

Ep #201: Your Intuition vs. Trauma



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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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. Welcome back. We're continuing our multipart series on trauma and intuition. If you haven't listened to the first two episodes, Trauma 101, Intuition 101, then, you know, you do you; you're grown. But I would invite you to consider pressing pause and going to listen to those episodes, and then coming on back here after that. Maybe make a cup of tea; check in with your breath along the way.

So, as a quick recap, trauma is our mind-body's super amazing and totally natural, normal mammalian response to nervous system overwhelm. When the world presents more than our nervous systems can integrate. When we don't get the co-regulation or calming support we need to feel okay in a scary moment, then our nervous systems get activated into the sympathetic state, known as fight-or-flight, ruled by adrenaline and eventually cortisol, our stress hormones.

And if we continue to feel scared, alone, unattuned to, we can go into dorsal, the freeze state of the nervous system. We call that, a trauma response. Trauma can present itself in your [inaudible], like the aftereffects of being involved in a major car crash, for example. Or, in the equally intense but slow burn response to being chronically under cared for, or cared for in ways that don't actually resonate for us, by the grown-ups in our lives.

As is so often the case in homes ruled by emotional outsourcing. Homes where codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing habits rule the proverbial roost. And, everyone responds differently to life events. Even the

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stuff that would seem objectively challenging, are easily labeled as traumatic. Which is why it's imperative that we remember, trauma isn't the thing that happened. It's how your perfect nervous system responded to protect you.

So, to people in a car crash, or a war zone, or a home where there was neglect or perfectionistic demands, might have wildly different responses to the same lived experience. One, may hold on to fear, pain. While the other, may blackout, forget that the crash or stress even happened. One, might just be okay.

And, one response isn't better than the other: they're just different. We honor the multitude of human experiences, and the resonance of that experience in our bodies. Here, at *Feminist Wellness*, and in Anchored, my six-month community-based program, we practice loving up on it all. Regardless of whether it was a boom kind of trauma, or 1,000 cuts of misattunement kind of scene.

Whether others perceive your experience as stress, distress, or trauma, the three levels of experience there, isn't what matters. What matters is your felt experience, and how that continues to resonate and show up in your life now. Either way, trauma causes harm that can linger. And, like with so many of the challenges that living with this human mind, in this human body, bring, we can heal from our trauma.

Different nervous systems need different things to heal. And the number one thing I want you to know, my perfect tenderoni, is that trauma is not a life sentence. We can come back from trauma with little kitten steps, with gentle care for ourselves, with patience, compassion, curiosity, and care.

So, how does intuition factor in, here? Because that's what we're talking about, right? How our stress, distress, and trauma can impact our intuition. All right, my darlings, mega nerd alert. Here we go.

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You know how our trauma response is the brilliant way that our nervous systems protect us from harmful experiences? Well, that knowing, internally, is guided by what Stephen Porges PhD, the dude who taught us about polyvagal theory, calls neuroception. Which, he defines as the continuous subconscious assessment, by the autonomic nervous system, of the safety or danger of any given moment.

So, our beautiful brains are constantly communicating with our guts, like our actual gut guts, taking in information about the world outside, through our eyes, our ears, our nose. And our brains are communicating, via our nervous system and the vagus nerve, about the state of our bodies inside. Which, us nerds call, interoception; ception, to know; interoception, internal knowing. The knowing of what's going on within the animal that is you.

And we pair that with exteroception; ex, outside or awareness of the world outside of ourselves. Put that together into the puzzle that is, am I safe now? And then, based on the findings of that math, our nervous systems send us little whispers of guidance that we call intuition, to guide us in making sense of the world. That guide us in the direction that most serves us. That helps us to stay safe and move our lives forward in the direction we most need.

When we are well attuned to our minds and bodies, and when the lines of communication up and down our vagus nerve are well oiled, so to speak, then we can really hear our intuition. And are more likely to make choices that serve us and our needs, in alignment with our nervous system.

For those of us with codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing thought habits though, there can be a lot of static on the line. Which comes because our neuroception of danger happens before conscious awareness, of said unsafety. And that neuroception, right, our brain, our body being like, "Ooh, danger town," can activate or trigger defensive or reactive

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thoughts, feels, or actions in the think-feel-act cycle, whether there is an actual scary or not.

Much of the time, our neuroceptive systems are able to accurately detect and alert to danger, for sure. And I mean, they can do an oopsie. Okay, but I mean, it's not an oopsie per se, right. Rather, it's just that our nervous systems are not alerting to the here and now, but instead to the there and then.

That is to say, our nervous systems love us so much, that at the slightest provocation, they'd rather scream, "The sky is falling," and be wrong, than to have us die. Which, frankly, is a very polite intention for sure. But it does mean that sometimes we freak out, we go into sympathetic activation, fight-or-flight, when there is nothing wrong, and this here and now.

Rather, there's a whisper of something that smells like past hurt. Like, if a lover leaves your house to go home after an amazing date, and your nervous system screams, "I'm being abandoned," and so you get anxious. What's relevant here, is that you might mistake that voice; from fear, from the past, from anxiety, for your intuition. And, it's just not. It's the past echoing in your mind-body.

Our work is to discern the difference. And, understanding the nervous system further helps us in that discernment. To understand that our own history of stress, distress, and trauma can urge us to stay firmly in the familiar, the comfortable. To not do the new things. Silly things, to a nervous system, like be vulnerable, open, interdependent.

Because the old things, chameleoning, shapeshifting, people pleasing, living from our emotional outsourcing, our codependent thinking, well, your nervous system says, "Let me do those things, because they haven't killed us yet." So, when we attempt to live in a new way, to think and feel in a

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new way, a voice can arise that can sound like our intuition says, “Nah, skip that. Stay in the old. Stay in the familiar.”

And that's when contextualization and reality checking really help, more on those remedies in a wee minute. A further block to hearing our intuition, is that we may be overly attuned to the needs and wants of others. Or, totally disconnected from ourselves. Which can make telling the difference between intuition, anxiety, nervousness, really challenging.

Not only that, but the struggle we feel in discerning, the second guessing, the self-doubt, that can become our norm when we experience emotional outsourcing, particularly in childhood. And things like gaslighting, that often come with it, can itself provoke more of that anxiety and nervous energy. That get in the way of really hearing our intuition, of really making the decisions that move us towards more internal and external love, more honesty, more healing.

Finally, believing that intuition is a binary, yes/no kind of thing, can keep you from trusting and believing your intuition. It's not a thing that either you have or don't, that works or doesn't. It's a thing that we all had full access to as newborn babes, and get to reconnect with, in gradual degrees, slowly but surely, once again, kitten step style.

So, if right now, you're like, “Oh, my God, I have zero connection to my intuition,” just know that that's not true. And that by remembering how to tune into it, to honor and listen to it, and distinguish it from the voices of fear, worry, etc., you can start to hear it 1% and 1% and 1% more, and that, my love, certainly adds up.

My nerdy and perfect darling, where does our intuition come from? Well, it starts early. Every little baby is born knowing exactly what they want, what they need, and they are not afraid to scream about it. Until they learn not to. When we think about infant nutrition, we may go right to eating healthy

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foods, but just like little ones need nutritious food for full body and brain development, all young humans also need regular and predictable contact with caregivers to develop in the healthiest way possible.

Good, early, contact nutrition, which is a term from Diane Poole Heller's DARE work on attachment, comes about when our caregivers are present and engaged with us in those early years. It's the particular kind of nutrition that comes from being met with secure attachment and attunement; with play, empathy, attempts to listen, being with and relating with love. When it comes with a genuine desire to recognize and repair hurts and harms.

And when we get all of that, the right hemisphere of our brains develops in ways most magnificent. And this early contact nutrition can up our EQ, our emotional intelligence, and can create ease around connecting with our intuition because we never learn to disconnect from it. Because it was safe to be ourselves. And, it was safe to be with our caregivers.

That intuitive self-connection was supported and allowed to flourish and grow within us as we got the contact nutrition we need. Unfortunately, many of us with codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing, thought patterns were not raised with the kind of good contact nutrition we so deeply needed.

Maybe, the contact we got from our caregivers was unpredictable. And we didn't know if our request for contact, for attunement, would be met or not. Would we get picked up when we cried? Or, told to stop crying? Or, ignored? Would we get a good night hug and kiss, or lay in bed wondering if anyone was going to check on us.

When we, itty-bitty, perfect and magical, little us felt like our need for contact might or might not be met, we got smart. We did the most genius thing we could possibly do in that position of dependence on others, which is natural and normal as children. We worked super hard to learn how to

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read other people. To cue into their moods and emotional shifts, so that we could interpret them quickly, and adjust our delivery of self to try to source safety.

And what we didn't realize, is that we were attuning outward, that's the muscle we were building, instead of attuning inward. We listened, watched, learned, about them instead of us. And slowly, slowly, we learned to hear them more than our own intuition. And as this becomes a habit, a survival skill, we can grow up learning to look for comfort in a way that doesn't actually serve us.

That is functional, in a literal, survival way, but dysfunctional when it comes to hearing our own inner insight and guidance. In a way that teaches us that we should just push down our feelings, rather than risk bothering the people who we would normally look to for comfort and support.

And, all of this gets written into our limbic systems. More on that in Episode 153, Inner Child Science. Into Our Nervous Systems, Episode 174, and so many others... Into our soma, our bodies, as the safest path forward. So, fast forward to adulthood, and our inner children, who are still seeking attention and love, pop up and sound the alarm bell of a past hurt when there is no real and present danger.

Activating our nervous system to react to life being lifey, instead of responding from our wise adult selves. Instead of being guided by our intuition. Because remember, our unfinished, incomplete, emotional and bodily experiences, reside within us until we are able to meet and complete them.

The feelings from childhood and our teen years, etc., those feelings don't just resolve on their own, until we learn to hold space for their resolution. Which is the work we do in Anchored on the daily, so we can stop buffering against our own feelings. Because all that pushing them down and away

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drives us towards acting from our subconscious, and leads us to call that old, emotionally driven, nervous system-based scary story, our intuition, when it's not.

As adults, this habit can leave us highly attuned to the anxious or people pleasing voices instead of us. That voice, that is sometimes straight-up wrong about other people's needs and feelings. Rather than attune to the calm, quiet voice of intuition inside each of us, that leads us into patterns of externalizing, of looking outside ourselves, for feelings of okayness.

Like we've talked about so many times here before, it's 100% perfectly normal to lean on the people in our lives, who we love and trust for support and comfort when we need that mammalian coregulation of our nervous systems. However, doing that is very different from feeling like the bottom is going to fall out if the people around us either are, or we perceive them to be, off kilter, grumped with us, or annoyed or distant in some way.

So, what does this have to do with intuition again? Ah, yes. Okay. The key question here is how do I, with my codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing thought habits, know what is my intuition? And what is anxiety? Or, a history of stress, distress, or trauma, living in my body?

How can I tell if a part of me, that is telling me to do something or not do something, is coming from my old emotional wounding, my inner children's, a hurt part of me, trauma, or from a deeper, wiser, more true and tuned in part of me? Well, the difference, my kittens, is this: Your intuition will always, always, always, always speak to you in a clear, loving, non-judgmental way.

The voice or the energy may be soft and gentle. It can also be firm, and even loud if that's what's needed to get the message across. Especially, if you're in actual physical danger. Regardless of the volume, the tone of

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intuition is always loving. It will never ever bully you. Never speak with anger, fear. And, it'll never be mean.

Your intuition is strong and confident, but never belittling, condescending, negating; it will tell you what you need to hear. Even if that isn't what you want to hear. Your intuition may disappoint your ego. May be the opposite of your desires and wants, on occasion, my sweet love. And, that's okay.

Because your intuition is ultimately your wisest self, speaking through you, and is always on your side. Intuition generally doesn't need you to do anything now. It doesn't press you to take action immediately. Again, unless safety is involved. And then, you'll also feel your body talking to you in a firmer, more directive voice or energy. Which can sound like, "Do not walk down that dark alley. Do not pet that polar bear, cute though she may seem."

Intuition is presence. It is patient; they can wait. Because unlike the patriarchal systems that need us to just keep grinding and hustling and moving and doing and consuming and producing. Intuition knows that all of that is just buffering and suffering.

Intuition knows that the things that really need to happen take time, happen in their own time. Are coming, because what is for you won't pass you by. So, intuition speaks in the calm voice that knows there's no rush. Isn't that lovely, to pause and feel in to that?

Now, let's talk a little bit about what intuition doesn't sound like, so you can really hear the difference. Intuition has no emotional attachment.

Meanwhile, a trauma response is designed to activate or trigger your central nervous system, and can spark emotions like anxiety. So, stress, worry, fear, anxiety, and the physiologic remnants of stress, distress, and trauma, are loud and come in hot.

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It is jangly, it is scratchy and urgent, harried and rushed. It's future tripping or spinning in the past. It's an analysis paralysis. Spinning you 1,000 ways from Sunday. It doesn't quite know which way is up, but it sure does know you're not doing it right. It's worked up and needs you to listen, right now. It's spinning. Never still.

Anxiety often speaks in a voice, tone, or word choice, that is not quite your mind. If you pause, listen, and ask yourself the key question; whose voice is this? It can often be the harsh or directive voice for a parent, caregiver, ex-partner, abusive boss. Someone else outside of you, who did not hold your best interests in mind. Who did not approach you with love, patience, kindness.

Depression, meanwhile, is often monotone, checked out, not fully present. My nerds, it's the voice of dorsal vagal; the detached, even dissociated state of the nervous system. It's doing everything it can to keep you from being in the here and now, in this moment. Because that voice believes that being where you are now, might just kill you.

So, it takes you right out of the moment, and its tone expresses that state. It tells you; you should just doom scroll with the TV on, while your YouTube videos autoplay on your laptop. Your partner doesn't love you, why even bother trying? It's often sub whisper, like you have to strain to hear it. Or, it has the energy of an overdub, like never quite in sync with reality. Taking you out of the present moment because, once again, it loves you and wants to protect you. And, it's only tool is dorsal.

Intuition, on the other hand, it has what we, nervous system nerds, call "prosody of voice". Which is the gentle singsong tone of voice that I have. That supports bringing and keeping our nervous systems in ventral vagal; the safe and social, present and connected, part of the nervous system. It's inviting, versus coercive.

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It's pure love, that intuition, and sounds like, "Hi, love. It's me, your intuition. Listen, I'm seeing a little red flag in this dating situation. I'm seeing the signs that you might be settling again. And I just want to lovingly remind you, that we said we weren't going to do that. I'll invite you to consider pumping the brakes here, my darling. Checking in, spending some time with you, before you text her back."

It's the gentle antidote to your brain's overthinking and spinning. And your intuition is not interested in any moment, other than the present. While your brain, your nervous system loves to time travel from moment to moment, especially when you have a history of trauma. Because trauma loves to take us out of the now, and catapult us into the past or future, and rush us towards a decision. Because a trauma response is the activation of the past in this moment. While intuitive communications are now, with no baggage.

So, intuition is never, ever rushed. Because why would it? It is slow and deliberate, and truly believes that there is plenty of time. And, that time is a mental construct that you don't have to believe. You can just trust that time is infinite and that you are deeply guided in life, and that your intuition will direct you to the next right step for you. Because your intuition is the voice of the purest self-love. and wants you to enjoy your life.

To revel in it. To have pleasure and fun and joy. To have beautiful relationships and friendships. And to grow and grow and grow. And to live into the essential human task, which is to live in and from our authenticity, with a full open heart. And that's what your intuition will always guide you towards, always.

And of course, it bears saying, intuition doesn't always talk or have a literal voice within you. It can totally be a feeling, a felt sensation, where the same idea applies. While anxiety, might feel like a racing heart, sweat forming,

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eyes darting. And depression, may feel like an elephant on your chest and weights on your legs.

Intuition feels light. It feels right. Present, calming, grounded and with you. It feels supportive, and on your side. Intuition feels true. Every cell in your body relaxes when intuition comes to the party. Even if it's not good news, or something you like, or want to hear, it just clicks when you know it's true.

You can, with time, practice, patience, relax into it. And it can be subtle, for sure, absolutely. And you get clear on it by paying attention to it; where attention goes, intention flows, says the old saying, right? So, you can move towards trusting and believing it, and letting it guide you and your decision making. Because we use our intuition to decide which way to go, and our mind to chart the clear path forward.

That's the connection between the somatic work I do, and the thought work that I find so incredibly helpful. So, for those of us with early attachment wounds, who have trouble sifting through what's anxiety, what's trauma, what's the wounded inner child, and what's intuition. The remedy is coming back to ourselves.

Anchoring ourselves in us; relearning, remembering what our own voice sounds like. We get to reconnect with a part of us that is looking out for our best interest. That is always, always, always, on our side. And speaks to us gently, with love.

A beautiful place to start to reconnect with his voice, is through the breath. When we attune to our breath, and just pay attention; what's it doing? Where is it at? Is it all high up and tight in my chest? Is it relaxed into my belly? Is it somewhere in between?

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We can tune in and tap into a roadmap to where we are, what state our nervous system is in. When we take deep mindful breaths with a focus on a long, slow out, we activate our parasympathetic nervous system; our rest and digest state, our ventral vagal safe and social energy.

And in this state, we can start to listen in, because the voice of intuition is the voice of ventral vagal. And remembering that, can remind you that when you're in sympathetic or you're in dorsal, that is not likely when your intuition speaks. Or, if it speaks, it's more challenging to hear it, right? Because it gets all fuzzy and tumbled up in that nervous system state that keeps you from feeling grounded.

For those of us who like to move our bodies, somatic work and activities like yoga or mindful, meditative walking, can help us to reconnect to that deepest self. To the self that trusts that it will get what it needs, in due time. The self that knows life is abundant. And through those practices, we can start to recognize that voice as a felt experience within us; intuition craves spaciousness and a clear mind.

Some of the folks in Anchored, have shared that they find there's a pattern to their intuition. That it's often easier to connect in with it early in the morning, before the clutter of the day settles in. And, that's often when we can hear our intuition most clearly. One Anchored family member shared that the shower was where she often heard her intuition coming through. That connecting with the element of water, really helps her.

I love to light a candle and connect in with fire, and what helps me drop into a space where I can hear that loving inner voice, is time in nature; connecting with Pachamama, Earth Mother. I would invite you to take some time to tune in and see if there are consistent times of day, places, energies, elements, that help you settle into your intuition, so you can hear your inner voice more clearly.

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And by practicing, actively, consciously, connecting with my intuition, I can feel and discern more and more, what intuition and not intuition feels like, in my own body. I know the thoughts and feels that lead me to mistake a trauma response for intuition. Like, when my mind is telling a fear story, a scarcity story. Or, when my brain is saying that, "I'm lonely," or when I feel sad.

So, I don't make major decisions from those narratives or emotions, because I know I'm not as guided by my intuition. And so, those decisions can wait. And/or, I can use my tools; like mindfulness meditation, breathwork, somatics. All the things we do in Anchored on the daily, to reconnect with my intuition, so I can make aligned decisions.

And this is where contextualization, a reality check-in, really helps. Really pausing to look at the situation you're in; to zoom out and to connect in with your nervous system state. And, to just get clear on what the "what" is, right? Like, what's happening in your environment? And, is that supportive for you? Hearing your intuition, or responding from an old story from stress, distress, and trauma.

Another core tool we practice in Anchored, is the tiny, daily check-in; practicing hearing your intuition around things you kind of already pretty much know the answer to. Right? So, this is asking your body, your intuition; Do we want coffee or tea? Burger or pizza? Pants or a skirt? Et cetera, et cetera.

Let the stakes be so low around these decisions, that your nervous system is unlikely to leave ventral vagal about it, as you check in with your intuition around small, daily moments of truly limited significance. And, let your intuition shine.

Finally, my nerds, intuition is evidence based. Yes, indeed. There are studies on it. The University of Edinburgh, and others, have shown that

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intuition can improve your decision-making capacity by up to 7%. And that's a really big deal, 7%. Because those wee increments of improvement in your ability to make aligned decisions, compound in a wild way over time.

So, you can label intuition some b.s. woo business, if you want to. Or, you can take a gander at the functional MRI studies on intuition that back it up; as a for realsies thing. I mean, if you're feeling nerdy that is. Come on now, like we're ever not feeling nerdy around here.

My love, my beauty, my perfect tender ravioli, that's it for today. Thank you for listening. As we start to learn the sounds of our own intuition, the feeling of our own inner voice, we can then start to trust it. And, to really trust ourselves, as we build self-trust with these small moments of listening to and acting on, our intuition.

We can help heal our perfect inner children by showing them that they matter. If we can show them that it's okay, they're safe, we are safe. And we can move forward together, towards ever more belief in self and evermore interdependence with the world.

While I've got you, I want to thank everyone who's entered the Giveaway I'm running, this beautiful month of December, in celebration of the 200th episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you're like, wait, what? There's a giveaway? Or, if you haven't entered yet, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/200giveaway, to learn more and to enter, for free, right now.

Why not? Ooh-aah, fabulous prizes await you, my darling. Come on now, like seriously, why not? Listen to your intuition. Does your intuition tell you to do it? Mine, says yes.

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And if you are ready to dive in and get my support, every single weekday for six months, to take what you're learning on the show to the next level, you're gonna want to join us for Anchored: Overcoming Codependency. We start again, in February 2023. And three of the very limited spots... Because it's a small, intimate community setting. Three spots are already taken. So, you're going to want to apply now if you're hoping to join the next cohort. Head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/anchored for more details, and to apply now.

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

If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance, so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety, overwhelm and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive, intimate group-coaching program. So, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there; it's gonna be a good one!