my face before 10 a.m., really starting the day out right with some nice crisp air and sunshine. You know, we've had some intermittent really like, you know those winter days when the blue sky is just like gorgeous? That's been magical. So I'm loving winter. I hope it's treating you all right.

So this week we're gonna talk about why nervous system education and somatic practices are life-changing because they absolutely 100,000%

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have been in my life. It's completely changed the game on how I relate to myself, the world, everything.

And so I'm wondering, have you, yes you, ever felt like you're running on a hamster wheel of overwhelm? Maybe you find yourself snapping at the people you adore, freezing in situations where you want so badly to speak your truth. Perhaps your body feels perpetually braced, like it's waiting for the next shoe to drop, jaw tight, shoulders creeping up towards your ears, chest aching with unspoken words.

How often do you feel like you're carrying the weight of the world? Not just your responsibilities, but also everyone else's moods, needs, expectations. Maybe you're the one smoothing things over at family dinners, the one your co-workers come to for advice, the one your friends lean on when life gets, well, life-y. And yet, despite so much giving, you end the day feeling empty. Like no matter how much you do, it's never quite enough.

What if I told you these feelings aren't evidence of a personal failing? That this isn't just how life is and it's also not the only way to live. What if there's a reason your body feels braced, tense, or disconnected? And that your body, your beautiful wise body, is holding the keys to a radically different experience.

Today, we're diving into the science of why nervous system education and somatic practices are not just helpful, but absolutely vital for building a life of ease, connection, and authenticity. And yes, my angels, I'm gonna nerd on this one. I mean as though I ever didn't nerd, but buckle up just in case.

Okay, so let's start with the nervous system itself, the control center for how we experience life, how you connect, handle stress, set boundaries, and just like exist in the world. When it's dysregulated, life doesn't just feel harder, it is harder. And dysregulation means your nervous system isn't balanced.

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Picture your autonomic nervous system as a symphony conductor. When it's in harmony, or regulated, you experience a full range of emotional music. Connection, curiosity, joy, even the bittersweet notes of sadness that remind you what it means to be human. But when it's out of sync, dysregulated, the symphony becomes chaos, out-of-tune instruments clashing, leaving you stuck in a state of chronic fight-flight-freeze-fawn.

For those of us with emotional outsourcing habits, people-pleasing, perfectionist, codependent, over-functioning habits, a dysregulated nervous system leaves us in overdrive, constantly scanning the horizon for what others need while putting our own well-being on the back burner. We say yes when we mean no. We let our boundaries dissolve because the thought of upsetting someone else feels unbearable that we're constantly upset and left behind, right?

We pour ourselves out to others, but rarely, if ever, feel filled in return. And here's the thing. This becomes like so the water we swim in, you might not even notice the dissonance. It can be sneaky, showing up as patterns like overthinking every conversation. Did I say the wrong thing? Struggling to say no. Man, if I set that boundary, they're just going to hate me. It's fine. It's fine. Better to tolerate their BS again. Or procrastinating on tasks you actually care about. And this one tends to be like more of a subconscious story that says, what if I fail? I'm just not going to start.

I feel like most people don't think that consciously. Instead, they think, oh, I'm going to organize that drawer over there. Or, I don't know, I just can't get started. These aren't just quirks or personality traits. They're survival strategies. Your nervous system in all of its brilliance adopted to protect you.

So I'm going to share some client stories. The names, of course, have been changed. So let's take Sarah, who came to me exhausted and confused.

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She felt like she was on a constant roller coaster. Fine one moment, and then blindsided by waves of anxiety or shut down the next.

It turned out her nervous system was super in this sympathetic overdrive, fight or flight mode, like, so frequently. And for Sarah, this meant she couldn't fully relax even when she was safe. The smallest critique from her boss, her kid, her partner, a stranger, sent her spiraling. She avoided even minor conflicts for fear of rejection. Her nervous system wasn't broken. I know it felt like that within her. I know it felt like that to the people around her, but her nervous system was actually doing what it had learned to do the way it had learned to do it, which was to protect her above all costs.

My client Beth would wake up every morning with a to-do list longer than her arm. Not just her tasks, but everyone else's too. She'd find herself answering texts late at night, holding her breath as she responded to make sure the other person didn't misunderstand or misinterpret her tone. She was driving herself absolutely bananas, trying to like finagle the right language. She was the one picking up the emotional messes, smoothing over the tension and holding it all together, until one day she was so burnt out, she wasn't able to be there to support anyone, much less herself.

A client I'll call Elena shared this with me. She'd sit silently in social situations, smiling through hurt feelings, as friends dismissed her idea, "Oh, whatever, Elena, we're not going to do that," or made subtle jabs, "Well, I bet Elena will be late next time."

She'd spend hours afterwards ruminating, "Why didn't I say something? Why does this always happen to me?" Her nervous system had learned over years of subtle and not so subtle messaging that avoiding conflict was the safest option. That speaking up, ooh, no thank you.

This strategy had totally protected her in the past when she was a wee little kiddo, but in the present, it was keeping her stuck, silent, disconnected,

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and longing for something more. And because her nervous system was so set to keep her defensive and protected, she heard jabs when her friends were just joking. She felt dismissed when her friends just didn't agree.

I want to invite you to picture this. You're at a meeting. Your boss gives you like a vague comment, maybe a critique, like, "Right on, let's tighten up the presentation." Everyone else in the room is like, "All right, Bob," but you, with your little sweet dysregulated nervous system, ooh baby.

Every bit of emotional outsourcing conditioning in your body makes your heart start racing. You feel your stomach drop. That one comment, which might mean anything or like nothing becomes a spiral of, "What if they fire me? What if I did a terrible job? What if I'm not good enough? What if I can't fix it?"

Instead of calmly asking for clarification, "Bob, tighten up. What on earth does that mean, buddy?" Instead of like just speaking up, your nervous system tells you to hide. And you spend the next six hours reworking everything, soup to nuts, over correcting, apologizing preemptively, doing everything you can to attempt to feel safer.

My beauty, these aren't just like mindset problems. They're definitely not, once again, personality problems. You're not broken. This is your nervous system reacting as though your very survival is on the line when it's like, just not.

Let's talk about the science of why this happens. Your nervous system, all of our nervous system, operates with lightning speed faster than our conscious minds. Dr. Stephen Porges just taught us about neuroception, And this explains how our bodies search for safety or danger without our even realizing it. Because they're designed to keep us alive. When it senses danger, it triggers survival responses. Fight, flight, freeze, fun. This

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isn't logical, It's primal. It's your nervous system deciding, is this moment safe? Can I stay connected? Or do I need to protect myself?

If you grew up in an environment where your needs weren't met, where love felt conditional, where emotional adulthood was not super-duper present, your nervous system adapted. It learned to read neutral situations as dangerous or to interpret benign interactions as threatening. For example, your boss raising her eyebrows in a meeting might make your nervous system shout, I'm about to be fired. Even when her actual words are, great job on that report.

This dysregulated baseline affects everything. Relationships, work, sense of self-worth. And while talking about our problems, mindfulness, personal development work all helps, if you don't address your nervous system, it's like building a house on a shaky foundation.

My loves, let me pause here to say this. Before you can begin to change anything about how you feel, how you react, how you move through the world, you need to understand what's happening inside your nervous system. Because here's the truth, you can't heal what you can't understand.

Your nervous system is like the operating system of your body. It runs the show whether you're conscious of it or not. If you've ever found yourself reacting in ways that don't align with your values, like snapping at a loved one or freezing when you want to speak up, but an important value is honesty and directness, that's not because you're bad or broken. It's because your nervous system is doing what it was designed to do, to protect you.

And to rewrite those reactions, you first have to see them for what they are. Learned patterns of survival. When you learn to map your nervous system, which is one of my favorite things to teach, and can recognize when it's in

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fight, flight, freeze, fawn, you gain the power to interrupt those automatic reactions.

Instead of being swept away by old patterns, you can create space for choice. And that, my darlings, is where healing begins. It is absolutely vital to understand and know about our nervous system so we can do this deeper work of healing. Plus we're nerds and it's really fun to learn nerdy things like medial frontal cortex, my favorite part of the brain. What's your favorite part of the brain? You don't have one? Cool, you have one? I wanna hear about it.

Because here's the thing, you can't outthink a dysregulated nervous system. And so that's where somatic practices come in. Because you might know intellectually that you're safe, but if your body is screaming otherwise, no kind of logic is going to land. Unlike traditional talk therapy, which can sometimes feel like trying to reason with a scared animal, somatic work speaks directly to your body's language. It helps your nervous system rewrite the story of safety in real time.

One of my clients, Layla, carried an enormous amount of tension in her shoulders and upper back. No amount of stretching, massage, PT, OT, all of the things seemed to help. When we explored this through somatic work, she realized her body was bracing against an old fear that if she relaxed, she would drop the ball on her family's needs, on her career, on being Enough. Eldest daughter syndrome, anybody? Whew.

Through practices like grounding, gentle movement, intentional breathwork, and of course, somatic experiencing, she began to teach and show her nervous system a new truth. It's safe to let go. Her shoulders didn't just physically soften, she started showing up differently in her life. She learned to say, "No, I can't take that on right now," with way less guilt. She stopped ruminating on every word in a text to a friend. She found ease in moments

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that used to feel impossible by learning to regulate her nervous system and to shift that internal story around felt safety.

Another client, Carolina, was stuck in a cycle of over-apologizing, saying sorry when someone bumped into her, rushing to fix problems she did not cause. Through our somatic work, Caro began noticing the physical sensations that preceded her apologies. This is what we do when we map our nervous system. So she started to feel that flutter in her chest, that tightening in her throat.

With somatic tools, she learned to pause, to ground herself, and to choose a different response. Over time, she stopped apologizing for simply existing, reclaiming her sense of agency. And here's what's so powerful. When you shift your nervous system, you're not just breaking a habit, you're breaking a cycle. You're teaching your body that it can be safe to show up fully, to take up space, to say no with less guilt. And I'm saying with less instead of without because, like, kitten steps here.

And these somatic practices work because they leverage your vagus nerve, the queen of calm and connection, and also panic on the other side of it. But here we're really leveraging that the vagus nerve is the centerpiece of the parasympathetic branch of your nervous system, the part responsible for rest, digestion, and repair. When given the right signals, it sends a message to your body that says, hey, we're safe now. You can exhale.

Through somatic practices, you're literally rewiring your brain and body. Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to form and reorganize connections, means that every time you ground yourself in safety, you're creating and then strengthening a new neural pathway, one that believes that you can feel safe and that you have the discernment to know when and where and with whom it is okay to feel safe, right? Because that's really important. And

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so over time, those pathways become well-worn trails, making regulation your default state rather than a struggle.

So what does this all look like in practice? Right, because remember, your girl's and nurse practitioner at the end of the day, we are both very practical people. So here's a sneak peek of how nervous system education and somatic practices can change your life. We'll do some before and afters, I love that.

So before, you dread family dinners, bracing for Aunt Susan's inevitable comment about your life choices. After, doing nervous system education and somatic practice, you notice the tension in your chest, but you don't let it take over. You take a slow, grounding breath and let it go. Her words are still irritating, come on. I mean, you're not gonna be impervious. They annoy you, but they don't pierce you. And because you're able to get a little cognitive distance, you can recognize that's her baggage and not yours. AKA, not my circus, not my monkeys.

Before, a co-worker's passive-aggressive comment keeps you stewing for days. After, you feel the heat of frustration. Because we feel our feels here, right? This is never about sort of like gaslighting ourselves or like emotional bypassing. No, no, you name it for what it is and let it move through you instead of carrying it around.

Before, you freeze in meetings, unable to share your brilliant ideas because you fear judgment. After, you sense the butterflies in your stomach, you acknowledge them, you have a set of somatic practices at your little fingertips to do to ground yourself, to orient, to come home to you, and you're able to speak up. The fear, it's there, it's a little whisper, but it no longer owns you.

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Before, you freeze in conversations where you disagree, staying silent to avoid conflict. After, you notice the tightness in your throat, take a grounding breath and say, actually I see it differently.

Before, you find yourself agreeing to a last-minute favor for fear of disappointing someone, generally someone who's more than happy to say no to you. After, you feel that old pull to say yes, of course you feel it. You pause, you orient, you ground, you connect to your nervous system. And you respond, gosh, I wish I could, but I'm just not available. I don't have capacity right now. And you can feel good about it because you took care of yourself and you know that firm limits and boundaries are resentment prevention.

And these aren't just mindset shifts. It's not just changing our thinking, these are nervous system shifts. They're proof that when your body feels safer you can show up as your truest self. Right? Right.

And of course, my angels, let's not forget our nervous systems don't exist in a vacuum. Come on now. Patriarchy, capitalism, white supremacy, these systems dictate who gets to feel safe when, where, and who doesn't. If you've ever felt like you have to work twice as hard to be seen or that your boundaries won't be respected unless you scream them, that's not in your head, it's systemic.

And this is why nervous system regulation and learning about our nervous system isn't just personal, it's political. When you reclaim your right to feel safe, to set boundaries, to live authentically, you're breaking apart from systems designed to keep you small. You're creating a revolution in your own body that of course ripples out to all the people you contact in this life.

My love, here's what I want you to know. This transformation is within reach. You don't have to stay stuck in old patterns, bracing against life or pouring yourself out for everyone but you. When you begin to work with

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your nervous system, life shifts in ways that go far beyond stress reduction. You learn to trust yourself, to make decisions with clarity, you stop bending yourself into pretzels to please others and start living from your truth.

Through somatic work, you can learn to trust your body, set boundaries with ease and move through the world with a sense of grounded confidence. And here's the best part, this isn't about becoming someone else, it's about returning to who you already are under the layers of conditioning and survival. It's about reclaiming your birthright of ease, connection, and joy.

My love, if you're feeling the pull to explore this work, you do not have to do it alone. This, all of this, is exactly what we explore, learn, and practice in The Somatic Studio. Together, we uncover how your nervous system shapes your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and how to reshape it to serve you, not just others. And not just scared you of the past, but the adult you are now.

Whether you join us or not, know this. Your nervous system is adaptable, your body is wise, and you are capable of profound change. My love, you are already enough, And the tools to reclaim that truth, they're closer than you think.

We start December 19th right in time for the holidays. The program is 12 weeks and the potential transformation is astounding. I would be beyond honored to support you to step into your most grounded nervous system. Learn more and enroll at victoriaalbina.com/somaticstudio.

Thank you for listening my love. It was an absolute delight to talk about the nervous system and why this work that I've been doing for the last 20 plus years is so incredibly vital. Thanks for listening.

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I really look forward to seeing you in The Somatic Studio. It's so much fun! 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, 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.