



Conscious Life presents

# ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

## Anxiety and coming home to the body

**Guest: Dr Arielle Schwartz**

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### **[00:00:10] Alex Howard**

Welcome, everyone, to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Dr Arielle Schwartz.

Firstly, Arielle, welcome and thank you so much for joining me.

### **Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Thank you for having me. It's lovely to be here with you again, Alex.

### **Alex Howard**

So we've done this a few times together in our conferences, going in some different places. And I'm particularly excited today to be getting into, really some of the embodied elements of working with anxiety, particularly looking at things like therapeutic yoga, looking at working with conscious breathing, with the vagus nerve.

Just to give you a bit of Arielle's background, Arielle Schwartz is a licensed clinical Psychologist, Certified Complex Trauma Professional, and Yoga Teacher with a private practice in Boulder, Colorado.

As an internationally sought out teacher and leading voice in the healing of PTSD complex trauma, she's also the author of six books. She's dedicated to offering informational, mental health and wellness updates through her writing, public speaking, social media presence, and blog.

Arielle, I think a good starting point, anxiety means different things to different people. And it's one of those causal terms that we can use meaning different things. So I'm curious to you, when someone comes to you and says, I have anxiety or anxiety is something which has been impacting my life in difficult ways, what are you hearing them say? What does anxiety mean to you?

### **Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Well, I think that the phrase, it's a casual term, is really what I want to lean into, that it's this very big umbrella. And I think it has to do with our fear response, but anxiety is not a really helpful term. It's something that actually in itself can lead us to feel a little more anxious.

So if we hone in on, how do you know you're anxious? What does anxiety look like or feel like for you? What are the kinds of thoughts that you're having? What are you sensing and feeling in your body?

What are the emotions? Because anxiety isn't an emotion. What are the emotions that are present or that are not present when you're experiencing this thing you're calling anxiety?

**[00:02:39]**

And so if we get really descriptive with it, then we have something to work with. Then we can lean into, like at this tightness across my chest or I feel like it's difficult for me to breathe. Oh, okay. Well, let's be curious about that. And we might explore and deepen from those more specific points or descriptive experiences into your direct experience and how it shows up for you. It can kind of affect all of the systems of our body in a way, how we're thinking and our nervous system, our endocrine system, our respiratory system, our digestive system.

**Alex Howard**

And in a sense, there's that surface experience of anxiety, but there's also many different, as you alluded to, factors or variables that can be, in a sense, underneath it. We can start to open up a little bit. What are some of those different factors and variables that can be underneath that surface experience of anxiety?

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Well, as you know, I'm kind of oriented with a trauma-informed lens, and so certainly for me, I get curious about what is the unfinished business of the past from a somatic perspective. If there were stressful, challenging or traumatic life events, what is lingering in our nervous system or in our psyche that's not fully processed? And in what way is the anxiety the front edge symptom that's calling us to attend to that unfinished business?

So it may be that there is that. And I think that, as you're speaking with so many of us throughout this conference, you're going to hear many different perspectives on imbalances in the nervous system, for example, and where our autonomic nervous system can get stuck in either being more in the on position, more of our sympathetic, driven state, or maybe we get more shut down and stuck feeling like we can't rise up to meet the demands of the world.

And in either of those cases, we can feel ineffective or out of control even in response to what's happening in our interior.

**Alex Howard**

Because I think that can sometimes be one of the challenges, can't it, that one starts to have sensations or feelings or emotions that are happening that either feel overwhelming or feel scary or people don't feel in control of, and so the response is one of anxiety, which is almost a way of trying to control or escape from or disconnect from, which somehow then often perpetuate some of those cycles.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Yes. And certainly if you've ever had something like a panic attack, what then arises is that even if you get a small tinge of anxiety, that worst case scenario of thinking kicks in in the memory of those worst experiences of that, I've experienced panic and I know for me that it's a terrible feeling. It feels like the world is closing in on you or you can't breathe or you feel trapped inside of the symptoms. It's a terrible feeling.

**[00:06:11]**

But it also is self-reinforcing that the next time you have even a little bit of those sensations or symptoms or a triggering event, you go, oh no, I'm going to have another one of those. It's going to feel so out of control.

One thing that I'll share with you is that I had a really significant history of my own anxiety, including panic, but especially around public speaking, which is kind of funny because I do a lot of it.

**Alex Howard**

I think folks might be surprised to hear that.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

In fact, even when I would go to teach a yoga class, ironically, I would walk into the class and it would break out in hives. And I had so much anxiety about sitting in front of a group of people and speaking. And all of these worst case scenario thoughts were coming in of like, people are going to judge me, I'm going to say something stupid, they're going to see me as incapable in some way.

In terms of just my own personal experience, I would say that the irony of all of that is that by the end of the yoga class, I would feel great. I was like, okay.

**Alex Howard**

It's almost like you were taking the class you were teaching.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Exactly. I was like, oh, something about this is working. But of course, I also needed to do my own therapy. I started teaching yoga in my 20s, so I've been at this for a long time, and I needed to do my own therapy and really get underneath what I was projecting onto that group of people? What did I imagine they were going to see?

And a lot of it had to do with how I felt judged and not fully accepted growing up in my childhood home. And that became this internal voice that I turned towards myself and I also put on everybody else. That's how I expected they were going to see me.

**Alex Howard**

Well, you mentioned yoga, it's a nice place, actually, to bring in the role of embodiment and therapeutic yoga and how that can help work with anxiety.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

One thing that I will say is that it's not a fast fix. They're going to be this both and. Because having taught yoga for, I guess at this point over 25 years, I would say that sometimes the tools that we have within the yoga practice, for example slowing down your breath, attending to how we're breathing or focusing on breathing lower down by opening up the diaphragm and that tension that we tend to hold in that band across the diaphragm that limits the filling of the lower lungs.

**[00:08:56]**

And that softening or belly breathing, all of those are really beneficial for reducing anxiety, but they also can open up more of our interoceptive awareness. They'll open up more sensory awareness the more that we're dropping in or breathing deeply or slowing down. And that can also be scary.

So we get a little bit of a catch 22 in here of, I want to do something that slows me down and helps me connect to my body. And yet it's scary when I do that.

**Alex Howard**

It can also be where the emotions have been stored. If we sped up to disconnect, as we slow down we start to feel those feelings perhaps we've not been feeling.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

That's right. And so a lot of it also has to do with building our own capacity to be with our emotions and be tender with ourselves when that arises.

**Alex Howard**

What do you find helps support that? So, often what happens is that in a sense, we tend to respond to ourselves emotionally the way that we were responded to emotionally. So the way the patterns got set up is often how we've learned to respond to them.

And so if someone's working, for example, let's say we're becoming more embodied, and perhaps they're working with breathing the way that you described, as they start to feel some of those things, what do you find helps them be with and be present with that?

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Generally, I think that the most beneficial way to relearn or internalize a new way of being with ourselves is through the co-regulation of a really caring and understanding relational experience.

And ironically, yoga is very much something that we think of that we're just doing on our own. We roll out our mat and we're doing our own practice. And I think it's a great practice to have and to be able to eventually be a good self co-regulator in the sense of, I can attend to those emotions or those felt sense of myself in the most loving, caring way.

But if that's hard to do, then we learn that by actually having an experience with someone else that can be with us in that caring way and offering that lens of curiosity without judgment so that we can go, oh, wow. You were able to sit with me while I had that most uncomfortable feeling or while I cried or while I felt so vulnerable or I told you about my fears and you didn't reject me. So that's possible.

**Alex Howard**

Also, it's just, in my mind tracking that back to my anxiety, part of it as well is, you spoke earlier around the anxiety around anxiety. But when we have, for example, that hint of panic that might come, and then we have a response to that. And what I'm hearing you say is part of it is almost feeling a place of okayness or a place of safety, even in a place of anxiety, like it to be okay to have that experience.

**[00:11:59] Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Yes, I think that's exactly right. We're actually not going to get over anxiety by staying safe all the time. Because look what we end up doing when we have anxiety is we make our world smaller. If you're agoraphobic, you don't want to leave your house. You're scared to go out into the world. And so the more that we don't go out into the world, the more that basically our brain says, well, that world must be really scary.

So we have to find a way to walk out the front door. Obviously, I'm using this somewhat metaphorically right now. We have to find a way to turn towards the thing that we're most afraid of with sufficient support.

One of my mentors, her name is Betty Cannon, she's here in Boulder, and she's been my primary mentor for many years. And as a gestalt therapist, what she says is we want to be safe but not too safe. And so there is this balance between knowing that we're safe enough to feel not safe.

**Alex Howard**

That's beautiful.

Because I think sometimes the strategy that I think we can use when we experience anxiety is we think that if I can control the circumstances or the environment enough, then I will feel safe. It's like we're trying to think our way or control our way to a feeling of safety. And what you're saying is actually that's just feeding the cycle.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Exactly. And I would say that a big part of what to me feels like the heart of unwinding this, is how do we become okay with the unknown? How do we actually know that we can't actually control what's going to come next?

Even going back to public speaking, if I'm trying to manage and control the next thing I'm going to say to you, I'm not in the moment. And it's very alive to be in the moment and it can feel scary, but it's also exciting. And that edge of excitement and fear is exactly what we're trying to meet.

There's another famous gestalt saying which I think comes from Fritz Perls, which is anxiety or fear is excitement without the breath.

**Alex Howard**

It's funny. Someone else actually used that and I just loved it. I hadn't heard it before, but I just love it.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

It's brilliant. And it comes back to then how do we catch our breath?

**Alex Howard**

And of course, that's one of the places that yoga can be so helpful. We moved through it quite quickly when you talked about breathing practices, maybe you say a little bit more about a few of the specifics of those practices, but also just why they can be so helpful.

**[00:14:58] Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Yeah. I'll offer up that what is profoundly helpful is actually to simply slow down the breath. Like if there's three keys to knowing how to breathe in a way that's going to help us soften in response to fear or the world at large and all that's happening around us, because there's so much right now, it's going to be slowing it down, dropping it down.

So that if we can slow down to 6 breaths a minute, which actually isn't that hard, or even ultimately 4 breaths a minute, we are going to change the state of our nervous system. It's just that simple.

And if we can draw the breath down from the upper chest down into the lower lungs by expanding across the diaphragm in the belly and allowing that reach and that stretch and that deepening.

And the other piece here is to notice the relationship between your inhale and exhale, so that's the third one. It's slowing it down so that there are fewer breaths per minute. It's deepening it down into being able to reside more in your lower body. And then the third one is what's that ratio between your inhale and your exhale?

And if you're really feeling keyed up, emphasize your exhale. If we look at animals in nature, animals are never going to have a longer exhalation than in their inhalation unless they're safe. Unless they're relaxed. Our fight, flight or our flee breath, our self protection breath is a rapid inhalation. It's going to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system and it's going to let us basically send fuel to our muscles to get out of here and it's going to pull the energy away from our digestive organs.

But when we're safe (breathe). You've probably heard someone else talk about this one too, but this idea of the physiological sigh. I don't know if this new to you?

**Alex Howard**

Not specifically actually. So I'd like to speak to it.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Actually, it's something that I came across through the work of Andrew Huberman and The Huberman Lab and his research on the breath. He's a fantastic resource around this.

But in an interview that he did with a man named Jack Feldman, sent me on this rabbit trail of curiosity about this understanding of the physiological side, which is a reset for our lower brain centers. So if we think of the autonomic nervous system being balanced, or the control functions of that reside in our brain stem, in our reptilian brain, our lowest brain, that the physiological side or a yawning response is a lovely reset for that.

And again, it's going to just be a really fast communication between body and mind that we're safe now. So what that might look like is just (sigh). You can do it with me. It feels good. And sometimes you can think about it as like a little double inhale and then (sigh), just letting everything go. And it feels good. It doesn't take that long to really feel like there's this flush of, I can just be.

**[00:18:38] Alex Howard**

It makes me think as well about the relationship between mind and body because often anxiety, of course people experience anxiety in the body, but also often in the mind, it's like I need to be able to calm my mind, to be able to calm my body.

And what I think is quite interesting in what you just introduced is that in a sense, by moving the body differently, we're also then helping the mind to settle.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Exactly. And we're actually going to work in alignment with our physiology when we create change, what we call bottom up change or allowing the body to change the brain and allowing the lower brain centers to influence our upper brain centers because it stacks that way.

So if our lower brain centers are in flight, flight and trying to help us survive, our upper brain centers, which are basically now going to be kind of our thoughts and meaning making, are going to rely upon that information and try and fit the thoughts to match the feeling.

If we can shape a felt sense of safety, our upper brain is actually going to just go, oh, okay, I know I'm safe. And actually then it becomes available for things like creativity and curiosity and positive thinking or manifesting or whatever you want to put in there.

**Alex Howard**

It also strikes me that part of the mechanism that's integrating these parts is the vagus nerve. I think part of what you're describing is ways of working with the vagus nerve, but maybe you say a bit more about what the vagus nerve does and why it's such an important part of the physiology of all of this.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

A few of my favorite things to think about with the vagus nerve. First of all, 80% of the vagus nerve information is carried from the body up to the brain. It's actually why I said before that we're working with our physiology when we're working in this bottom up manner, because if we're trying to think our way out of anxiety, we actually only have about 20% of those nerve fibers in which thinking is going to change how we feel.

But when we change how we're breathing or the sensory experience in which we're really softening into a felt sense of safety in the body, we have 80% of that that's going to go in the upward direction to actually create physiological shifts.

The vagus nerve, one of the ways we can think about it is that it's like a power cord. And if you go out into the world and you're waiting for a phone call and your phone is low on juice and you don't have your power cord, you're going to feel anxious. We all know that one. Oh, no, I'm not going to be able to get that important phone call.

And so it's not that the power cord doesn't carry, or if we use our computer metaphor here, it doesn't carry all of the information, but it carries the necessary charge to use that information. And so if we think about the computer, in this case would be your brain and your brain stem, but we need that power cord to basically send the information in, to allow us to access it and to receive the call.

**[00:21:58]**

And so when we're working with the vagus nerve, the vagus nerve is through what Stephen Porges refers to as neuroception, is basically constantly involved in determining whether we're safe, whether there's a threat, whether there's a life threat. If there's some significant danger out there.

And using your senses and how your heart rate is, how you're breathing, what's happening in your gut, your neuroception, or that unconscious processing of all of this information, about the look on your face, your body language, the sounds in my environment, what I'm feeling inside of me, all of this information is going in, and it's basically going to unconsciously allow me to adapt to whether or not there's a threat out there.

And this is really important. And we want to know to be able to respond to a threat even without having to think about it, because it helps protect us. It keeps us safe.

### **Alex Howard**

One of the things that comes to my mind is that there's that neuroception response in terms of what happens in our body, but then often anxiety is our mind trying to respond to that and make sense of that. Particularly that anticipatory anxiety, like, what if this? What if that?

And I guess I'm curious as to, if someone notices that they are triggered in that way, like they've walked into a room and they've had that neuroception response or an event happened and they've had that response, and they notice that anxiety starting to rise, what in those moments will help them change the direction of that?

### **Dr Arielle Schwartz**

You already named the first step in that, which is that you notice it. I noticed that that anxiety starts to arise. Because often the build up of our response to the world happens underneath the lens of our own awareness. And so we might not become aware that we're in an anxiety response until enough is accumulated.

So the first step is to notice and actually to build more somatic or body awareness. And again, this comes back to yoga or any mindfulness practice where we're observing or sensing and feeling the body more and more frequently.

And the second is that once we can consciously perceive the state of our nervous system via how is my body feeling? Or can I sense my heart rate? Or can I sense how I'm breathing? Once we can attend to the state of our nervous system, then we can start to discern, is the state of my nervous system an accurate reflection of my environment? Is it an accurate reflection of my environment? Am I having a false positive? Is there basically an alarm going off in a house where there's no fire?

And if that's the case, I can then engage my sensory awareness, my external senses of what am I seeing? What am I smelling? Is there smoke? What am I hearing? Pulling the sensory information to go, is there actually a threat here?

And then I might say, no, there's no threat. Alex actually is really friendly, and he's smiling and he's nodding. Oh, I'm okay. And so then we can actually work with that sensory experience and breathe in a way and sense and maybe put your hand over your heart or hand over your belly and go, oh, wow, I was having an anxiety response, and it wasn't necessary.



**[00:25:43]**

But here's the flip side, Alex, and I think this is so important, which is that sometimes, and this is very much about trauma, is that sometimes we've had to override our neuroception of threat for the sake of survival in environments where there were threats. But in order to survive that, I actually had to dial down my sensory awareness of it or tune it out.

And in those cases, sometimes what happens is I walk into a house, there's a fire, but the alarms don't go off. And basically I'm non responding to environments that are truly unsafe or people that are truly unsafe and maybe ending up in relationships with people that could be harmful to me or walking into places and not tuning into there's that sketchy thing going on over there.

So sometimes what we have to do or what we find that's necessary when we dial up our conscious perception of neuroception via sensing and feeling the body, is that we'll start to tune into the felt sense of threat, and it actually then becomes our friend. We don't want to get rid of all of our fear. Fear is necessary to keep us safe in the world. We just want to know when it's necessary.

### **Alex Howard**

Yes. It's also something about, going back to something we touched on a little bit earlier about learning how to respond effectively, but also to, in a sense, self soothe and to be able to be with those feelings or those sensations that might feel difficult.

Because I think for some of us, if we have that neuroception response and our nervous system is activated, it goes back to that point earlier, anxiety about anxiety or the response that we have to that.

And yes, as you spoke, awareness is really important, but there's also awareness plus something. Like something around, be it building of capacity, be it a certain courage initially. I'm wondering what you find, perhaps particularly working one-on-one with people as you're helping them build that safety with those places, what helps them take those leaps or what helps them to be present to that which they've historically not been?

### **Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Actually, there's a phrase you said in there that really struck me, and I just want to pull it out because there was a lot of richness in what you just spoke to, anxiety plus something. And you mentioned anxiety plus courage. And that really touches me.

And I think that's a huge element of this, awareness plus something and awareness plus courage, that there's this way in which it takes courage to cultivate greater self-awareness. And the courage is what allows us to be with something uncomfortable and to stay present to it.

So often, and trust me, I do this, too, so often we feel something uncomfortable and we're like, I want to jump ship, I want to scroll on my phone, I want to eat something, drink something, just anything to get me out of this feeling.

And so courage is what then lets us stay with something just that little bit longer. So it's awareness plus sustained awareness, sustaining in there. And whether that's another person that helps me stay with something just a little bit longer, whether that's me on my yoga mat choosing to sit or stay in a yoga posture just a little bit longer. Because it's very often that element of time that allows something new to occur.

### **[00:29:44] Alex Howard**

Of course, I'm now going to ask, what helps us have courage? We've got into a rabbit hole here together. Again, it's interesting to me that often people that experience a lot of anxiety, and I include myself historically, particularly in my teenage years, in my 20s, I had a lot of anxiety. And my narrative of myself was that I was someone that wasn't courageous because I found myself a lot of the time in these difficult states and anxiety. And over time, I had quite a different perspective on that.

But I'm interested, particularly from your thoughts of when you're working with folks that are struggling with anxiety and maybe part of their story is, because I have this anxiety, I don't have courage. But also, in a sense, the ingredient that perhaps they need is to embody a bit more of that courage. How do you see that?

### **Dr Arielle Schwartz**

I think there's a lot of different ways that we can build that capacity to stay with something longer. One being that, again, maybe there's another person who's an ally who stands by my side. We can also pull in imagined allies, like who do you imagine would have your back or encourage you forward or say the kindest thing to you right now? So sometimes we can pull in those imagined forces that allow us to stand in something uncomfortable.

And there's something about embodying courage, which is a phrase you used in there. And I think about, if you imagine a time, and anyone watching this can do this, if you imagine a time when you felt empowered, when you felt like you really were able to handle something, even though it was scary.

Who was there with you or whether you were on your own, what allowed you to access that experience? How did it feel in your body? What was the posture that your body naturally went towards in that positive experience of success or empowerment or a time when you were courageous?

Like, I notice I'm getting taller as I talk to you about this. I'll probably go out of my window here. My Zoom window, not my window of tolerance. Literally our chest lifts, our heart lifts, there's more space for us when we imagine, when you imagine a time when you have felt courageous. And our body will rise to meet that. So even recalling a time when you felt that way can help you bring that with you into another time when you want to feel that way.

### **Alex Howard**

It's funny, as you're talking I was remembering at the weekend I took my eldest daughter, who's nearly 11, and a good friend of hers from school on a high ropes course. I've done quite a few high ropes courses with our eldest daughter and she runs around these things. I'm the middle aged dad trying to keep up. But with this one I hadn't researched it properly and it was much harder and it was much higher and it just kept on getting higher and higher.

And this friend of hers, my oldest is very dyslexic and they are at a specialist school together so they've got various neurodiversity things going on, and this friend is highly dyspraxic and was really struggling with the clipping on and off. So I was growing in anxiety that we were getting higher and higher and I couldn't trust her to do the bit that they were supposed to do.

**[00:33:31]**

Anyway, there was a point towards the end, after about 2 and a half hours I lost all my upper body strength. I became more and more exhausted and I was genuinely starting to feel really scared. We were probably like 60ft up and we're climbing up these tiny ladders and the staff, I'm sure if we shouted someone would have come running, but it would have taken them a while to get to us.

But the reason why I tell the story is that there was a moment where I could feel that I wanted to freak out. Genuinely my window tolerance was down to very narrow. And in that moment it didn't feel like courage, although I think in hindsight it was, what it felt like was, I just have to do the next right thing. And the next right thing is I need to get us from here to there, and then when we get from there, we get to there and then we'd ride the zip wire and we're out.

But it was like I think often the story that a lot of us have about courage comes from movies when it's like Arnold Schwarzenegger running around shooting, looking big and bold and powerful. But my experience in that moment and what you say makes me think about it because I think often we have this glamorized idea of a reality which is like what's the next right thing that I need to do in front of me?

### **Dr Arielle Schwartz**

I absolutely love this story that you shared, Alex. I'm so glad that you spoke about it. I can really visualize you all up there. It also brings to mind another form of courage. And I'll speak to this one actually also via a story of a panic attack that I had and ironically it was also on an adventure, not a ropes course adventure but we had taken a multiple family river trip.

And at the end of the river trip it ends up in Canyonlands in Utah of the US, the Southern US, Southwestern. And in Canyonlands there are all of these slot canyons and really cool mazes that you can follow through the rocks. And the rocks are very tall so at some point you yourself might feel very small inside of these high rock wall canyons.

And a friend of ours was taking about ten of us through this route, and don't tell the rangers, they're not going to listen to this story, but at one point we're walking on this trail and it said, stay on the trail. And this actually ties in a little bit to neurodiversity as well because my son also has dyslexia.

And at the time he was, I don't know, 12 years old or so. And when our friend took this route off the trail to go check out this one slot Canyon, my son stopped and he said, well, we can't go off the trail. He saw the sign. And in a way I wanted to do it, all right.

And so I stopped with him and we got separated from our group. And it's a very large area. They didn't realize that we got separated. And so I'm sitting there with, what's the next right thing? Do we stay on the trail and stay separated from our group? And I had no idea where I was. We really had gone quite a way into the National Park. Or do we stay with our group, which in some ways is safer? But I have to convince my son to cross the line.

Anyhow, there are many elements to the story. Eventually we caught up to our group. We went across the line. I was just like, we just need to stay together. This is going to override one morality for another. Let's go over here. So we get to our group and the next obstacle that we face is that we're going through this slot Canyon and there's a drop off, like a big drop off in which we had to help each other and chimney down this slot Canyon and I froze.

**[00:37:38]**

And so my husband and several other people had already, and my daughter and the rest of the group had already gone down. Once again, my son and I and this time one other person, we're stuck at the top of the Canyon and we decide, well, we'll go around this slot Canyon and see if we can meet them at the bottom. We get lost and separated a second time.

And at this point, as we're making our way through the desert, I started to feel that I had this tightness in my chest. And I started having difficulty breathing. And my first thought was I must be having an allergy attack. Why can't I breathe? I started to wheeze. I didn't know that I was having a panic attack.

And eventually I got so bad that I felt like I was going to pass out. And I sat down and it all came out, like the whole thing, you know that breath. And our friend was able to connect to the rest of the group and brought my husband back and at that point, I just sobbed. I was angry, I was scared, I was angry that he went ahead with the group and let my son and I get left behind. I was angry that he didn't track that I didn't want to go down the Canyon. All of the feelings came out.

And of course, what resolved in that was that I was no longer anxious. The panic also resolved within, thankfully, a safe enough relational field where he was just able to hear it all and not react offensively. And in that moment, the courage was really about being profoundly vulnerable and just allowing what I was trying to manage and control to not be managed and to just be accurate with what I was feeling.

#### **Alex Howard**

That's pretty powerful. What I'm really hearing is that in a sense, the anxiety was your nervous system's way of saying there's something to pay attention to here. There's something that needs to be said and it needs to be expressed. Something in your inner guidance is being violated somehow.

#### **Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Yes. And I think that that's why, coming back to and looping right around to where we started with this kind of catch all, is that if you think of anxiety like one of those big nets, those trolling nets that goes behind the boat, it's going to catch everything. It's going to catch all of our unprocessed emotions and connections to historical times when we felt maybe separated from a group or maybe when we felt not heard or not seen, it's going to catch all of the stuff and all of the associations.

And so we might find, yes, there's beautiful fish in the net and maybe there's a boot, but it's going to catch everything in there. And so sometimes when we're working with anxiety, the slowing everything down lets us sort out what got caught in the net.

#### **Alex Howard**

And that sometimes anxiety is not because something's dysfunctional. Sometimes anxiety is actually, like in the instance you described, is a positive thing, like it's a call to listen to or honor something which actually was really important in that moment.

#### **Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Yeah. This actually helps me connect back to my public speaking anxiety. So I had all this performance anxiety, not because I didn't ultimately want to be a public speaker, but because I so

badly wanted to do this. I so badly wanted to stand up and be able to speak to people. But all of that anxiety was actually, it wouldn't have been there if there wasn't part of me that wanted to do it. I just would never have sat in front of a group of people.

**[00:41:40] Alex Howard**

I wouldn't have mattered.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

So when we can befriend all of that, we actually can step into our potential, we can become more. So anxiety may just be calling us forwards to become more of ourselves.

**Alex Howard**

That's beautiful. I'm mindful of time, but I want to just, before we talk about where people can find out more about your work, I'd love to just bring it down to a few practical pieces.

We talked about the breathing earlier, that's a very simple practice people can work with. And also that there was the physiological side. Is there anything else you want to say, just in terms of practical tools, to particularly perhaps help this coming home to the body, like really coming to this more embodied place in terms of how we meet our experience?

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

I would say that when we're practicing any kind of embodiment practice, whether that's yoga for you or whatever that might be, that we're cultivating ultimately the capacity to turn our attention inward.

If we think about that the anxiety is often driven by the sympathetic nervous system, and that when we feel safe, we're allowed to drop into our parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system is eyes out to the world. My attention and energy is being pulled outward to mobilize me, to move me out, to extend into the world or to determine if there's a threat.

But my parasympathetic nervous system allows me to settle inward and drop into stillness or be with my interior world, be with my internal felt sense. And as we're navigating between kind of eyes out or eyes in, sometimes as we go inward, as we've already named, that's where the emotions lie. That's where the unfinished business resides.

So that might feel scary so we build our capacity through knowing, first of all, that we have choice, because choice is one of the most profound elements of being able to access that courage to go inward. And we might need to have eyes open just enough to determine I'm safe. I can see my flower. I can see your face. Whatever I'm looking at, I know that I'm safe.

And with that knowledge of safety, I can start to go inward and I can start to sense and feel. Now I can always come back out if I need to reassess whether there's any current threat. And so that oscillating of attention between out into the world and my inner experience is a way to build that capacity to go inward.

**[00:44:25]**

And to cultivate that compassionate dialogue so that if we think about a yoga practice as an invitation for conversation with yourself. So that if there's a bubbling up of emotion, how can I respond to that? How can I attend to that or a sensation?

And you're seeing a lot in my body language. Maybe it's placing your hand over a sensation. Maybe it's curling towards a sensation and backing away from it so that everything becomes this oscillating of going in and taking a break. So I don't feel like I get stuck in something that I don't have the capacity to handle or stuck out avoiding it.

So these are some of the tools that when I'm teaching therapeutic yoga for trauma that we're building that capacity to listen and to turn towards at a pace that I can tolerate and ultimately perhaps to really settle into that interior landscape of the self which really is its own journey.

**Alex Howard**

That's beautiful.

Arielle, for people that want to find out more about you and your work, where's the best place to go and also what's some of what they can find?

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Great. So you can find me at [drarielleschwartz.com](https://drarielleschwartz.com), which is my website and I have a blog there and I have only a million articles that I've written over many years because I just love to do that, about the body and about yoga and about polyvagal theory and about trauma.

And I'm on Facebook at [Dr Arielle Schwartz](#) and I'm on other [social media platforms](#) and I also have a [YouTube channel](#) and that's if you are interested in exploring some of the therapeutic yoga for trauma, I have probably about 100 videos on there at this point. They're free. It was my pandemic passion project of how do I make these tools and some of them are short and some are longer.

And I still teach live classes on Zoom so you're welcome to join me. They are Saturdays at Mountain time, but it works for the UK. So I've got a lot of folks that come in from Europe too. So you can find all of that on the website.

**Alex Howard**

Fantastic. Dr Arielle Schwartz or Arielle as I've been calling you, my very English way, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

**Dr Arielle Schwartz**

Thanks, Alex. I enjoyed our conversation.