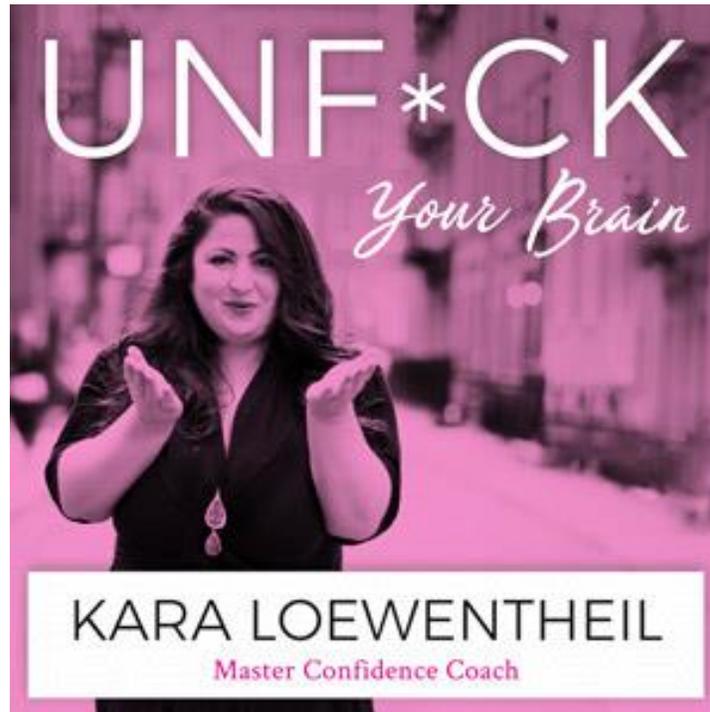


**UFYB 212: Codependency, Coaching,
and Your Nervous System:
A Conversation with Victoria Albina**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard Law School grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens. How are you all doing? I just got back from Clutch College Live in Dallas, Texas, where I had never been before. And Clutch College Live was amazing. We talked all about big goals for 2022.

So many chickens doing so many amazing things, and honestly, one of my favorite moments was afterwards, one of my master coaches and Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching graduates who was there to help teach said to me, “Your clients are smart.”

She was like, “Those chickens really keep me on my toes. I had to coach at the highest level all weekend long.” And I was like, that’s right. That’s how we roll around here. Life coaching is for everyone, including the whip smart.

So I just thought that was funny because I’m always talking about how coaching is practical philosophy and modern day philosophy, and well, there’s modern actual philosophy or academic philosophy, but this is modern practical philosophy and that my students I think are so smart and are operating - I think we teach and we coach in The Clutch and on this podcast at such a high level of sophistication.

I definitely was told early on that I might need to dumb things down and I was like, I don’t think so, I don’t think that’s how we’re going to do this. I have faith that people can understand complex ideas and sophisticated thinking when it’s explained clearly and made relevant to their lives.

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That's what we do around here. So I just want you to give yourself a high-five. Being someone who not only wants to think about and work on yourself, but at such a sophisticated and high level. This work is hard and you're here doing it.

So today, we are talking to one of the funniest people I know, and that's saying something because I am also quite funny. Usually I'm the funny person in a relationship or in a friendship. I have to say, my current romantic relationship, we are both funny also. It's quite a nice change.

And my friend Victoria Albina is an amazing health coach and life coach and she works on people-pleasing, codependency, wellness, all from a feminist lens. So, today we are talking about all of those things.

We are talking about codependency, which is not a word that you've heard me use on the podcast very much. But I'm sure a lot of you have heard that word used in books you've read or pop psychology, or even in real therapy, or wherever else.

And so we're going to be talking about how do we think about codependency in the context of thought work and the model that we use and how does it relate to our nervous systems and nervous system regulation, how we can learn to soothe our nervous systems when they're over-activated, when we're reactive, and how all of this is a feminist project.

So you can see why we are very good friends indeed. So with no further ado, I'm going to dive right in. Let's get into all of these questions and I know that so many of you are going to recognize a lot of your own thought patterns and find the concrete suggestions in this episode super, super helpful. Let's do it.

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Kara: Hello my chickens. I am - I feel like every single episode I'm like, I'm so excited about today's episode. This is another episode in my series of my coach friends and I talk about random shit, except it's not random. It's life-changing random shit.

So, funny true story. Our guest today, Vic, I will let her introduce herself fully because she is a Leo and she loves to shine. She was my basically healthcare provider. That's first how I met her 10 years ago. And then I went to get certified as a coach in 2015 and I sat down the first day next to Rachel Hart, who you all know is one of my besties I talk about all the time.

And we were like, the only two people in the room from New York. We were at a Holiday Inn in Eldorado Hills in California, which is where you always go to get your life changed. And we were the only people from New York. And we started comparing our lives and there were all these weird coincidences, like the universe would try to bring us together.

And one of them was that she also knew Vic. So here we are. That's how I met Vic. And then eventually she became a health coach and then a full-time coach, and now here we are and now we're friends and coaches. So we are going to talk about all things nervous system, codependency, and feminism.

Codependency being a word I've literally never used on this podcast before, and we're going to talk about that whole framework and how thought work maybe works with it and what the benefits are, what the pitfalls are. We're going to talk about the nervous system, which is something I have been a fuck load of work on myself in my own life lately.

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That is coming soon to a future podcast. But let me let Vic - sadly you guys aren't going to get to experience one of Vic's best attributes at a dinner party at least is that she does an amazing Rhode Island mob boss accent that is just truly - has to be experienced to be believed. So I don't know if there's a way we can work that into this episode. But why don't you tell the folks some other things about you?

Victoria: Yeah, we can totally work Rhode Island mob boss in. I'm here for it.

Kara: Really, this episode could just be you telling that whole story the way you did it at that dinner party, which was a 20-minute affair and totally worth it.

Victoria: Oh yeah, Buddy Cianci. We can spend the whole time on that. Or...

Kara: Everybody go listen to Crimetown podcast. That will tell you all about Buddy Cianci.

Victoria: It's so good. So my name is Victoria Albina. I use she/her pronouns. I live on occupied Munsee Lenape territory in the Hudson Valley of New York. What else do you want me to say? I'm a life coach.

Kara: That was the trifecta of woke introduction right there.

Victoria: Thank you. Doing what I can.

Kara: You get a prize. I don't know, tell the people - what do you do? Who are you?

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Victoria: So my training is as a family nurse practitioner, which is what I did for a very long time. And my passion is helping humans socialized as women to take their lives back from codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, which is all about self-worth, really.

Kara: Spoiler alert, literally all coaching is about self-worth and how to not freak out all the time. But we get it. We got to talk about it in different ways. Okay, tell us how you define codependency. Let's start there.

Victoria: Yeah. So I think about codependent thinking is chronically sourcing our self-worth from everyone and everything other than ourselves. So we look outside of ourselves for validation, for someone to tell us that we're good enough, we're worthy enough, we're doing a good enough job in this life, instead of just believing it, instead of owning it.

Instead of basing our life decisions on what makes me happy, what brings me joy, and how can I be of support to the collective, versus looking to the collective to validate my story about whether I'm worthy as a human, of being loved and cared for.

Kara: So it sounds like you're using - maybe it's possible I just had missed this in what I have read on codependency. But it feels like often when people talk about codependency, they talk about being in a codependent relationship, like a certain relationship is codependent, and you're sort of talking about it in a broader sense. So what do you think is the difference there?

Victoria: So yeah, a lot of times folks are in a codependent primary relationship, a romantic relationship, or a codependent relationship with their family of origin. And I think we can really zoom out and look at the ways that we - because we're not validating ourselves, because we're not

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really believing in our heart of hearts that we are good enough, we can often show up at work, in dating, with strangers on the street and bus drivers and the guy at your bodega, the way we show up in all of our relationships can be from that codependent place of tell me I'm worthy enough, tell me I'm okay, tell me I'm lovable.

It's like we have this spotlight on our heads that is looking to everyone else in the world to say, no, you're good, you're fine, you're okay, instead of turning that spotlight inward and truly celebrating ourselves, or even truly getting to neutral with ourselves. And from there, owning who we are, accepting who we are, and approaching ourselves with love and care.

Kara: So what do you think makes - I think in the original version of codependency, people of any gender or orientation or background can be codependent in a relationship. What do you think makes codependency kind of a feminist issue for you?

Victoria: I believe that humans who are socialized as women are taught often from day one to put everyone else ahead of ourselves. So growing up, it was expected that my mom, my sister, and I would do all the dishes, and we'd do all the cleaning up.

And my dad and whatever tio, male cousins would go watch football or go play. But have a break, even though all the women folk had done the grocery shopping, the planning, the cooking, and now we're in charge of the cleaning. It's our lives are always secondary to what is needed by humans socialized as men.

Kara: So how does this work relate to your work on the nervous system? What do you see are the patterns between codependency and how people's - tell us first, can you give us a little nervous system overview for

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coaching purposes? Because this is not something we've talked a lot about. Actually, that's not true. I think I did an episode on this, but tell us anyway.

Victoria: Yeah, I'm going to go full nerd.

Kara: Do it.

Victoria: Alright, let's go. You can handle it. Full nerd alert. So our autonomic nervous system has three magnificent parts and this is the root of all...

Kara: Magnificence is science.

Victoria: It's actually textbook. So this is polyvagal theory, which comes from the work of Dr. Stephen Porges, which is made into English by Deb Dana, because of course a woman made it into English. And so what we understand is that the vagus nerve controls so much of the way we think, feel, react, respond in the world.

And so the vagus nerve, the longest nerve in the human body, the 10th cranial nerve has this constant interaction with our thoughts and our sensations in our body. And so the first part is sympathetic, and so the sympathetic nervous system is fight or flight, freak out, the lions are coming, they're going to eat my face, I need to run, everything's a crisis, freak out, which evolutionarily was saved for lion attacks, and now is like, my boss texted me, my mom called, I got ghosted on Tinder, panic, this is about me, take it personal, freak out.

Next is parasympathetic, which has two branches. Ventral vagal, which is the ventral part of the body, or the front body, which is the safe and secure,

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safe and social part of our nervous system, which is how I feel right now. I'm talking to you, I feel chill, I feel grounded in my body, I'm able to make eye contact, I'm here, I'm present.

The other part of the parasympathetic nervous system is the dorsal vagus, and so that is the freeze response. That's deer in the headlights, that's a possum playing possum, that's the way it shows up in humans is often depression, is I just can't anymore, I'm overwhelmed, I'm done. The slightly more extreme of it is disassociation.

Kara: I have somebody in my life who responds that way and it's just like, all of a sudden complete shutdown. Overwhelm, helplessness, it's like cognition slows down. The whole system just slows down.

Victoria: Yeah, or is completely cognition is unavailable. And our brains just can't put two and two together, can't move us forward. And so what often happens in a codependent way of thinking is because we don't...

Kara: Wait, did we get all the branches? So there's...

Victoria: Those are the three. Sympathetic, fight or flight, ventral vagal, safe and secure, and dorsal, which is freeze. So those are the three main parts. And then there's the fond response, which is about appeasement. It's not actually part of the nervous system. It's a socialization response or our conditioned response. People just confuse it and Instagram thinks it's part of the nervous system. It's not.

Kara: Pro tip y'all, Instagram isn't always right.

Victoria: Shocking. So how does this relate to codependent thinking? So from codependency, because the story in our mind goes I need everyone

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else to tell me I'm okay or I cannot believe it, we have this sense within us that we're in chronic danger. We are not safe, we are not okay unless everyone else thinks we're okay.

Kara: Not even then, right?

Victoria: But not even then.

Kara: That's such a lie. We think I'll feel okay, as long as these 10 people tell me I'm okay, and then we feel okay for like, 90 seconds, and then we're like, person number three, the tone of their voice sounded like they maybe didn't really think we were okay, we should go back and ask them again or see if we maybe need to fix that.

Victoria: Totally. And how this would show up for me is I'd have friends over for dinner, they'd be like, "What a great meal." And I'd be like, are you sure? Did you really like it? Can I get you something else? I didn't do that great a job. It was that constantly putting myself down as a way to sneakily get more validation. But you're right, it never actually does the job because...

Kara: Think about the Pac-Man that eats all the things. We're just a validation Pac -Man. We're just like, ate all the things in this row, we got to turn, go up that row and eat all the things.

Victoria: More, more, more. Exactly. Because when it's always outside, it's never fully grounded, it's not embodied. It's not actually shifting you into ventral vagal because it doesn't create a real lasting sense of safety. But it's a cover-up job. It's in a way, it's buffering. Those thoughts are definitely buffering.

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Kara: Validation vending machine. It's just like, you're like, E5, please tell me I'm worthy.

Victoria: Right, exactly. And so that creates that sympathetic reaction. So adrenaline, norepinephrine, eventually cortisol, the levels of those stress hormones are elevated in our body as we're constantly thinking, "I'm a fuck up, I'm not enough, shit, someone tell me I'm okay."

And so then that slows everything that the vagus nerve controls, from our thyroid to digestion. I mean, when we look at the root cause of things like chronic irritable bowel syndrome, hypothyroid, autoimmune concerns, for humans who have experienced menses, menstrual concerns, so much is tied to being in sympathetic more than ventral. And then eventually dorsal instead of ventral because all those systems slow down.

And so too does our cognition. And we can't work our way out of it until we have attuned to our breath, grounded our bodies, and found that internal sense of safety that has nothing to do with what everyone else thinks about us.

Kara: So what do you do with people? Because I think breathwork and grounding and there's different forms of grounding obviously, there's the sort of - I don't know what you would call these. But the nervous system aware practices that are like, name 10 things in the room and how they feel. Or look in all directions to establish peripheral safety.

There's these various somatic tools. I think there are also people who are not capable where they are of feeling - breathing and physical grounding is not creating a sense of safety. So when you see that, how do you handle it?

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Victoria: So what you described is called orienting. So it's orienting to your surroundings because the brain will start spinning and spinning and spinning and spinning, and the way the peripheral nervous system works is that when you can remind your body that there's no lions, it can start to down regulate the freakout chemicals, the stress chemicals.

So I do think that's an important step one is to help folks to actually land back either in the environment or in their bodies. So that cognition has the capacity - you know like, one little percent, two little percent, three little percent to come back online. And that's where thought work can come in paired with somatics.

I think it's really important to work with both practices because where thought work, in my experience and in my clients' experiences, where folks get stuck is when their brain agrees with the new thought but their body just doesn't.

And so by doing these somatic practices that help us actually land in our bodies and connect in with our sensations, we can create more of a symbiotic relationship where we can understand, my body is doing x, y, z because it is in a fear state right now.

So we can bring dignity to our inner children, to our nervous system. We can dignify those responses and through that practice, start to - understanding why isn't always the most important, but bringing love and compassion and care to what's happening really is.

Kara: I definitely agree with that. I think my experience has been that it's not so much this linear you have to be grounded in the body, then you can use the mind. In my experience, often when the nervous system is activated, breathing or looking around, or doing any of that stuff is not

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grounding because my brain is still sending a danger signal, and in fact, what works for me often is to just - it basically is very rudimentary thought work, which is to just say to myself I'm safe over and over until my brain can receive that message.

So I guess I like to think of it as it's a toolbox, but I think sometimes sort of one of the reasons that I found thought work helpful and I think it appeals to a lot of people is that there are people for whom that more somatic grounding and breathwork and yoga are more easily accessible, and then they can move up the chain to working with their minds.

And then for people who are oriented a different way, it's sometimes like you can't even access getting into your body until you've kind of done some thought work. But I think that distinction between we talk about it in slightly different ways, but that sort of when you think a thought and your body "doesn't believe it," which I call just - I just call that you don't believe the thought.

Your body's not responding to it, you don't believe it, you're just saying a sentence in your mind. I can be like, I think the universe is made of all lollipops. I can say the sentence in my mind but I don't have an emotional reaction in my body because no different.

I'm curious actually, this is something that I think comes up when people start learning about the nervous system and then integrating it with the thought work model that we both use. What do you think is the difference if there is one between emotions and nervous system reactions?

The difference as the sensation is happening in our bodies, but I think we label some as a feeling, like sad, a feeling, and I've certainly experienced the difference between the emotion of sad in my body and the dorsal

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shutdown. They aren't the same. So there's nervous system responses, and then it does seem like there are emotional responses that are different, but how do you think about those?

Victoria: That's a challenging one to answer because so much of it is felt. So much of it is for me about that physiologic sensation. And recognizing that sad doesn't always feel the same, anger doesn't always feel the same. Different settings of different emotions will have different resonance in my body, and I think it's often because of what it's touching from my past, what the rest of the story is somatically, and what it's bringing up for my inner children, if my attachment system is getting activated.

What the rest of the story is. So I might feel angry and it might feel like a burning in my chest. I might feel angry and it might feel like a lump in my throat.

Kara: So how do you know those are both anger? That's probably an interesting question, right? Is it we give a name to a certain set of sensations because of the story associated with them, even sensations that are different?

I think I work the opposite way, which is there's a set of sensations that I identify as anger, there's a set of sensations I identify as anxiety, and then I work backwards from I'm feeling anger, okay, what am I thinking or what's the story causing that.

Victoria: Yeah, for me it is - yeah, it's super variable. The reason why I'm angry. So if I'm working on something from my childhood and I feel angry about some story from growing up, right now, as I say that, it's this dense, heavy radiating energy deep in my pelvis. Whereas, I don't know, I could

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think about getting cut off in traffic, just to say something super simple, and it might be a flare of anger in my chest.

Kara: That's interesting. So you've mentioned - well, first, the inner child and then the inner children. The multiples. Tell us what you...

Victoria: So many childrens.

Kara: Do you want to talk to us a little bit about inner child theory and how you use that in your work?

Victoria: Yeah. So we can criticize young in a different call...

Kara: I don't know what you're talking about. I take everything young set as fact. Freud, there were no perspectives lacking there. Just straight up absolutism about the human experience.

Victoria: 100%. So we'll do that later. But for now, this concept of the inner child, inner children is that as we grow, as we develop, as we evolve, there are parts of us. I also look at this through the lens of internal family systems, which is a framework that really works for me in understanding myself and has been really helpful for my clients.

So either set of language, it really points to the same thing, which is that there are parts of us, that there's not one united whole to our brains and our psyches and our bodies, but all these different parts that have developed throughout our lifetime that hold on to different stories.

Different ideas of what it means for us to be physically safe, emotionally safe, spiritually safe, and those parts can have wildly different stories about

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what it means for us to be safe. Different from our adult brain, our six-year-old self can have a different thought than our 16-year-old self.

And what happens is these parts of us, whether it's an inner child or a protector part, a manager part, a firefighter part, these are internal family system words for the same thing. They can drive the bus. They can effectively really control the way we react and respond throughout our lives.

So often I find from a place of fear, from a place of worry, from not feeling emotionally safe. And when we are not aware of, connected with these parts, and cannot recognize them as such, I mean, it makes perfect sense that we would take their thoughts and feelings as gospel and would believe whatever those voices within us are saying and believe that it's true and believe that like, this is a dangerous moment.

Whereas our adult brain, less our reptile brain and more our prefrontal is like, no, I'm cool here, everything's good, I'm a grown ass woman, I can handle this. But that young part in our brain may still be like, "But it's scary, don't get too vulnerable, don't be too honest, keep it inside, keep it inside."

Kara: This isn't the Buddy Cianci voice. But it's another good voice.

Victoria: It's a good one.

Kara: That would be hilarious if your inner child did speak in a Rhode Island mobster voice. That would be...

Victoria: I mean, I wouldn't be that surprised.

Kara: No, it would be pretty standard.

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Victoria: Kind of follows, right?

Kara: As I'm listening to you talk and thinking like, I think there's this desire when we are trying to understand the world ourselves, to have the one answer, like it's all polyvagal theory, it's all inner child family systems, it's all the models, how do you think about that? Do you notice that desire in yourself to have an overarching explanation? Do you see that in your clients? How do you approach that in your work?

Victoria: Listen, it makes perfect sense that we would have that black-and-white, all-or-nothing kind of thinking. There is the one thing, when we don't know how to source safety from within ourselves. So we want to look for the magic pill, the silver bullet.

I remember so often as a healthcare provider people were like, "But there's a pill for that, right?" And I was like, no, it's a lot more complex than that. And the nuance, I get why the nuance can feel scary at first from our feelings of like, I can't make me safe.

Kara: We don't think we have any authority or discernment. We're like, I don't know enough, how will I know then what's right? I need somebody else to tell me what's the right answer.

Victoria: Absolutely. So for me, it's about expanding our capacity, growing what's called our window of capacity in the nervous system world. I like to think of it as our window of bodily dignity, which is a term from Jane Clapp, which means how much can my body handle, move through, feel safe and okay in in this moment, without going into dorsal or sympathetic. What can I handle and support myself to stay in ventral?

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And so we get to expand that window, expand that window, expand that window. And I think what, for me and for my clients has been so vital, is really bringing in all of these tools and recognizing we just need different things in different moments.

And that's not just okay, it's phenomenal. It's such a gift to be able to recognize - when I'm coaching the folks in my programs, what I often say at the beginning of the call, they share the circumstance and what's going on, and I say like, okay, do you want to go cognitive with this or do you want to go somatic?

And sometimes we'll do both because it is important to address our thoughts. Because if we keep having those same self-recriminating thoughts, those same painful thoughts, whatever those thoughts are, it's challenging to shift our somatic experience. We're feeding that back in.

Kara: Breathwork your way into feeling better, and then you beat yourself up the next day, and then you breathwork your way into feeling better, and then you're in a cycle.

Victoria: Right. It's this bullshit cover up job instead of actually getting to the core.

Kara: That balance of - this is something I have been working on but I think is one of the places these things can intersect is like, figuring out the container where - I think about this in weightlifting. Like I've learned from my trainer who is very nervous system and somatic and trauma aware that like, on the one hand, trauma can make the body feel unsafe, and so the body wants to maintain homeostasis and feel safe.

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And on the other hand, growth only happens when the nervous system is a little bit destabilized. Being completely safe, you can't - you're not going to - if you never push what your body thinks it can do, you're never going to adapt. It's never going to change.

And so creating that kind of - it's sort of like the right amount of emotional distress. It's like, when you're very distressed versus staying totally safe. Never challenging yourself so you don't get distressed, not the answer. Being in so much distress that you can't grow, you're just in crisis management and distress all the time. It's also not helpful.

And figuring out what is the right structure or container for whatever you're working on where you are pushing yourself enough to be uncomfortable and grow, but not so much that it's sort of beyond your window of distress tolerance.

Victoria: Right, and that's where resourcing comes in. That's where nervous system resourcing, which is knowing what helps you to get back into ventral vagal, helps you to regulate your nervous system towards safe and secure within yourself so that you can show up for you and can shift towards discomfort.

So when we talk about trauma, there's the sort of three levels we talk about are stress, distress and then trauma. So each level is like, pushing against our window of tolerance or window or capacity or bodily dignity a little more. So for me, it's like, what does planned stress look like?

So in my dating life, it's been like, okay, I'm going to show up and be radically honest about this thing that makes me feel really vulnerable and kind of makes me want to barf, and my inner children are like, "Oh my God, don't tell them that, they're going to think you're whatever and judge you

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and leave you, and you'll be abandoned and you'll die cold and alone in the mountaintop."

And it's like, okay, I'm going to share one part of this, I'm going to resource my nervous system by attuning to my breath and I'm going to share another part and attune, another part and attune. So every time we go through that cycle of remembering or learning how to resource ourselves, we strengthen our belief that we can resource ourselves.

So again, we do create a new thought to create a new feeling, and we also create a new somatic experience in our bodies of I was vulnerable and no one died. But my inner children, my protector parts were like, yo, no, you're going to die.

Kara: We have to change that thought also that - not saying you don't, not saying that you don't need to. But because one of the things that I have found is that if I don't consciously and on purpose change the thoughts I'm thinking about something, it doesn't matter how many - this comes up in chronic pain work too where they talk about having - what does he call it? The guy who just did the book *The Way Out*. Oh, corrective experiences, which is you do the thing, it's not so painful, you don't die.

Is that the brain, for some of us, is so powerful that if you don't change the underlying belief, it does not matter how many examples you have that you didn't die this time. Your brain is like, okay you got lucky, that person happened to be nice, or that walk wasn't so bad, but you're still totally going to die next time.

So for me, I found it really has to be happening at both levels. I have to be practicing how to self-soothe and self-regulate when my nervous system gets activated, but if I don't - and I have learned this the hard way. If I don't

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also be spending time during that whole overarching period thinking the new thoughts I'm trying to believe on purpose, if I just wait for the nervous system to come up and try to regulate it, it's an uphill battle because it's sort of like doing yoga when you had a stressful day and all the same thoughts come back the next day.

So it's like the combination of both is what I find feels like it, over time, lowers the trigger level for my nervous system. So that things don't trigger me as much.

Victoria: Absolutely. A couple weeks ago, someone I'm dating had a health concern and we were in the ER and had been in the ER for several hours. And I was sitting talking to them and they finally got morphine, and so they calmed down. They were not in excruciating pain.

And so of course, my hip started spasming, which is where my chronic pain often shows up. I couldn't in that moment put full weight on it. So I stood up and I said out loud because at this point in my life I've run out of fucks in the most positive and amazing way.

Kara: I'm like, hi, I'm having a feeling, let me discuss it.

Victoria: Yeah. I'm just going to tell everyone out loud right now. So I was like, "Maria Victoria, you are safe, your brain is just sending signals." And so I said it out in the third person. You are safe, until I felt a small shift in the pain in my hip, and then I was able to say, I am safe, my brain is sending my body signals, nothing else is wrong. And as I said that, I felt the pain start to melt.

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Kara: So powerful. Alright my friend, thank you for coming on to share. If we were going to sum up the takeaways, I'll say what I think. I think there are - first of all, there is no orthodoxy to any of this.

Victoria: Absolutely not.

Kara: These are all a bunch of different tools. And one of the things I'm finding is like, as I'm doing this work myself, you just have to be willing to experiment. You have to be willing to experiment. I'm working through a lot of nervous system arousal in one of my relationships, not the fun kind, and it's been a lot of experimenting.

Like okay, these are the things that seem to trigger me, can we condense them? Can we plan them better? Can I create a situation where things feel more predictable? Not that I won't get triggered, just I know more when it's going to happen so I can prepare and manage it. And then sometimes the things I come with to try do work, and sometimes they don't, and I've had 10 million moments where I'm like, oh, I figured it out, and then nope.

But just not - since I know who listens to my podcast, I want to encourage you not to listen to this and be like, okay, but what is the exact perfect system of how I integrate all the things with the one through 10 that I always do. There are just many ways of talking about and many bodies of knowledge for understanding our experience as a human.

And the irony is that you think you'll feel safer if you know what to do, but actually, being willing to experiment is what lets you feel safe because if it doesn't work, you just try something else or do it a different way.

Victoria: Exactly.

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Kara: So try it both ways. Try doing breathwork and then try doing thought work. Try doing thought work and then doing breathwork. Try talking to yourself in the third person, try talking to yourself in the first person. Mix it up and just experiment to see what works for you.

Victoria: Right. And remember that it all expands your window of bodily dignity just a little, one quarter of a percent more and more every time. And so I hear this a lot, "I'm frustrated it didn't work," but that's where that trust and faith in yourself and the fact that our bodies want to move towards feeling safer, we could call it towards healing from whatever has happened in our past and our past stories and sensations. And just rewriting, creating new neural grooves is the delightfully nerdy way to say it.

So every time you choose to show up for yourself in the smallest way to say me first, you second with love, I don't have to make the codependent choice, the perfectionist choice, the people-pleasing choice, I really can take care of myself and it's okay, in this tiny, tiny, tiny way, the next time it can be just tiny, tiny, and the next time tiny.

Kara: Except that like, 70 times in each of those times.

Victoria: Yeah, statistically between 70 and 102.4.

Kara: I do think that's - some of the early payoff with thought work are those moments where you're like, oh my God, I see my thought, the whole thing fell apart and I feel great. And nervous system work is not like that.

Victoria: No, it is so slow and it needs to be titrated.

Kara: It's so slow and it can be so painful. I just recorded a podcast episode called what to do when it seems like nothing is working to solve your

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problem. It was basically - I'm not sure if this will come out before or after this one, but spoiler alert, it's basically like, just keep the faith, keep going, it's okay that you don't have the answer. But I do think that is a big difference.

I've had to adjust my idea of how quickly I should be able to work through something when it's a thought work issue and when it's a nervous system issue, and obviously sometimes they're related. So keep the faith, chickens.

Victoria: Keep the faith. I love that.

Kara: Whether you call it human body dignity or distress tolerance or whatever you call it, just keep working on it. Thank you for coming on my friend. Where can people find you?

Victoria: That's a good one. So you can find me on Instagram @victoriaalbinawellness. You can download a free set of meditations, including the orienting exercise that we touched upon at victoriaalbina.com, right at the top of the page. It's free. Just put your name and email in there. And my podcast is called Feminist Wellness and it is also free every single Thursday. All the free things.

Kara: Two things on Thursdays. My podcast and your podcast.

Victoria: They're mutually supportive and loving. They're interdependent.

Kara: They're brain and body all together.

Victoria: I like interdependent.

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Kara: Our podcasts are interdependent.

Victoria: I love that.

Kara: Thank you my friend.

Victoria: Thank you.

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