

Ep #353: Pre-Holiday Prep for Your Nervous System



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Búa Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach Béa 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. Listen, it's that time of year again. It snuck up on us. It snuck up on me for sure. A week from today is American Thanksgiving. I mean, Thanks-taking, right? This is a complicated day for those who believe in indigenous rights and land back, but I digress because I want to talk about you and me and families and emotional outsourcing. Because you know, every year around this time, I get the same kinds of messages, the same things come up in anchored for coaching. I'm dreading going home or I've worked so hard on my healing and I feel so good at home, but like five minutes into a family gathering, I am thirteen again and everything's a disaster.

And I want to say that makes perfect sense. When your family system has a long history of emotional outsourcing, when love was something you earned by being easy, agreeable, useful, or invisible, the holidays aren't neutral, whether it's next Thursday or the winter holidays. They can be a full-body flashback. The smells, the voices, the tempo of your house, your body knows exactly what those cues mean. Before your brain can say, I'm safe now, you're already back in your old assignment, your old childhood survival role. The helper, the fixer, the diplomat, the one who keeps things running smoothly so no one explodes.

So today, I want to walk you through a few real Thanksgiving moments that tend to light up an emotional outsourcing nervous system and talk about how you can move through them with more self-possession and a lot more compassion for the body you actually live in. No platitudes, no just breathe and let it go, because we don't do that around here. We're talking about what's actually happening in your biology, your psychology, and what helps in real time.

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So let's start in the kitchen because that's where most of the holidays begin. You walk in, coat barely off, and someone says, "Oh, hey, I'm so glad you're here. Can you mash these potatoes, make the gravy? Oh and set the table while you're up." And before you know it, your nervous system has clocked in for unpaid labor because once upon a time, being needed was how you knew you belonged. You didn't learn to say no. You learned to be indispensable, to say yes and *sí señora*. But the thing about nervous systems is they don't care what you intend, they care what you feel. So if you notice that familiar rush of energy, that compulsion to jump in, try pausing. Mid-reach for the spoon, stop. Orient. Feel your feet. Notice the texture of the floor. Let your breath fall all the way down into your belly and soften your exhale.

Then ask yourself quietly, what do I actually want to do right now? Maybe you genuinely want to help because it feels really good to be part of the action, part of the family again. You've missed this. Great, do it. Or maybe you'd rather go say hi to your cousin, have a moment of connectivity that isn't about productivity, or, oh my God, you just got off a train and you need to pee and wash your hands. Either way, the core message here that we forget when we get home is that you're actually an adult and you actually get to choose. And you might choose being wicked helpful and you're not going to stop doing chores the whole time and like, that's cool. I'm not saying to not do that because I love being helpful. What I'm saying is you get to make a choice for your life.

And that's not being difficult or contrary, it's you teaching your body what choice feels like and then stepping into it in an environment where you're not used to having choicefulness. Because you have choicefulness back home or you're working towards it. I mean it's the work we're doing here together constantly, right? So you're working towards it, but now you get to embody it in that setting where you were like fifteen and just did what you were told.

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Now, imagine you finally sit down at the table. Things are rolling along just fine. This is like actually pretty pleasant, until someone, and let's be real, it's usually the same someone every year, makes a comment about your body, your job, your relationship, your politics, something they have absolutely no business commenting on. Your heart rate spikes, your jaw tightens, and before you know it, your nervous system's halfway through an old pattern. The polite laugh, the fawn response, the quick change of the subject to keep the peace, or you're just diving all the way down their throat. I want to invite you to try a tiny shift instead of the old habits.

Take a moment and orient your nervous system. Look around. Look around. Take in three things in the environment. Make it easy. Plant your feet under the table and press your toes down. Slow your chewing. Drop your shoulders. Unclench your jaw. Release your pelvic floor if you can feel into that. These little physical actions together with orienting tell your nervous system, I'm okay. We're okay. I'm okay. You might choose to say something, but you let your body lead.

So instead of the old fawn or swipe, it can be a simple, "That's not something I want to discuss," and that can be more than enough. A number one, because you don't owe anyone an essay on your boundaries, but you're also not trying to teach anyone a lesson. You're showing your body what self-respect looks like. And that's what matters here.

And then because families are masters of nostalgia, someone starts retelling one of those family stories. You know, the ones that have been edited for like everyone else's comfort and generally tend to make you look dumb. So maybe it's a story about your like teenage attitude or how, "Oh, she was always so sensitive." And suddenly you're not an adult anymore. Your chest tightens, your cheeks get hot, and you can feel that like child version of you shrinking down, wishing you could absolutely disappear.

And this is where you orient hard. But like for real, move your eyes around the room, find something that reminds you of now. The window, the lamp, the shape of the silverware, look out as far into the distance as you can. So

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the building across the airshaft, what's up, New York? A tree outside the window, a deer in the yard, and then look as close as you can, your own place setting, your own hand, your own nails, your own ring. And then look out into the room as a whole. Feel the chair under you in a very conscious way. Touch your hair, touch your hand, feel a texture. Let your senses show your nervous system that you are actually here in this present moment. You are not twelve. You are not eight. You are not powerless. You are a grown human who can excuse yourself, can step outside, can take a breath, and can choose what happens next. That's what nervous system repair actually looks like. Coming back into time one sensory detail at a time to reclaim your choicefulness.

And then there's that moment later in the evening when you end up at the sink, sleeves rolled up, doing that good girl routine, doing dishes while other people are lounging on the couch. And you can feel that old irritation and resentment rise. The old, how dare they relax when I'm over here scrubbing gravy off plates. And for so many of us under that irritation is actually guilt because for many of us, somewhere deep inside, our body still believes that rest is dangerous, that pausing makes you lazy and lazy makes you unlovable. But I want to say that lazy doesn't exist. Speaking of Thanksgiving, right? And the Puritans, it's a puritanical fantasy made up to keep people working themselves to the bone. What's real is exhaustion. What's real is depletion.

So when you feel that spike of guilt about wanting to stop, stop mid-action. Turn off the faucet. Let your hands drip. Breathe through your nose and find one muscle you can soften. Maybe your shoulders, your belly, your arms, then whisper to yourself, rest repairs. And it's okay to do some chores. You can dry some dishes, you can wipe a counter. You can do one sink load of dishes without taking on the whole kitchen. You don't have to go back into that role because you don't also don't have to go back into that resentment.

And balance is the medicine. We didn't know this when we were young, but we can bring it to bear now. Balance is the medicine, participating, helping,

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being part of community. You're not proving anything by being the last one standing. You're allowed to leave a few plates in the sink. No one loses out when you pause. You just get to stop running for a second. You just get to be a human with limits. You're giving your body a chance to return to itself and that is a vital lesson.

And then there's the quieter kind of emotional outsourcing that happens in conversation, the mask of, "Everything's fine." Someone asks how work is or how you're really doing and out comes the rehearsed answer. Oh, good, busy, you know. Because honesty often carried a cost for us growing up, right? So many of us learned that if you said you were tired or struggling or got vulnerable, people would get uncomfortable, and you'd end up managing their feelings about your feelings on top of your own feelings. Ugh.

So we are all adults now, though, hopefully we're acting like it. And so listen to your intuition. Listen to your discernment. Feel into your body. And if your body says, actually, cousin Tina is somebody I maybe could try being real with, try it. You can build tiny bridges towards honesty. You can say something true enough that your body can handle it. You know, Tina, it's been a really full year. I'm still learning how to rest. I'm really in process with it. That's real and that's enough. Right? You don't have to open your whole chest at the dinner table, but you don't have to shut yourself down either. The work simply to stop leaving yourself behind in the micro moments. Every time your mouth and your body tell the same story, you build congruence. That's nervous system fluency. That's growth.

When you finally leave, maybe you feel wrung out. And that doesn't mean you like failed at anything, right? You can love them with your whole heart and still drive home feeling drained. Your nervous system just spent the day doing emotional heavy lifting, tracking every tone, every pause, every subtle shift in energy, trying to keep connection while keeping you safe. That kind of work takes a toll. So instead of judging your tiredness, honor it.

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That fatigue is your body saying, I've been working hard to care and to stay protected at the same time. Give yourself decompression time. Dim the lights. Put on soft clothes. Maybe silence. Maybe a little music that lets your shoulders drop. Exhale through pursed lips and feel your body begin to unwind. You might jot a few notes in your phone about what moments pulled you off center, not to scold yourself, but just to witness what happened. That simple act of noticing is how you start to build true capacity. Awareness without punishment rewires the system faster than any ritual of self-critique ever could. And we went into so much detail about this in last week's show.

And of course, here's the nerdy part because you know I can't help myself. So the vagus nerve isn't just about relaxation. No, no. It's about relationship. It's the body's internal barometer of safety in connection. It's why one whiff of your dad's aftershave or the sound of that one family laugh can fling you into an old state. Those cues live in what we call implicit memory, the wordless body-based memory that stores threat and safety long before language was actually cognitively available.

So when you practice regulating in these moments, you're not changing your mind. You're updating the body's archive. It's beyond changing your mind, right? You're teaching yourself that connection doesn't have to mean self-abandonment, that belonging can coexist with boundaries, and that teaching happens in the body, not once, but over and over in tiny repetitions at the stove, at the table, at the sink in the car.

And of course, we have to name the social layer, because all of this isn't happening in a vacuum. For so many women and femmes, Thanksgiving, any of the holidays aren't rest. It's just more unpaid labor. It's emotional arbitration. It's smiling through patriarchal nonsense disguised as family tradition. So when you choose to rest, to say no, to decline to overfunction, you're not being selfish in some bad way. You're disrupting this story of this lineage of women who learned to disappear to keep everyone else

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comfortable, doing the dishes so the men could watch football. And that's the politics of nervous system repair, right?

So let's talk about what to actually do this week before this first holiday hits and definitely before the December holidays. So, practice what I call pre-regulation. Spend a few minutes each day orienting to safety before you even pack your bag or make your dish. Look around your space and name five things that are neutral or pleasant. Let your eyes rest on something still, a plant, the sky, your pet's chest rising and falling. Feel the weight of your seat. Notice a temperature of the air against your skin. Let your attention drop from your thoughts into sensation. Then exhale slowly through your mouth. This is not forcing calm. It's widening your body's ability to stay present in a high stimulus environment. Do that every day this week. And by the time you sit down at that table, your nervous system will already have one more pathway home to yourself.

And if this is a year where you're staying home altogether, maybe that's what safety looks like for you right now. That's right on. Just be mindful that solitude doesn't quietly become isolation. Feed your social nervous system in small ways. Call a friend. Eat something delicious. Go out in public. Put on music that feels alive in your chest. Volunteer. Real safety isn't the absence of people. It's connection that doesn't cost you yourself. Don't make the goal of your Thanksgiving or your holidays to like show up as some like perfect serene, self-actualized human. No, make the goal to meet your humanity with tenderness.

Beauty, you will get activated. You will slip into old grooves and that doesn't mean you've gone backwards. It means your body is rehearsing. It's reenacting. Every time you notice it, take a breath and choose something one degree truer. You're laying down a new map for what family can feel like and what your role in it can be as someone who's stepping into themselves ever more. You're allowed to belong to yourself first while also loving them.

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And if you want to keep practicing, really truly practicing all of this, come join me in Anchored. It's where we do this work in community, nervous system repair, somatic practice, emotional repatterning, with lots of breath work, tenderoni, and fun. Learn more at BeatrizAlbina.com/Anchored.

My darling, take care of your beautiful heart. Take care of your body. And remember my beauty, you are the cake. Everyone else is just the icing. If you don't know that metaphor, check out episode 166 or chapter 5 of my new book, End Emotional Outsourcing for more on that. 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, ciao.