



Conscious Life presents

# ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

## Sensory-based approach to anxiety

Guest: Dr Cathy Malchiodi

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### **[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson**

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Anxiety Super Conference. Today I'm speaking with Dr Cathy Malchiodi.

She holds a doctorate in psychology and is an expressive arts therapist specializing in the treatment of traumatic stress. For the last three decades, Cathy has worked with traumatized children, adolescents, adults, and families, expanding the range of understanding of nonverbal, sensory-based concepts and methods.

She's the executive director of the Trauma-Informed Practices and Expressive Arts Therapy Institute that has provided online and live training in expressive arts and somatosensory approaches to over 25,000 practitioners around the world.

Dr Cathy Malchiodi, thank you so much for being with us today.

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Great to be here today. Good to see you again.

### **Meagen Gibson**

So how are expressive arts based and sensory based methods effective self-help approaches when it comes to anxiety and distress?

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Well, what's interesting is it's one of the most researched areas in this field, which makes it unique because a lot of what expressive arts and sensory-based approaches do, a lot of it is anecdotal and a lot of it has been used for trauma and loss, grief, a lot of different issues.

But in the area of arts-based approaches and sensory-based approaches, we have the best data about how they're effective, especially in self-regulation. I think we're learning more about that. It can be very small time periods of using these methods to help people reduce anxiety.

### **Meagen Gibson**

When you say small time periods, I just want to get really specific, are you talking about minutes, hours, weeks?

### **[00:01:52] Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

It's like anything else. The studies have shown 15 minutes to 45 minutes of some kind of art-based activity. Now, some of it can be visual art making, some of it's listening to music. Some of it has to do with movement, play, maybe even humor injected into that, too. But that time frame is pretty accurate for how we can get benefits during very small amounts.

Now I say this with that caveat about exercise. So we can't just exercise for 15 minutes a week and really get the full benefits from it. So if it's done regularly, but regularly means not even that big of an amount of time, it can be two or three times a week.

So some of these studies they found early on in nurses who are tremendously stressed in hospital situations, and if they use part of their lunch hour for 15 minutes, sit down, just draw, relax, just do whatever they want to, that is enjoyable in terms of maybe making something or drawing something or creating something. But they got a significant reduce in cortisol. Now it gets even more powerful if you extend that to 45 minutes.

So we all don't have 45 minutes, but a lot of times we do have 15 minutes. But again, it's that regularity. You have to do it on a regular basis to keep those effects going.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Because taking one walk does not make you a marathoner, right? Sadly, for both of us, I suppose. And that's so interesting. As you were talking, I was imagining all of the meetings that I've been in where somebody's doodling and the natural instinct that we have to express ourselves as a way of just even subconsciously coping with discomfort, or stress, or boredom, frankly, for that matter, and doodling in the margins of our paper.

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

I think that's probably why it goes on a lot of this, what I'm saying, now, they're proving it through research, but humans have done this for thousands of years. They've created images, they've danced, they sing together, they have rituals together that are all sensory-based, art expression type things. People do these things for a reason, so we naturally gravitate towards it.

Now at least we're starting to know through quantitative- and even the anecdotal stuff, has told people a lot because the narratives that people share about, "Wow, I feel better. My body feels more relaxed" is important data, too. So it's nothing new, except it's new in the fact that we know how it might be working and why and how much of it we need.

### **Meagen Gibson**

So what is the difference between expressive arts therapy and art therapy?

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Expressive arts therapy is a combination, an integrative approach. So I always break it down into the areas of movement and rhythm and image-making, sound or music-making, enactment, maybe improvisation, getting action-oriented with your body, playing. And again, just that simple image-making as part of that continuum.

**[00:05:06]**

And also storytelling, making a narrative up about what you've done or created or experienced is all part of that. So when we're talking about expressive arts therapy, we're thinking about integrating two or more of those kinds of experiences for people based on what is going to work for them, what they resonate with, what they feel comfortable with, what helps them relax.

And we're talking about the individual therapies. We have art therapy, which is visual based. We have music therapy, which just has to do with music and sound. We have dance/movement therapy, has to do obviously, with dance and movement, gesture. And then drama therapy, which has to do with improvisation, role-playing, psychodrama. There's a lot of different things that go into that. And play therapy is another area. Although play therapy is very integrative, it's almost like expressive arts therapy in that play involves a lot of different things.

You can involve art, but you can involve movement and sound, and role-play and fun and humor into it. So that's kind of the basic definition. Sometimes people resonate more with one art form than another. I mean, I started out in art therapy as a visual artist. I resonated with that.

But I found that working with people using a lot of different methods that might be helpful to them was the direction I wanted to go. Basically because I started to work with the military quite a few years ago, and they were very movement-oriented, and they also love music and sound. So those kinds of things resonated with their health goals, resonated with how they could relax, or how they could find capacity in themselves. So it's different for everyone.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Fantastic. So many of the practitioners that I've interviewed name reintegrating mind and body together, and re-establishing safety, as a primary principle of anxiety treatment. So how do expressive arts-based, sensory-based methods help with that reintegration?

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

With mind and body. Well, it depends on which way you go with expressive arts. Because you can go from either a bottom up, or top down approach. Now, "bottom up and top down". These are terms that are used a lot in trauma work now. When we're talking about "bottom up", we're talking about more sensory kinds of things.

So that would be more movement and rhythm, sound-making, maybe percussion, drumming, all that very sensory-based, sensory integration kinds of things that involve the arts. But "top down" is also another way to work, which is more brain-based. I would say the "bottom up" is more body-based and the "top down" is more brain-wise because it involves language. Some people might feel more comfortable starting out with creative writing or storytelling, narrative.

And I also think drawing kind of crosses into both areas, making art, because it often tells a story. So it can be a little more connective between those two areas, between the sensory, which is the bottom up, and the top down, which is the narrative. So it just depends on which area you want to start with with people. But coming from an expressive arts point of view, I'd say that's how the body and the mind are connected. That's why I really love this stuff, because you can go either way with it.

**[00:08:26] Meagen Gibson**

I think accessibility wise. I think most people with anxiety first get access to the top down approach, first. That's the normally... You're accessible... The first run of treatment is always kind of a top down approach. And so I think that's probably the one that people are most familiar with. But I certainly resonate with the bottom up approach as well.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

I'm biased because I think that we can't talk ourselves into being calm. A lot of times we can use talk to maybe stabilize, but to really feel it in the body is a different experience. So there are a lot of people that even come into expressive art sessions, and they want to talk, and that's good. They have a story to tell.

But then at that point, I want to help them connect that brain-wise piece with the body-oriented work in some way. Because one of the things we know, too, about all this, for emotional health in general, is we need to get in touch with what's inside our bodies. That's not really easy for a lot of people that are anxious or traumatized or experienced something that's very distressful or disruptive, but they need to be able to connect that with their senses somehow, and also that narrative.

So the senses have to do with the exteroceptive, what's around us. What's around me right now? I feel like our air conditioner is on. I feel it on my skin. I can see you, I can see my colorful background, that's all our senses reacting.

But how do I feel about where I am? Well, right now I feel comfortable. I feel comfortable because I've talked with you before, and I love talking about what I'm talking about, in terms of expressive arts. But that's not the case for everybody who's distressed.

A lot of these things they're out of touch with and they maybe have a story for it, but they have to connect it with those senses because that exteroceptive, all the stuff on the outside, and what's inside, really are related to emotional health. We find that when we can connect those things and then talk about that, that there is real progress in emotional health on a lot of levels.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah. And I can share just that I approached my anxiety and trauma recovery work from a top down, because that was what was accessible to me at first. But there came a point where my understanding was pretty deep and pretty broad. And then I had an experience where my body let me know I had not integrated it into my understanding of anxiety and trauma recovery.

And so I feel like, unfortunately for a lot of people, because of that accessibility piece, that they don't understand the importance of that bottom up approach and the importance of that integration, because at some point your body systems are going to take over in a way that you don't have control over if you haven't done that integrating work.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Yeah. And it's hard. It's not an easy thing to do. I mean, we're talking about this, but to get from... Okay, so right now we have in the world, a lot of worried parents and a lot of worried families, and their minds are going, there's a story running in their head about danger. We've had danger for a couple of years now with the pandemic and lots of other things.

**[00:11:46] Meagen Gibson**

Pick your danger.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Yeah. So it's not unusual that we have this story running in our heads, but what it's doing is impacting our body. But sometimes we have to stay up here just to get everything done every day. To wake up, and meet the needs of our family, meet the needs of our children, get to our work, get things done. To go down into the senses has to be done carefully, too, in those circumstances, because there's a lot of feeling there.

And to get through a day, sometimes we need to stay up in our head, so to speak. So I think that's the tricky thing. But that also makes talk therapy important as a lead into that. People have a story running around their head. How it's impacting their body is what we try to deal with, with the expressive approaches, in a way. In a very sensitive and gradual way.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah. And embodying safety, right? And I'm glad that you just said that. The piece about compartmentalizing so that you can function in your day, because not everybody has the time to really get into the deep work and allow themselves that time and space. They don't have the time for that. They've got, like you said, young kids to feed or people depending on them, or a job that they really need to keep and things that just have to go on on a day-to-day basis that you've got to compartmentalize how you're coping with anxiety or trauma, for that matter.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Yeah. But it makes me think too, I mean, I always think about this. It's a social action and social justice issue that people do have all these things that they have to deal with. They have to go to their job, they have to take care of their children, put food on the table, pay the rent, all these things. And it's very stressful right now financially. So there's anxiety around that.

But if we can figure out just that 15 minutes, I kind of want to direct this towards families in the sense of right now if they're really struggling. Is there a 15 minutes pocket in the day where you can sit down either as a family, or with a child, or with your children, to do something self-regulating? And the reason that's so important is, okay, so you do something that maybe makes everyone feel more calm, or they feel good about, creating something together, moving together, singing together, all these things.

But it co-regulates. And that's where the real actually calming and feeling safe and anxiety-reducing moments are going to come about. And right now I feel like, wow, this is so important that we all try to make time for that, even though, yeah, we're on these busy schedules and there are realities, what we have to do every day.

How do we get that co-regulatory piece in there in families right now? Thinking a lot about that and how we can get those little micro moments, even, of that, because that's going to help everybody feel a lot more safe if it's done again on a regular basis.

### **[00:14:51] Meagen Gibson**

And I love that you've just specifically drawn that out. And for anybody at home, I have two brains working right now. My interviewer brain said one thing, and my mom brain was like, "don't give me another thing to do".

But I want to contextualize for people because getting an activity or like my mom brain was like, "oh, great, now I've got to get art supplies and I've got to do all this stuff". But my interviewer brain was like, "no, it's way more simpler than that".

So I would love it if you described what co-regulation options look like for me. I'm thinking you put on a song and you dance together, or you're literally... a friend of mine used to call it a "puppy pile". Her and her kids would literally all pile up on each other and just lay there for 15 minutes. But what is co-regulation? What can it look like?

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

I'm glad you brought that thing up about the music right away because it's so fascinating. For the last few days, a wonderful study came out from Japan. I get these bulletins from this neuroscience news. So these are neuroscience researchers.

And this sounds like we probably just have taken it for granted, but they have proved through a study, that listening to music together, that you get into a groove, it makes your body happy immediately, that this is not only good for emotional health, it's good for cognitive functioning, too. But it's just the simplest thing that they measured that nobody else apparently has measured. But just dancing together to music that you like, moving together.

So again, it's that thing. We could do this as an individual. You could do it first thing in the morning by yourself. But if you're in a family situation, how can we get everyone in the family? Maybe just put on that loud music that everybody loves to move to for 15 minutes. Again, a short amount of time, and move to that, is the important thing. And you can sing to it, too. But getting that rhythm together, in a principle in expressive arts and sensory work, is synchrony and entrainment.

So Synchrony is- we're moving together the same way. If we start to do that, even our heart rate and our breath rate, and everything about our bodies, start to entrain at the same level. But this is so important, not just now, because we have a lot of things that we're worried about in our environment, in our country, but also during the COVID outbreak with separation and isolation.

We need these skills back because we've lost some of them. We've felt like distancing, isolation, home-schooling, all these things may have put us together in ways that we weren't together before, but we need this, to practice these things, even more than ever for that regulation to happen.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. And I'm going to skip ahead a little bit because I was actually going to talk about co-regulation, but now I want to... Where are my questions about co-regulation...

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Well, it's really important. Everybody should keep that in mind, that we always talk about helping ourselves be calm, totally important, that we find ways that we can access that. But that

co-regulation, it actually goes hand-in-hand with that self-regulation. We need that connection with other people.

**[00:18:10]**

And if there are significant people in their life, if it's a caregiver, a parent with children, or teachers with children, they need that as well. So that's a really important piece I want to just underscore.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Thanks for helping me stall because I figured out what I was going to ask. So one of the things about co-regulation that I wanted to ask you about specifically is, if you are a parent who has struggled with anxiety, and then you start to witness anxiety symptoms, or behaviors, or patterns in your child that are either like yours or different. In this co-regulation piece, what I found is the most important part of me helping co-regulate with my kids is to make sure I'm regulated first.

In reality, though, when we're talking in practical terms, in the moment, in the heat of a moment, a toddler is having a meltdown or displaying some real symptoms of anxiety that you're trying to understand, and that don't make sense to you at all. How do you go through that exercise of calming yourself first and then being able to co-regulate and be with your child who's experiencing anxiety?

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Well, one of the things, and I'm thinking back to a workshop I just did recently, that was live. I had spots during the workshop where we did some of these things because people go out of the workshop, they come back in, they're energized or they're lethargic too. I want to get them back in their body. But sometimes we can just try some stuff ourselves with, just putting your hand on your head and then maybe seeing how that feels. Is that a calming kind of thing?

These are simple things. Putting my hand on my heart, maybe trying both hands, seeing what that feels like, or just holding our heads and trying to balance that back and forth. There's a lot of different things. I'm just showing you three here. Sometimes hand over heart, hand over belly. That could be another thing, some kinds of holding. I have one hand under my arm here and one hand up here. All these things are things we can try out to get ourselves calm in the moment. But what I wanted to say, too, is right now, with all the anxious parents and caregivers, sometimes we can't get there.

We're trying really hard to get there. And this might have worked at some point, but it doesn't work now. That's when we need to find a way for that child to access somebody who has that regulatory ability. We can't punish ourselves 100% of the time for not being co-regulated for our families, because these are hard times. There's a lot of anxiety out there.

So if we can find these methods, great. Another thing I work with people, this is occupational therapy, actually. If you just stroke your arm, that works for some people to kind of get them calmed down, not 100%. So you might do it on both sides. That's very regulating for most people, actually. What's more, energizing is going the other way, because arms are considered a hairy part of the body, not that we all have a lot of hair on our arms, some of us do, some of us don't.

But those parts of the body stroking upward can energize. So if you're feeling out of it, you just need a little energy boost, or going this way to calm down. But again, I'm just saying, right now it is pretty hard to tell ourselves, even through some kind of body interaction that was calming, to chill out, to be regulated so that we can be regulated with our child. So that's an important piece to know. Maybe we

need an outside resource for that, once in a while, to give ourselves that option because we can't be 100% calm all the time.

### **[00:22:11] Meagen Gibson**

I wish we all had a magic pill or button that we could say, "I know how to make you calm all the time, instantaneously". And I learned in the last couple of years to really just name for my kids. Like, "I'm having a hard time right now. But I want you to know it has nothing to do with you. It has nothing to do with anything that you did. I promise I'm going to be just fine, and I will come back to you. I will be able to..."

And there were parts, just to be super vulnerable, there were parts of the last few years, especially when we were home-schooling, where I would get so much stress and anxiety that I couldn't be touched. And for kids, it's so hard, right, when they want to snuggle and they want to be close, and I would tell them, I was like, "I can't be touched right now. But I promise you, I'm going to go take a walk or I'm going to go take a shower. I'm going to go do XYZ."

And when I come back, I will be able to do that for you. And I promise you it has nothing to do with you. And it's not your fault." But it's hard to admit when you can't be co-regulating with your kids. It's a hard thing to admit.

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Well, sometimes in those cases, a prop helps, too. We used to have in the clinic, now we'd be questioned for infection control, but weighted animals, right, that people could hold in their lap or a weighted blanket. So sometimes just say, "hey, hold a weighted animal for a while, put a weighted blanket on. I'll be with you", but see if that will help you slow down. They're good props to use, too. They're very easy to get.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I bought ankle weights like that you can strap around your ankles, but to put in my son's lap during home-schooling and it helped him just settle in his chair. He's neurodivergent and was not having a great time during home-school. That weight...

### **Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

I was just thinking, too, this all came from research with animals, particularly dogs, to put a weighted vest on them if they were very anxious. But there's another thing for co-regulation. If anybody has the option, sometimes we can only relate to an animal. And that's why equine therapy is so important.

And just having a dog or a cat or some other, I call them "sentient beings" that sometimes they're the first level of co-regulation for everyone and to regulate with that animal before even regulating with another human. Certainly cases where children have been disrupted by humans, humans have not been kind to them, then animals fit this range. It's not an expressive arts therapy per se, but we integrate it a lot in our work because it's very powerful.



**[00:24:50] Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. Dogs and cats don't tend to get stuck in their heads too often, unless they're terriers-speaking from experience. So I know that you mentioned writing, and writing can obviously be a super strong part of anxiety treatment and kind of reshaping our narratives and stories.

And I know that when I started treatment, it was actually because I felt such a strong urge to write, and I wasn't creatively blocked. I felt fundamentally unsafe to express myself. So it was kind of an interesting twist to me, at least, I thought. So what kind of writing practices can you recommend to people that can help reduce their anxiety over time if they have a similar feeling, if they...

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

One that's tried and true is, again, that 15 minutes window of two or three times a week, having a journal, that's your private journal, nobody ever sees. And writing whatever you want to, whatever just spews out onto the paper. They found a lot of good information about how reparative that was after September 11, 2001, when people were searching for something to just feel safe again in their bodies. And there's also a lot of other restorative aspects to that, too, with people that engage in that.

And this is usually after distress. If you don't have distress, you could still try it. But if you're distressed, it certainly has some kind of a positive impact. It also impacts your immune system. So they found that... They measured people's immune systems after doing that over the course of months, just these two or three times a week. Write whatever. Even it made no sense. It didn't have to be complete sentences. It's just whatever came to mind.

And then putting that away and never sharing it with anybody, their immune systems were boosted significantly, too, much less visits to doctors. And this was a real problem after September 11. A lot of people felt, "I don't feel well", a lot of it did have to do with anxiety, but they felt a lot of somatic symptoms and were calling up the doctor for prescriptions, for sleeping pills, for anti-anxiety medicines, and all...

**Meagen Gibson**

Pain, stomach issues, I'm sure.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Exactly. Some people were resorting, of course, to alcohol, having an extra drink. They weren't turning into alcoholics, but they were having to have that extra drink. And all of that was addressed by this very simple practice. And again, nobody ever witnessing or hearing it. That to me is remarkable. Also, there was a thing about pain reduction.

So sometimes pain is related to anxiety. It certainly gets increased if we're anxious. But pain perception was reduced, too. So people were feeling less need to take medication for that. So just some really powerful effects from just writing. It's never going to be a book you publish. Just words, sentences that make no sense. But just doing that for 15 minutes, as fast as you can spontaneously put it on the paper. And it has to be the writing. You can't sit at the computer and do it. Who knows?

**[00:27:58] Meagen Gibson**

I've been a practicer, and that's not the word. But you know what I mean. Julia Cameron's, *The Writer's Way*, I think it's called.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

*The Artist's Way*.

**Meagen Gibson**

*The Artist's Way*, thank you. For years, probably 20 years, off and on, never consistently, but off and on. But now the reframing of that... When I get up 15 minutes earlier in the morning to do that right away, I can just tell everyone I'm working on my immune system.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

No, really. The other thing people can think about, too. And I've used this on occasion when I've had something troubling me. If you write about it right before you go to bed, similar practice, but just write down all these worry thoughts. And I thought, "wait a minute, now I'm focusing on the worry. That doesn't sound right". But I did find that that helped me fall asleep more quickly.

So I keep a journal right by the bed in case I have that kind of thing. This is still on my mind. I haven't let it go. I'm going to be... You close your eyes. You're still thinking about it and the time goes by. Now it is very helpful just to try to do that each night for a little while. I don't even do the 15 minutes, just maybe five minutes. It's just writing down all the things that are bothering me. And oftentimes I'll take that sheet of paper and throw it away the next day.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

It's just a process.

**Meagen Gibson**

I have a burning ritual. Every once in a while, I toss everything in the fire. And what I'm hearing consistently, the undercurrent of all of this, is that this is not a results-oriented action or exercise. None of it is. There's no result. You're not trying to sell your art or make something of it. It's just the pure expression that leads to what you would call an increased circle of capacity, which... Oh, look what I just did there. Let's talk about that. We haven't even talked about that yet.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

I was just thinking about that, too, before you said it, actually, because the whole point of, and having worked in trauma for decades, but just thinking about the topic of anxiety, so that's what's preoccupying your body. That's then the major narrative of the body's experience. It may also be of the mind's experience, but also of our body. How do we resensitize the body to joy, to curiosity, to

feeling confident again, to having self-compassion, to all these different experiences? Just the pleasure and play in life?

**[00:30:23]**

And that's what I think these expressive and sensory-based methods really do. I mean, we can talk to people about this. You can't talk people into these. They have to experience it somehow, just not up here, but also in the body. So it's a mind-body experience, but the body often doesn't get addressed in the narrative only.

So when we're playing or making sounds or drumming or moving, all these things start to tell the body a different story. And that's kind of that circle that I'm always trying to help people expand, not just tolerate what's going on, the anxiety or the depression, but how do we expand these good feelings?

Because we need something to replace those. Otherwise, what do we have? Maybe we've erased that narrative, but we need the body to understand that now I have a new narrative. It's okay that I feel joy. I don't have to feel guilty or ashamed about that or uncomfortable about it. I can feel more confident. I can have more mastery.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. And I know that, and maybe other people that are watching this can relate to this, but I know that joy and creativity are the first things to go when I start to get out of my healthy practices. The number one thing, the first thing I let go of, is my ability to create and my ability to feel and practice joy.

And so to have just a handful of things that I can draw upon when I know I've let those practices go, it's just so, it's fantastic. Because that's the way back in. It's not to fix, or solve, or manage your life necessarily better, although some stress management will help you with your anxiety, I'm sure. But it's not "I'm going to deal with all these things that give me anxiety, and then I'll have time for joy". It's actually that you've got to create the time for the joy, and it will help you manage all the anxiety

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

And I think the other thing right now, for me, is the predominant sense of what's going on. So we have this anxiety in our society right now, but we have a lot of fear. Fear of the pandemic, fear of violence.

**Meagen Gibson**

Legitimate fear.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Legitimate. Real. And fear is the one thing that robs you of curiosity. So that's why I say, a lot of times I'll say, that at some point in the session with somebody, like, part of the goal here, we're doing different things, is try to be curious, see if you can have a moment, even a moment of curiosity, about what that paint stick does on the paper, or what moving like this might feel like.

So getting that curiosity back in as a major factor, as a way of thinking and being, mediates fear. And right now, I keep thinking, how do we introduce this on a bigger level for people? Fear is a healthy

response because we have to survive things, so we need to be alert. But to have that preoccupy our lives robs us of so much stuff, and it robs us of that play and curiosity that we should also experience as humans. I think that's a very powerful thing in the capacity-building. How do we get to that simple thing of curiosity? I don't often say the word creativity. Sometimes we think about creativity.

**[00:33:43] Meagen Gibson**

Because that sound results-oriented maybe, or has more results-oriented connotations.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Yeah. Got to come to it in a different way. Sometimes we'll do something, we'll say, "wow, that felt different. I think I actually did something creative there". That's fine. But I think the curiosity thing is more of a piece that mediates a lot of that anxiety, but particularly the fear. It just can't exist in the same place with it. We can go back and forth on that because we're going to be fearful again. But can we have more of the curiosity? And more of those moments is what's really important in the expressive work.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, it's obvious that we all want that kind of curiosity. I mean, look at the way Wordle took over. We would really call that an embodied, integrated experience. But people went bananas for Wordle because everybody was just grasping for something simple that they could do that would give them some joy and creativity on a daily basis. We have a worldwide audience.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Social media, share your Wordle score.

**Meagen Gibson**

Exactly right. So for anybody watching who has no idea what we're talking about, Wordle was a website where you could go and guess a five word letter, or a five letter word, every single day. Yeah, that's it. That's it. Five letter word every day. Could you guess it? And it really unified a lot of the west.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

In a way, that's kind of a strange virtual co-regulation, because sometimes you can take a look at social media. I don't do the Wordle, but I'll look at other people's and give them a like. Wow, yeah.

**Meagen Gibson**

I don't but my husband does. One of the last things he does, in bed, every night. So it's dark. He's got his phone. I can see he's trying to get his Wordle in before midnight.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

That's actually a dopamine rush, to post that. Because some people get it in one shot. And I'm like, "wow".

**[00:35:36] Meagen Gibson**

The rush of that must last all day,

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

My "wow" emoji on their Wordle gives them a dopamine shot. That's okay. It wasn't a big effort on my part and I'm proud of them. But yeah, it's a really interesting kind of virtual co-regulation.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. Shared experience. Look at us all co-creating this creativity together. Like I said, it's a low hanging fruit example. So for people watching, I know we've named a couple of things, but I'd love it if you could give me three more things that people can do at home, basic practices that people can get started with today to kind of help them move around some anxiety.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Well, I think get moving. Again, even if you do it by yourself. I think the co-regulation, if you're in a family situation, is really important, but if that feels too uncomfortable, just put on those headphones and get your body moving. Because the worst thing I think with anxiety, hyperactivated reaction to anything, is we start to get frozen too. It starts to just stay up in our head in this running narrative of anxiety and our bodies start to freeze.

So to get moving, to even make sound, go sing by yourself, go do those kinds of things. But the one thing I wanted to bring up too, which is very popular now in the expressive movement kind of sensory-based thing is nature and how we should get out into nature and get those senses going out there, get outside in some way. And I know that's not possible for everyone, but hopefully you have a park, even nearby, if you can get out into the woods.

And again, getting out as a family, walking together, observing, hearing things, all these nature sounds. There's so much research on the fact that... Why we have birds in our environment. It's not just about the ecology. Bird sounds are the number one for calming the body. They're a total mental health element in our lives and we need to protect them.

But going out as a family or just on your own and being able to walk amongst that and hear those sounds is a very focused kind of way of getting the body to interocept and exterocept. So again, back to that thing of getting the senses and then thinking "what do I feel in my body with this?" That connective thing is really important for emotional health. So anything to do with nature.

And we probably always knew this. But right now there's a big expansion in the literature about being out in the environment. Protecting it at the same time as being out in it is a very calming, restorative experience. I also could say, get a journal, do that writing and also just start to doodle, just start to make those images. Nobody's going to see it. Just see what you get into with that. So yeah, very simple things you can do.

**Meagen Gibson**

And if you're stuck, I give my kids a journal. This works for kids as well. And I always tell them, I'm not looking at it, I'm not judging it. You get to say whatever you want in there. You write all the bad words if you need to get them out. Write whatever. And they'll be like "well, I want to write something, but I

don't know what to write". I'm like "write something you heard today, something you saw, something you said", observe. Get curious about what happens in your life on a daily basis.

**[00:39:15] Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

I was just thinking one more thing that seems to be important in the sensory integration area, sensory-based, is if you have a big chalkboard, you can do this on a chalkboard, or you can paint a wall with that chalkboard paint. Bilateral work.

So this is really fun for kids, but adults ought to be doing it, too. Just putting chalk in both hands or if you have a big piece of paper. I love these paint sticks that you can get just about anywhere for cheap. And they're children's paint sticks, but I just use them in workshops with adults, they love them. And work on both sides of the body and just try different kinds of movements.

Now, one side is going to be non-dominant. We're not trying to make a wonderful picture here, but put on the music. That music that gets you in the groove. But now we know if we move to that kind of music, it's health-giving and good for our cognitive abilities. But do the bilateral. That is a really important thing. It's very simple. I know a lot of parents that they make a wall in their house if they have a big enough house and paint it just in that chalkboard paint.

**Meagen Gibson**

Or I was thinking even sliding glass doors with dry erase markers. Lots of families have those. Big windows. Yeah.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

So that bilateral work seems to be really important, too, for getting ourselves rebalanced. So that, for some people, could be really helpful, I think, with the anxiety and the worry. And it gets you outside yourself, too, because you're on a different kind of focus. Normally we just use one hand to do everything. We don't do this kind of bilateral work that taps something, we're not quite sure what, but it seems to have an impact on emotional health, and what we call embodied cognition.

So the whole body starts to have that experience and starts to have that health-giving experience of moving in a certain way. So again, get the rhythm on. Get the music on something that you really like to listen to and just move to that. Don't worry about what you're making. It's okay.

**Meagen Gibson**

I love that. Embodied regulation.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Well, we call it "embodied cognition".

**Meagen Gibson**

Cognition, that's what you said.

**[00:41:25] Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

It came from education, that doing a lot of things. And an important thing about this, too, I should say, is standing up doing it. And standing up for some reason has an impact on learning, but it also has an impact on emotional health, too. So getting the whole body into it moving, which makes us think about why we sit so much in classrooms, in rows. That we should have time when we're doing these kinds of things, too, in between, to help learning and help emotional health and regulation, it's really important. Yeah, so just a simple thing like that. This doesn't have to be complicated.

**Meagen Gibson**

Fantastic. Cathy Malchiodi, it's been a pleasure, as always. How can people find out more about you and your work?

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

I always say just Google me, but fortunately you can find everything out on Google now. Just the website [cathymalchiodi.com](http://cathymalchiodi.com) is probably the easiest.

**Meagen Gibson**

Fantastic. All right. Good luck with Googling Cathy and going down that rabbit hole. And thank you so much for being with us today.

**Dr Cathy Malchiodi**

Thank you.