

Seth (00:00:02):

Okay. So today is one of our special topic calls, and this is on parenting. And now we only got about six questions that were actually about parenting, so we will definitely answer those. And then we got a whole lot of just random questions, which is not unusual, and we will also attempt to answer those. I answered a bunch via email already, and we will get to as many as we can on the call today. So thank you as always for being here, and we'll get started.

So first one, "Hi there, this is my sixth round, and I have a one-year-old daughter. She's awesome. My question is, how can I use the knowledge and practices of SBSM to help me have healthier conflict with my partner? What would healthy conflict look like and how can I use SBSM to help make our conflicts healthier? I'm aware that our fights potentially affect our girl."

(00:01:08):

Absolutely. If you're engaged in conflict fighting with your partner in front of your children, that will definitely have an effect, even if they're too young to understand what's happening. Little ones are very sensitive to just the energy in the room, and so they will often sense it even if there's nothing being said, but mom and dad are really mad at each other and full of tension, and then baby starts crying. So yes, absolutely your little ones are affected by conflict in relationships. So there's a few general principles that are important to keep in mind when this is the case. The most important thing is, if possible, to take the conflict away from the child and not have it around them. So even if this means there is some tension, well that's better than yelling and screaming and whatever else may happen in a fight.

(00:02:13):

So as soon as possible, you will want to address it between you, but really not in front of the kids. Now, this is an age-dependent thing to some degree. Once kids reach a certain level of individuation, then it's actually can be healthy to see conflict and resolution, as long as those things go together, but we're talking about later, once they have a clear sense of self, so maybe pre-teen, teenager, maybe getting around then, it might be okay to have a conflict and resolution and yeah, they're there. It's still not ideal, but sometimes it can be okay, and especially if there's resolution, it can be kind of a good model for how things could be worked out. But the reason kids need to be old enough to have a clear sense of their identity and what I'm calling individuation, like, this is me, is because otherwise they'll often think it's their fault.

(00:03:19):

They'll think that they're to blame. They will then often try to take care of mommy and daddy. So those sets of patterns aren't the best. So taking the conflict away from the little one, that's sort of step one, that may require what's called what I call conscious compartmentalization, where it's like, "Okay, yep, this is happening. Let's agree that we're going to talk about it later, and maybe we should just both go do our own thing for now, and we'll reconnect after baby's asleep, and then we'll get back into it." One of the biggest things is, in terms of somatic work, when it comes to conflict, is learning to recognize when you are triggered. What does that mean? When we're triggered, what that word means is that we are getting put into a survival state by something that is not necessarily a survival situation.

(00:04:24):

It means that wounds from the past that are relevant in some way to what is happening now are rising up inside us, and that's informing how we respond. So we need to learn to recognize when we're triggered. That is a hugely important thing in a relationship because if you can't do that, conflict tends to just go nowhere. It's really impossible to find resolution when one or both parties are not fully present, meaning they're triggered. So what are the somatic cues of being triggered? Well, it's going to be usually something in the survival camp of things. So that might mean your heart rate is starting to pound. You might find yourself getting tense, feeling a lot of muscular tension, maybe you start getting a headache, maybe your face, your eyebrows start making a line through them. You get certain tension in the face, maybe you get hot, or maybe it goes the other way.

(00:05:29):

Maybe you shut down. Maybe you start to check out, feel numb, like you can't really connect what's happening, start to have arguments in your head, just essentially learning to notice whatever it is that happens for you when you get triggered. That is step one. That is like, because then we can make a choice, and just the act of saying, "You know what? Yeah, I'm triggered right now. Let's come back to this." That is incredibly powerful and useful, and it's what leads to actual resolution. So that is the second thing is, learn to recognize when you're triggered, as soon as either partner recognizes that, stop, there's no point having any further discussion, and that's a good agreement to set up in times when there's no conflict and there's no triggers happening, everything is groovy. You have this discussion about, like, "Let's start to

work on this, and let's make an agreement that when either one of us recognizes that we are triggered, we get to say, stop. And let's just go have our own space."

(00:06:38):

And then you can use the different somatic tools you're learning in SBSM to work with what is arising, because every trigger is an opportunity, because what is happening, you're getting survival energy from the past coming up. Your trauma is revealing itself. That's an opportunity to work and use whatever. Maybe you realize you're feeling tense, and you need to bring in some more space into the body, and you use some diaphragm, and then that leads to some sounds, and then whatever it may be, whatever way into the system you feel is appropriate, from all the different things that you're learning.

(00:07:13):

You bring in your somatic tools, you work with what is being triggered, and then you come back to the relationship after doing your work. And if both people do this, what can happen is relationship and conflict can become an incredibly powerful vessel for healing for both people. Now, both people have to be on board. If you try to do that, and then your partner tries to keep dragging you into it and won't let you leave, that's a real issue. We need to be on the same page with this kind of stuff if we're going to evolve. So that is about it.

(00:07:50):

Consciously compartmentalize if you need to, wait until later, recognize when you're triggered, learn what those cues are, when you recognize you're triggered, have permission and agreement to say, stop, go work with your stuff. Right. I'm just going to do a little check and see if Mara... Doesn't look like she's here yet. Okay.

(00:08:17):

Okay. "On a Zoom call, you and Irene did on healthy aggression, just before this round of SBSM started. You mentioned that you were working with a boy, and you gave his mom and the therapist steps to follow, because you knew this aggression was arising in him, and you were taught through your training not to shut it down, whereas the therapist was. What were the steps you had for the mom and therapist / people who are unfamiliar with this way to be ready for this to arise?" So yeah, what did I suggest? How did I prepare them or what did I

recommend that they do, if they're recognizing that aggression is arising in their kid? Because yeah, most or many, at least modalities will say that if aggression is arising in your child, you have to redirect it, try to shut it down. And that actually is almost never the right way to go, because it just leads to internalization and them thinking that anger is wrong or bad, or that they are bad, et cetera.

(00:09:28):

So what we want to do is be able to engage with them creatively. So number one, number one thing for this is you have to be comfortable with your own aggression. You have to know how to work with your own aggression because if you don't, you won't have the ability to hold space for your kid. You'll get scared by their aggression and go into your stuff, and then that just sets off a maelstrom that doesn't go anywhere. So that's number one. You've got to do your own work to get familiar with your aggression and learn the different ways to work with it, which of course we will get into around lab six in SBSM. Very often, and there's many reasons a kid may have aggression, a hell of a lot of the time it is because the parents are not in touch with their aggression, and kids reflect to us what we're not seeing in ourselves.

(00:10:25):

They feel what we are repressing, and they will be a mirror for that. So that is another reason to start working with your aggression, is because that itself will automatically a lot of the time sort of help the kid feel a little better and not so angry and upset, because they're not feeling this stuff in their parents. So that's a big part of it. And then the key to holding space for a child's aggression is being able to remain calm and present and able to match them in creative ways that are healthy. So all of that requires that you have familiarity with the territory, and know how to stay present and grounded, and relatively neutral and centered in the presence of that energy. Now, kids can sometimes have aggression for reasons that have nothing to do with the parents. It may be something that's happening at school.

(00:11:24):

It may be early surgical experiences that they went through. It may be something that is outside of the family system, like a mean crossing guard or something. There can be things that happen that have nothing to do with the parents, so I just want to acknowledge that as well. So that's really the biggest thing. And then once you have that, once you are comfortable and familiar and feel safe in the presence of aggression, then you can start to learn to engage with

them in creative ways. So one of them is to just use physicality, like, "Here, come try to push me over, see if you can push me across the room," and you let them push against your hands, and of course you let them win, but you make them work for it. Like, make it fun. Like, "Oh my gosh, you're so strong."

(00:12:18):

Validate their strength. "You're pushing me all the way across the room. Oh my God." Or having another fun one is to stand in front of the bed and then tell them, "I bet you can't push me over. Try." And they'll push on you and you, "Oh my gosh," you fall on the bed. And it's about giving them the experience of being victorious, engaged with their life energy, which is what aggression is. Having that experience of that being validated and being victorious, that is very often how that stuff gets healed at an adult level too. This is very often where for us working with aggression, we get to a point of transformation, when we have that experience of expressing it physically in a way that leads to a sense of victoriousness or triumph. That is very often part of a completion of stuck aggression, because when aggression is internalized, it's depression.

(00:13:19):

It's very often that is how it ends up manifesting. We are essentially being angry at ourselves, and that is what depression is. It also can show up in tension, heat, behavioral tendencies, these types of things. But when aggression is very deeply internalized, it almost invariably leads to depression. So the opposite of that is this sense of life energy, victoriousness, capability, agency, all of those things. Also, learning to engage your kids in creative ways that let them tap into that when they're not feeling expressing anger and stuff. So just exercise, running around a lot, passing the ball around, kicking the ball around, throwing Frisbees, just making up games, running around at the playground, just general rambunctiousness. Really, really helpful. Now, of course, not everyone may have the energy themselves to do that, so you do the best you can. Maybe you recruit, if you have other kids, older kids who can also join them in that, you recruit them or family, friends, uncles, aunts, whatever.

(00:14:36):

If you don't have the energy to engage with your kids directly with high energy play, maybe you can find or create situations with other people where that can happen. There's ways that are pretty simple too, like things like building towers and blocks and then encouraging them to

smash it down. Like, "Oh, here comes a hurricane." Now, this kind of stuff is really, if you're sensing that energy is in the room, it may not make sense to do that kind of stuff if your kid's just chill, right? It's like, "No, I want to make the castle and keep it." But if you're getting the sense that, "Oh, little Suzy is pretty pissed today. She's got some anger energy coming out, okay, maybe we can smash the castle and see what that feels like."

(00:15:23):

Or using the imagination, being big animals, being dinosaurs, what kind of sounds would you make if you were a monster, if you were Godzilla, how does Godzilla sound? How do they stop and move? Roar. Let's stomp around the house together. Just finding these ways to use that big energy in ways that are safe, playful, creative, all of that stuff. So I'm just going to check my messages for a second just to see what's happening. Bear with me for a moment. Okay.

(00:16:24):

All right. Well, the rest of the parenting questions, Mara was going to answer because they are more in her field of specialty. So I'm going to wait a bit and just see if she can get on the call, and I'm going to move on –

Mara (00:16:55):

I'm here Seth.

Seth (00:16:57):

Oh, yay. Great. All right. Do you want me to... Shall I do one of the other questions first? Are you ready to dive in there, Mara?

Mara (00:17:18):

I'm okay. I landed so I could introduce myself, and then jump into my first question, if that's okay.

Seth (00:17:26):

That's wonderful. I don't see you. Do you have your camera on?

Mara (00:17:31):

I do.

Seth (00:17:32):

Oh, okay. Ah, there you are. Great. Wonderful. All right. Hi.

Mara (00:17:40):

Hi. Hi. Getting to practice regulation.

Seth (00:17:43):

Absolutely.

Mara (00:17:47):

So I'll do a quick introduction since it's my first time being one of the people answering questions on these Q&As. I'm Mara. I've been a long time moderator with Team Lyon going back about six years now. And before that I actually was one of probably the last private clients Irene had before she stopped seeing people individually. And I'm a mom. I happened to be a solo parent to two teenagers who are now 17 and 15, and I had my children on my own. So anyone who's a single parent, I also have that angle, that voice, and happy to be here and support all the parents and parent questions. I'm going to start with the first question that Seth had queued up. "My nine-year-old is very expressive with his emotions. When upset, he screams and cries to the point that he can get a headache. When we try to offer comfort through calm speech or touch. He gets more upset, which is frustrating. The only thing that works is distraction, like putting on the TV for a while. When calm, he doesn't want to talk about what happened or what we can do to support him. How can I help him in a better way than just distracting him and waiting it out? Thankful for any suggestions."

(00:19:28):

So my first thought is that a tantrum is behavior, and we want to go way, way upstream from the tantrum. So by the time you get to the tantrum, you really do just need to wait it out. And any challenge with waiting it out is work that the parents need to do on their own nervous system. So find a way to be able to be present with very few words. So it could be you're in the same room, you're nearby, all you say is, "I'm here." And maybe you say it every minute. "I'm here, I'm still here. You're safe." That kind of thing that's reassuring and actually helps you,

because you're not trying to fix anything. You're just trying to help the child ride it out. So more presence, fewer words.

(00:20:24):

At times when your child's not in the tantrum, we want to encourage play, physical activity, special time. So that's one-on-one time that you might name special time, or some personalized name for you and your child. And set a timer, you could start with five minutes a day. And so there's sort of these opportunities for laughter and for tears, which can be titrated releases of emotion. And also planned, if you set a timer for five minutes and there's disappointment from your son or child when the timer goes off, that's like an invented mini tantrum, right? It's a titrated way to let off some of this discharge. But so is play, laughter can be as healing as tears for children.

(00:21:20):

So I have a few books that I actually think Leah is going to be able to put in the chat. One is a book called, Listen, by Patty Wipfler and Tosha Schore, and that's from a school of parenting called Hand in Hand Parenting, which is parenting through connection. It's very aligned with this nervous system work and it teaches these different tools for listening to your child through play, and also through something called stay listening, which is what I was describing, that you stay with your child through the tantrum and any other upset. And the other two are Playful Parenting, and The Art of Roughhousing. So many of us struggle with learning how to play with our children in meaningful ways. And both Playful Parenting and The Art of Roughhousing, Larry Cohen is author of Playful Parenting, and he's a co-author of The Art of Roughhousing. So those are my suggestions for anyone struggling with big tantrums, big emotions. Thanks.

Seth (00:22:34):

Awesome. Thanks, Mara. That's great. Well, I'm going to start going to the non-parenting questions since I got through my parenting ones, and then we can just alternate if that works. Great.

(00:22:52):

Okay. "Hi Seth. I keep getting images from my childhood. I was so scared and frozen at night that I turned to fantasies to get to sleep and they got more and more horrible when I got older.



I had violent images, such as getting raped or murdered, and then masturbation was also part of it. I never told anyone because of feeling ashamed about it. Was it a kind of self-harm? What's your idea? It was as long as I can remember, from a very young age and I think something made me think so bad of myself to do this."

(00:23:32):

So first off, I just want to really acknowledge and celebrate you in asking this question, because this is something that has been repressed and you felt ashamed of. It takes a lot of bravery to ask this, and really, bravo. So yeah, well done. And first off, no, I would not say this is a kind of self-harm. Violent fantasies are a normal adaptation to being exposed to violence. So if you were growing up scared and frozen, I don't know what was happening in your environment, but it wasn't good, obviously.

(00:24:17):

If you're growing up in that way, it is a normal adaptation to have fantasies about the things you describe. This is also why many people who grow up in an atmosphere of violence or trauma often gravitate towards horror movies, because that is something that matches what they are already feeling on the inside. It's an externalized fantasy that can be quite comforting to people who grow up with that kind of thing. Now again, that's not true for everyone. I never liked horror movies, they just scared me. But I had friends who loved them, loved them. So this all sort of comes to personality and how we adapt, but it is a normal adaptation.

(00:25:05):

In terms of masturbation, I certainly wouldn't see that as a form of self-harm. What I see is, is you developing some form of agency and control, and bringing in an element of pleasure into these fantasies that were disturbing you. To me that's actually quite a creative adaptation, that is about you having control over an experience that is pleasurable. So much of being traumatized means we feel out of control. So having some pleasurable experience that we have control over is a very common adaptation. This may manifest as overeating or not eating, those are ways to have control over a bodily experience. There's many ways that it may happen. Sexual fantasies, that kind of thing, is just a normal adaptation as well. So I think that what you did was a creative and common adaptation to experiencing violence growing up, and not really a form of self-harm.

(00:26:10):

Now, it may be at this point not useful anymore as an adult. So you don't ask about what to do to change this. So I don't know if you're looking for that or not, but I'm going to guess that maybe you're looking for ways to work with this. What it comes down to is uncoupling the aggression from the sexuality, because that aggression is fundamentally what's at play when you're talking about violent fantasies, it's internalized aggression that needs to come out. So as we get into the healthy aggression work in the later labs as we keep going, it'll be interesting to see what happens as you start exploring some of that stuff, and learning to express that in ways that are physical, and not so much in the mind and in fantasy. So that's one way.

(00:27:11):

Also, you can titrate your fantasy when it comes to masturbation. See what happens if you don't allow yourself to fantasize, but really focus on just what is happening now physically, and that can be a way to start. It may not have the same effect, it may not be as pleasurable. It's more of a somatic exploration. What's it like if I keep my eyes open and I just look at what's happening, be present with the reality that's happening. That's another way that you may start to work with uncoupling these things. So I hope that is helpful for you. Over to you, Mara.

Mara (00:27:54):

Thanks. The next question is, "I'm an alum with EDT, early developmental trauma. My teen had a mental health crisis almost a year ago. It lasted a few months. At the time, I went way over my capacity and was not able to resource sufficiently because I had to care for him. He's doing better, but not okay. I had a CFS, chronic fatigue syndrome, relapse a few months ago due to this stress, and I'm also more anxious and depressed. I'm having a hard time coping. How do I support myself to heal from the past crisis and also help myself cope with the current stress?"

(00:28:39):

So I have a lot of empathy for you and some understanding. The first thing that I want to say is that you don't really need to separate the past crisis from the current stress. In your body, in your physiology, it's all in the soup. And then the other thing is the airplane metaphor of putting on your oxygen mask first, is really essential. So for the whole family system to start to regulate, you've got to start with yourself.

(00:29:23):

So how do you do that? You don't need to do it alone. So find support wherever you can. It may be from extended family or friends, created family, found family, community. There are many, many families, I mean many other families facing this type of adversity and they can be supportive to each other and they've organized organizations that can be supportive, often for free or very low cost. Maybe there are other communities that you connect to through your child's school, through a religious organization, or whatever supports you in your community. And find respite if you can, if there's any way for you to get a break to restore yourself and come back renewed to the parenting journey.

(00:30:21):

And then in terms of SBSM, I really would direct you back to the very first lesson about resources. So what are the resources that, if you had to build an emergency first aid kit for yourself, what do you need in that first aid kit? And maybe it's a list of things to do. Maybe it's physical objects to have next to your bed, or next to your computer, or in your car, or wherever you are much of the day. And also work with your teen to build them a similar kit, and it could be a list or objects. Exercise, time outside, time with animals, listening, listening from other parents, listening from your extended family or network, all of that, I think, could be supportive.

Seth (00:31:25):

Awesome. Thanks, Mara. So this one is, "I started SBSM two years ago and realized how pre and early developmental trauma I carry growing up in Lebanon during the war." So yeah, growing up in Lebanon when there was the war happening. "I've been out of the country for more than 10 years, but my family is still there. With all that's happening now, I feel like my system and my body are there, always on alert and activated. I'm trying to communicate safety to my body, but emotionally, I don't feel safe. Is what's happening a re-traumatization? Is there any way I can leverage reliving the situation to heal this pre-developmental trauma?"

(00:32:19):

So when you ask, is what is happening re-traumatization, it depends on how you respond. It certainly is stressful and it's bringing up old trauma for sure. How you respond to that will determine whether or not it's re-traumatizing. So if the current stress puts you into such a

state of overwhelm that then you can't deal and it just ends up reinforcing the patterns, then yes, that could be. But you ask, is there any way to leverage the sort of reliving of the situation that's happening, to heal, and that is certainly possible. As I mentioned earlier, I mean, this is a trigger and it's a very intense one. And it's complex because if you were there, it would not be a trigger. It would be an accurate, real-time response. However, you're not there but your family is. So what needs to happen, it sounds like, is really finding a way to focus over and over and over again onto where you are now and what's happening now.

(00:33:40):

My heart goes out to you because it's really complex because of course you're going to have natural concern and worry about your family. And that's not a trauma response, that's just human care, and empathy, and compassion, and connection. So there's a degree to which as long as this conflict is happening, there is just a natural level of worry that I think is just normal. In order to keep it from re-traumatizing you, I think it's going to be about really finding resources. What can you connect to that helps you just soothe a little bit and feel a little bit calmer? How can you reorient your attention again and again to the outside, to where you are now physically? I mean, like you're saying you're reliving it, and I hear that's happening physiologically, but it's not happening in reality because you're not actually there. So how can you keep on just reinforcing that? It may be helpful to connect to not just your home environment, but to really put yourself into natural settings that feel good to you. There is a healing power in nature and grounding. Getting your bare feet on the ground where you are now, on the earth where you are now. Just feeling that connection to the ground, seeing your connection to your environment where it is. Then the other side of things is, well, there's this always on alert and activated thing that's happening. That's a big sympathetic charge. Again, some of that is natural and normal. Is there extra because of what you experienced as a kid? Probably.

(00:35:35):

So how might you find ways for that to mobilize through your system? Excuse me. What are some ways that tension might be able to express, that activation might be able to express? This may look like many things. This is where following your impulse is really important. Sometimes it may just, one way to start is just with the whole running and sitting practice, where you just sit upright and you just let your heels, start with just the heels and you let them start to run and then maybe you see how that goes. Can the energy that you're feeling inside, that alarm,

can that start to go into the legs? Can the legs express the act of running away? That may be part of it. You can even combine that with orienting, or you combine that with imagination, seeing yourself successfully fleeing away from whatever the threat is. Maybe that comes into full legs running, like the legs coming off the ground, moving that energy, mobilizing.

(00:36:46):

That's just one possibility. There may be other impulses that you have. Maybe the impulse is to hide and get real small and to cover up and feel containment. Or maybe it's to fight, and you need to help express some of that in an aggressive kind of way with the healthy aggression work that we will get into. Since you're an alumni, you have access to all that. So that's pretty much the most I can think of, is that combination of really orienting and reorienting to where you are now and finding creative ways to let some of this activation come through. And also just to know that yes, a lot of this is just normal. The only other thing that I thought of, and this may or may not fit with one's belief system, is the idea of just positive intentions, prayer, sending good energy, just envisioning your family safe, just holding that intention. And of course talking with them, communication, checking in with them, hearing their voices, that could be really helpful potentially as well. So I can't think of anything else in that regard, so I will turn it back over to Mara.

Mara (00:38:01):

Thanks, Seth. My next question is, "my daughter was tube-fed for her first year of life with other trauma and surgeries. As I do this work, I realize how much nurturing she missed out on. Food was just delivered into her stomach at a set time and set amount, so she had no control over it. She's now 12 and really struggles to feel when she's full, sometimes eating until she's sick. Do you have any ideas on how I can best support her in this situation, and more generally how to encourage healthy eating habits in this modern world?" So I actually do. I was lucky enough that a friend of mine who has been a friend since high school and had children a little bit younger than I did gifted me a book when I was expecting my first child and it was called *Child of Mine*. And the subtitle is *Feeding with Love and Good Sense*. And the link for Leah to paste is Ellyn Satter, E-L-L-Y-N.

(00:39:17):

And the main teaching that Ellyn Satter offers is something called a division of responsibility. So the parent's job is to provide what and when in terms of food. So that's scheduled meals,

family meals, and snacks, and you all sit down at the table and the food is offered. What the parent decides to offer is what the parent decides to offer. You can include a variety of foods that you know the child is likely to eat and foods that maybe you want to introduce. It's family time, it's social, it's like meals are meant to be. But the child has a job too, and the child's job is to decide whether to eat and how much to eat. And understanding and learning to accept what your job is and what your role is and what your child's job is and what your child's role is is really this body of work from Ellyn Satter. And she has more recent books, and the website that I think Leah's linking to has this division of responsibility outlined there. So that's the biggest beacon I would offer.

(00:40:40):

It's hard, and many of us in this culture have had our own complex relationships with food. So the other thing that I would do, like I said earlier with putting on your own oxygen mask, is really make sure that you understand what work you have to do in your own relationship with food, with body, with the social aspects of family meals and all of that. So to tease apart or decouple, as Seth was speaking about coupling previously. If you can decouple your worries about your child's behavior around food from your own issues or challenges in that realm, that would be extremely helpful. And do that separately and away from your child.

Seth (00:41:41):

And I'll just add, like I was saying about earlier, this is a way of having control over an experience. And so yeah, there's some really great ways to play with that, that Mara's suggesting. The only other thought I had as you were reading that Mara, is that I wonder what it would be like for the daughter to experiment with what happens if I just stop before I'm full and just notice what happens? Because oftentimes, I noticed this from myself, I was a big overeater due to my own freeze. That was one of my soothing mechanisms, because it wasn't until I was so stuffed that I literally couldn't eat more, that I would feel a sense of fullness. Part of changing that for myself was actually making myself stop earlier and waiting. And what would happen is that I would then feel full maybe 10, 15 minutes later. So that's just another thought I had.

(00:42:47):

"I have early developmental trauma and hear lots of people reporting having involuntary muscle spasms and shaking at some point in their healing journey. For a year now, I've been

---

experiencing strong impulses to bounce, shake and stretch my body, and particularly my hips, but no involuntary movements. Can somatic and nervous system trauma heal without involuntary movements when early developmental trauma and extreme panic have been in the picture, or is it just a matter of time for that to occur?" Great question. So I never like to say there's any hard and fast rules about any of this stuff, because we're all so individual and unique in how we adapt. That being said, there will always be sympathetic discharge of some kind at some point because that's what needs to happen. The sympathetic energy needs to leave the system. However, that's not always going to look like involuntary movements.

(00:43:46):

It may be very fine trembling or a sense of internal shaking that you can't even see. It may be spontaneous movements like you describe, actually. What you've been saying about strong impulses, that can be part of it. It may not be involuntary. It may be that you're connected to the impulses. And it's only because someone isn't necessarily hearing their impulses that it comes out in an involuntary way. So that's a possibility as well, is you're hearing your impulses for movement, and that's part of it. Sympathetic discharge can happen through laughter. It'll have to be through yelling or screaming or crying or movement or shaking. It can be from hilarity, is one way it can happen. It can happen very quietly through positive connection and a gentle emotional upwelling, is part of the way it can happen. There's so many ways in which these old energies can leave the building.

(00:44:51):

So I wouldn't necessarily say that, yeah, at some point you'll definitely have big shaking or muscle spasms or involuntary movement. It may, it may not, and I really wouldn't worry about it. I would celebrate the noticing that you can feel these impulses for organic movements that want to arise, and that you're exploring those, that's fantastic. And then maybe you start seeing what happens if after you do that, you just really get still for a moment, and you just feel what is happening on the inside after all that movement, and while the outside is still. And maybe you'll feel other things happening. And also know that, yeah, it can be really subtle. I never had big shaking or anything like that. Most of the sympathetic discharge I experienced was vibration or very rarely, so much the teeth chattering, kind of. That was often when moving through freeze actually, or a sense of heat or cold. There's many ways it can happen. So yeah, keep on exploring and try not to expect anything to happen or not happen, because it's through being open that whatever needs to happen will. Over to you, Mara.

Mara (00:46:12):

Thanks, Seth. My next question, “my daughter is six, diagnosed with autism and pathological demand avoidance, PDA. I feel signs of complex PTSD from high stress, blame, lack of support, divorce. I feel dysregulated as soon as my daughter gets distressed about something and she might shout or cry. I struggle to cope, immediate overwhelm. Don't know how to respond to her, feel like I want to flee. I try my best to parent with compassion, but don't know how to stop being triggered by her distress. How do I let both of us know her emotions are okay when my body's stuck?” So my response to this also connects to the previous response about the parent who was coping with a child in a mental health crisis. So the first thing is to build time each day to connect to yourself, and that might be first thing in the morning, last thing at night. Another book recommendation, and I'm not sure I pulled the link for this, but Leah you can search on it, it's called Parenting From the Inside Out, and Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell are the authors of that book.

(00:47:41):

So it's really these that our kids bring out in us that help us discover our unresolved stuff. So there are a lot of prompts in that book for journaling and other ways to access what's going on from your own history that your child in this present moment is bringing up for you. The simplest thing is to just lie on the ground and be overwhelmed with her. So if you're on the ground, let her lie next to you or on top of you or somehow be there in the mess of it. And again, you don't have to fix it, you just have to be present. So lower the bar of expectations on yourself. Simplify the care needs. If you can, make food simpler, anything you can do to reduce the household management tasks. And then again, get breaks. Find ways when she's not reactive, maybe there are times of day when she's less reactive, when you can actually play or read together or go for a walk together.

(00:48:59):

Routines can be super helpful if you start to find or co-create with her a routine that supports both of you. Maybe it's going outside in the morning and greeting the sun or saying good night to the sun. Or maybe you have some nature around you that you can connect with. And then because she's six and very likely in school, find support from any teachers or therapists, and then again, listen from other parents who are in a similar situation. When my kids were in this age range, early elementary or even late preschool age, I had sometimes two or three other



parents on speed dial that were listening partners and we would exchange. We'd set a timer, I listen to you for 10 minutes, you listen to me for 10 minutes. And even having that space to hear yourself vent or problem solve out loud with a compassionate listener sometimes is all it takes to take a little bit of the pressure off. So you're doing great, and the fact that you're here in a course to learn nervous system regulation means you're several steps ahead of where you actually think you are.

Seth (00:50:28):

That's lovely, Mara. Thanks. Okay. "Hi there. I have a terrible phobia about fainting. Because of this, I disassociate very easily. Whatever I feel in my body, I start to think and believe, not feel, that I'm going to faint. And this creates even worse bodily sensations. I've had this phobia for some years. I even did some therapy but no results. Last December after a big flu, I did happen to faint and thought that I had had some new insights or some learnings, but it continues exactly the same, this huge fear of fainting. How to work with this." So again, this is a matter of uncoupling. This is a general feeling of survival, terror. Oh my god, I'm going to die essentially, if you take it to the most primal level, and it's been coupled with this thought pattern of being afraid of fainting.

(00:51:36):

The most important sentence in this question is, "Whatever I feel in my body, I start to think and believe, not feel, that I'm going to faint and this creates even worse bodily sensations." This is the human condition to a large extent. This is the sensation thought loop, and this is what Buddha called the wheel of suffering. It's the, thoughts create sensations, the sensations create thoughts. They feed back and forth in an endless cycle. And when those sensations are of survival, threat and nature, the thoughts are corresponding and that creates more of the same sensation, which creates more of the thoughts and on and on and on we go. So you are not alone. This is a very normal thing. And what we have to do is stop that wheel. The way we do that is by feeling when you find yourself thinking, and it's not easy. There's a reason they call this doing work. It's hard. You'll have to do it over and over and over and over and over again, thousands and thousands of times, because the pattern of staying in the head is very strong. However, if every time this starts to happen and you start to get the sensations, and then you start to think and believe, oh my gosh, I'm going to faint, you stop, come out of your head. Start with maybe not even the body, start with the environment. See what it's like to just like, okay, I know these thoughts are happening, but I'm not going to pay attention to them. I'm

going to look at my environment. I'm going to describe that plant to myself. Oh, look, that's a green plant and there's all these little leaves and I see flecks of brown, and literally name stuff that you see. Anything to start to train your ability to bring in your awareness, because your awareness is different than your thoughts. Your awareness is what gives you the ability to notice what you're thinking and then to do something else.

(00:53:57):

And that's what needs to happen, is, you need to train your awareness to notice the thoughts and then not pay attention to them, to pay attention to something else, anything else. Now, ultimately what we would want to have you become aware of is the direct feelings. What are they actually? Can you name them the same way that you named the green leaves with the brown spots? So eventually it's like, oh, okay, I have the thought that I'm going to faint. Just start with that, name the thought as a thought. Oh, I notice I'm having the thoughts again that I'm going to faint. What am I feeling? I'm feeling a pressure in my sternum, and there's a lightheadedness kind of, and there's a feeling of heat, intensity, whatever it is. I have no idea. But really learning to connect and maybe even name consciously, what are the feelings?

(00:54:56):

Because then you're starting to not think about how you're going to faint, you're starting to think about what you're actually feeling. You're becoming conscious of that. You're naming that. Eventually you'll then be able to work with that. So if it's a constriction in your chest, oh, I'm going to bring in a little diaphragm work with the shoulders and the breathing diaphragm. I'm going to bring in a little self-touch. What sound? Gosh, it feels like a pressure. I wonder if it could come out in some kind of sound. What is the sound of what I'm feeling? But whatever way it is that works, bringing in your various tools to work with that felt sense experience directly. And that's what needs to happen. And it is hard. It's really hard. It's lots and lots and lots and lots of repetition. So just keep on doing it. It's better than just thinking you're going to faint obsessively and being in that obsessive loop. So good on you for asking the question, and being here, and just keep on trying. Keep on working. All right, back to you, Mara.

Mara (00:56:08):

Okay. "This is my first time in SBSM. I've been leaning into my sensations, however, for the last few days I've been waking up multiple times a night with severe pain in my forearms, both forearms. I've been feeling the pain and trying not to dismiss it, however, this is recurring

---

multiple times each night and disrupting my sleep. I would be grateful for advice on how to deal with this either in the moment or the following day.” So during the day first, I think that it's super useful with pain, and I'm also a Feldenkrais practitioner prior to being a somatic-experiencing practitioner, so I come at this from a very body-centric point of view. And I've lived with my own chronic pain that I've resolved and had other bouts of chronic pain. So I have experience with chronic pain, as well as pain that seems connected to somatic symptoms from emotional causes potentially. So the first thing is to just cultivate the practice of listening to those forearms. And not just to the forearms, but maybe to the whole arm. So the super simplest thing you can do, and I'm doing this with arms elevated, so you can see, is just to hold on to your own forearms, but then you can let those two forearms rest on your chest, and just to listen. So each hand, like your right hand, is listening to your left forearm at the same time as your left hand is listening to your right forearm. And you also can become aware that you're making a loop or a circle, if you think of the chain going through the two arms, and up through your upper arms, and back through your back and chest, and around to the other arm.

(00:58:24):

So you can just hang out in this kind of position and notice what you notice coming through those forearms, but also any energy flow that you feel through any part of that system in your arms or your chest or your body. And it's not energy like woo-woo, it's very concrete in terms of sensations. You might feel heat, you might feel electricity, you might feel a sense of tension or constriction. So get as detailed as you can, and maybe at first you can only tolerate 10 seconds. I mean, I've probably been in this position now talking for a couple minutes, but start with five seconds, 10 seconds and see what you can tolerate and see what you notice. And I would do it like that a few times throughout the day to start with. And then notice what happens after you let your arms down. Is there more tension or less tension?

(00:59:36):

And just start to kind of become a detective to your own experience throughout the day. So that's the first thing. In terms of lessons that we've already introduced, we're in lab four now. So the kidney adrenal lessons of this lab four might be super valuable as another thing to pay attention to. Can you let your whole system downshift either while you're holding your arms, or forget about the arms and just do the kidney adrenal practice, and see if during the day or during the night you notice any improvement with your arms.

(01:00:19):

And then in terms of some things to look forward to, in a couple of weeks when lab six comes out, so that's week seven, lab six, there are some direct lessons that might actually help. And I'm thinking of the layers lesson as well as the very first containment lesson. So the layers lesson teaches how to touch yourself and pay attention to different layers. So you might start by paying attention to skin, and then pay attention to fascia, and then muscles, and then bone. There may be some other layers in there that I'm forgetting, but those are the essential ones. So start with what I suggested initially, and then in a couple of weeks you'll have more resources to play with. So those are my thoughts there. Do you have anything to add, Seth?

Seth (01:01:21):

Also in lab five, the dropping your adrenals, the second kidney adrenal lesson will also, yeah, probably be good. Yep, that'll be after our break week. That'll be the first one that comes. So that's another one. Yeah, absolutely. And this is a really good thing to notice in general. It's like this idea, we'll say this kind of thing a lot, like this happens at night. What do I do? Or how do I respond to my kid when they're in peak activation or really angry? A lot of the time actually what we need to do is when that's not happening, we need to work proactively with whatever the thing is when it's not at peak alarm. Because like Mara said, when the kid's already in the tantrum, that's it. You're on that train and you've just got to wait and be present. And maybe at night, whatever's happening right now, by the time you wake up with that pain, okay, well, it's already at its peak.

(01:02:25):

So most you can do may be to just be patient, wait, listen, soothe yourself. But when we are proactive in our investigations and interventions, when the alarm bells are not at peak, that's when we can start to actually get into underneath of what's really going on. So that applies in many different situations.

(01:02:47):

Okay. "Is there a connection or relationship between a dysregulated nervous system and being a highly sensitive person who perceives things on many levels?" So this is a complex one and a multi-layered answer. The first thing I'll say is that all human beings as a birthright are highly sensitive individuals who perceive things on many levels. If we all were not messed with and

we all had that lovely attachment and attunement and non-stressed parenting and good environment, and we're living on a different planet essentially, then yes, we were all meant to be very sensitive and able to perceive things at many levels.

(01:03:36):

Now what happens is with trauma, this sensitivity tends to go one of two ways. A person may learn very early to shut down, and that is kind of, I would say, the majority of the population on this planet is shut down to some degree. And so we are not sensitive when that happens. And that can explain a lot in terms of the types of things we like to consume, the type of entertainment we like. Just the constant go-go, over stimulation. It's all a way to feel because there isn't a sensitivity. And so this freeze, functional freeze essentially is what I'm talking about is probably the most prevalent adaptation. And what happens then is people who are just normally sensitive feel unusual because that's not the norm. Now, the other thing that can happen is our natural sensitivity and empathy becomes coupled with survival energy.

(01:04:46):

And that is usually when someone is talking about, I'm an HSP or I'm a highly sensitive person, or I'm an empath and it's disturbing what they're... Usually that's what's going on is our natural sensitivity has gone into overdrive. And this is what I did, constantly scanning and feeling into every situation and person around us at a micro level, so that we know how to navigate that minefield. Because if I can feel what's going on in my dad from 40 feet away, I know to avoid the room he's in right now, and I know how to speak to him so that I don't get screamed at. So when we're talking HSP, empath, this kind of thing, and the way it's often talked about, that's usually just our normal human empathy and sensitivity, but it's been coupled with the survival energy, and so it's on hyper alert.

(01:05:42):

Now, what tends to happen as we get more regulated is, at least this is what I've noticed for myself and other clients like this, is that it seems that that sensitivity often does not change. What happens instead is that it's not a problem anymore. And what we can learn to do is learn to dampen it a bit, or really learn to use it as a superpower, essentially. So the reason that people who went through trauma themselves are often really good somatic practitioners is because you learn to hone that very sensitive sense in an artistic way such that you can really feel the field of what's happening with your client and in the room, and then it becomes very,

very useful. So that is my take on that. I hope that all makes sense. Anything to add to that, Mara?

Mara (01:06:41):

No, that was beautiful.

Seth (01:06:43):

Okay.

Mara (01:06:45):

Thanks. I'm going to wrap it up with my last question. "Hello. I have experienced a lot of anxiety. I'm not afraid of it. Often I try to relax into it, meaning I try to soften everything. Other times I try to engage with it more. I run, push, voo, but no matter what I do, it seems it's not connecting to the energy ball in my chest. There might be a really small bit of energy moving, but it could also be wishful thinking."

(01:07:19):

"So my question is, is it possible that the energy is released in tiny small bits or is it supposed to feel complete with one session?" So I love this question, and the first thing I'm going to do, which I'll give you a clue into how we moderate sometimes when we're moderating, we really carefully read what you've written, and we find the ways in which you're already answering your own questions. So in this whole paragraph, you know that there might be a small bit of energy moving, there might be a small shift, and you have some self-doubt about that. Maybe that's just wishful thinking, but I'm just going to say full stop, if you think there's even the possibility of a tiny bit moving, let yourself believe in that.

(01:08:16):

Tiny bits might be all that somebody's system can tolerate at the moment, and that's great. Any movement is a sign of movement. The other thing that I noticed from the language that you used is active. So this is very common because we're in a culture of trying to fix as opposed to trying to witness. So there's relaxing into it, or engaging with it more. But I would invite you to consider bearing witness to your own experience, and some ways in which you could do that are kind of like what I was suggesting with the arms, but here you could put a hand on

your chest or wherever the ball of energy ball in your chest is, put a hand near it and just ask some questions.

(01:09:19):

Ask about its color, its size, its density, its voice, if it has something to say. And check in on it at different times of day, and when you're in different moods. When it's not screaming at you, when it's just there. When you forget about it, set a timer, see, oh, is my energy ball there?

(01:09:47):

And then sometimes it's really helpful if we're not feeling movement ourself in something that feels big and stuck, to have another witness. So another witness could be a trusted body worker, even a partner if you have one, or a friend, and just having another human skilled hand, or hand directed by you. You could say, that's too much pressure. Or move left or move right. Or put your hand on the middle of my back. If you can't reach your own back and you wanted to get a sense of the volumetric nature of this ball, what would it be like to just have somebody put one or two hands on your back, and hang out there again for 30 seconds, or for three minutes, and hang out there, and then ask them to remove their hands, and notice if you can track, or if you can begin to develop the skill to track, what it's like and what those measures, color, texture, size, all of that, what it's like when the support is there, and then what it's like after that support has been removed.

(01:11:14):

Do you notice that then you can characterize the nature of that energy ball as moving in more refined ways. Sort of like right now, the vocabulary is that it's there and it's stuck, but maybe there's a whole lot more nuance there. And sometimes it's red and sometimes it's purple and sometimes it's green and sometimes it's a ball of spaghetti and sometimes it's a tennis ball. And so whatever the imagery or the vocabulary that emerges for you, to try to make it richer so that you can start to... If it were a yarn ball – I knit. So if you get a ball of yarn that's really tangled and you have to patiently figure out how to unknot that, and that takes time. And so that's one image that might be meaningful. But I don't know what images speak to you. I'm just throwing out a bunch. So I think I'll leave it with that, unless Seth has anything more on that question. And then of course, anything to wrap up the whole call.

Seth (01:12:32):

Thanks, Mara. The only other thing I thought of while you were speaking is also sometimes it's useful when we feel something in a specific area to work with the idea of a container. So that can be like Mara was suggesting with your hands or someone else's hand. But you can also do that with your imagination. Can you imagine having a container around that sensation? Can you tell the size of it, the edges of it, such that you can sense what it would be like for it to be held? And then what might it be like to imagine that container expanding a little bit, or breathing with you as you breathe? That's another way to work with this sometimes. And generally speaking, yeah, this stuff doesn't change all at once. Usually it's much more in this sort of little bits at a time kind of way.

(01:13:24):

And then sometimes that's not true. Sometimes things shift very quickly. So like I said, there's no hard and fast rules with this stuff. So all right, I think that is everything for this round. Thank you so much, Mara. Really appreciated you being here. Thank you Leah and Ari as well. And thank you everybody here.

(01:13:45):

Next week is a break week, so please use that time, however it serves you best. Back when I was in my SE training, whenever we would have a significant break, my trainer would always say, I'll encourage you to orient to pleasure, or to orient to goodness. What might that be like, to allow yourself a week to frequently orient to pleasurable or good things in your life? And then what does that feel like on the inside, as you do that? So that could be something to explore. And of course, use the time however you wish. If you want to catch up, if you want to do nothing. Great. So we'll see you all again in a couple of weeks. Thanks all.