



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

Resonance skills for managing trauma and anxiety

Guest: Sarah Peyton

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[00:00:10] Jaia Bristow

Hello and welcome back to this conference all about anxiety. My name is Jaia Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am delighted to be welcoming Sarah Peyton.

Welcome, Sarah.

Sarah Peyton

Thank you, Jaia. I'm very happy to be here.

Jaia Bristow

I'm very happy to have you join us today.

So, Sarah is an author, a trainer in Nonviolent Communication, a constellation facilitator, and a neuroscience educator who integrates brain science and the use of resonant language to heal trauma.

So, Sarah, I'm excited to get into more about that and what resonant language is, how it helps with trauma and anxiety. But first, shall we start by talking a little bit about anxiety itself, seeing as it's the name of the conference, what that means to you, what types of anxiety you work with. It's such a broad topic so let's start with that.

Sarah Peyton

Wonderful. Some people may even be thinking, what does trauma have to do with anxiety? I'm just anxious. I was born anxious. I've been anxious all my life. It's just my state of being.

But in actuality, as we start to use resonance to get our brains to be a really good place to live, we start to realize the extent to which our anxiety is most often, not always, but most often deeply intertwined with a kind of a basic loneliness that's been present in our bodies since we were very tiny.

And for humans, despite all of the press to the contrary that tells us we're supposed to be strong individualists who are not dependent on one another, we actually are exquisitely made to accompany one another and to be social.

[00:02:08]

There are so many strange little things about humans that show us that we're supposed to be with each other in really sweet ways, that we don't necessarily know how to do. So everybody's kind of walking around in, oh, everybody's a little dangerous kind of way.

But one of the interesting things that humans have is they have skin sensors that are devoted exclusively to sensing body warmth. These skin sensors don't light up when we're close to something that's hot, like a burning fire. They don't respond to coldness. The only thing they respond to is the temperature that human bodies are at.

So they're devoted to letting us know, and this is particularly important for those of us who have been isolated for the past 2+ years, they're letting us know whether there are any other human bodies around. And that's one of the signals of safety. It's one of the signals that reduce human anxiety, is the signal that there are safe humans with us.

Jaia Bristow

Amazing. And so let's talk a little bit about what you mean by resonance and resonant language as well.

Sarah Peyton

Resonance is the experience that two humans have. In my definition of the word resonance, it's the experience that two humans have where one human has a warm inquiry about how the other human is doing and the other human gets to say yes, you understand me. I wonder if you're feeling a little exhausted and sad right now. Yes, you understand me.

Or if the first human is warmly curious but doesn't have the right idea, I wonder if you're feeling a little exhausted and sad right now? Actually, I'm kind of pissed off. Oh, pissed off. Yes. And there's a yes. The yes lets us know that we're in resonance, that there's an understanding between two people.

Jaia Bristow

So it's really that being mirrored, that being heard, that being empathized with or empathizing with someone. Meeting that person where they're at, is what I'm hearing.

Sarah Peyton

Yes. That would be the job of this one. But there's another job for the other one, which is to say yes or to redirect the other one, say no, I'm more pissed off.

The thing about empathy and compassion is that it can flow one way. We can be driving down the street and see somebody who's fallen and we feel bad for them, but we're in the flow of traffic, we can't stop and help them. We have tons of empathy, tons of compassion for that person. That person never knows.

So empathy and compassion, yes, that's one part of it, but it's not the whole thing. It's just the one way rather than the co-creation, which is what resonance is.

[00:05:23] Jaia Bristow

So resonance is much more, like you say, co-created and active, it sounds like. Empathy can be more passive, you give the example of someone in that situation.

Before we tie it all into how it helps anxiety, let's talk a little bit more about, again, anxiety itself. You talked about how we have these cells that respond to human warmth to other bodies around, but what is anxiety to you, then?

Sarah Peyton

Anxiety is a state of being that lets us know that something's not right. And because of our sharing of our neurobiology with our mammal cousins who are animals, what we know from animal research is that animals will respond identically to two different emotions.

They'll respond with anxiety, which is an agitation and an increased heart rate, a sense that something's wrong, a feeling that something needs to be done to remedy the situation, that animals will specifically reflect the symptoms of anxiety in two situations.

And one of them is alarmed aloneness, the experience of not being with people who are able to be in resonance. And the second is fear. If animals are anticipating that something dangerous is going to happen to their physical being, their physical safety, then they'll also have anxiety.

So the amazing researcher who worked on this was Jaak Panksepp, who was of Estonian descent and worked in the United States starting in the 1950s, all the way through to the early 2000s, before he died. In his work, what he did was he would take animals and people that were anxious, and he would give them either benzodiazepines or opioids, opiates, there we go.

And depending on which substance calmed them, that would tell him whether the animals had fear for their physical safety, if they were calmed by benzodiazepines, or if they had a distress at being separated from others of their kind, that would be the grief panic circuit, that would be alarmed aloneness, separation, distress.

And humans don't know from how it feels whether they're in alarmed aloneness or whether they're in a state of fear. It's only, either when they take the drugs or when they begin to talk to themselves with resonance and to ask themselves, and everyone who's listening can do this right now. Just step into the part of yourself that's anxious and say, using your own name, say, Sarah, are you afraid? Are you afraid for your physical safety or your financial wellbeing or for the physical safety or financial wellbeing of somebody that you love?

And then you wait and you see if the anxiety calms a bit, and then you say, Sarah, I wonder if you are feeling an alarmed aloneness, a separation from the people who matter most to you, or if you've never had people who matter most to you, if you are lonely for people who would matter the most to you?

And then you see, is there something that comes in the body? Because we are extraordinary, we humans, we are changed by language. Language is medicine. And this is what the beauty of resonance is, is that it lets us step fully into the way that language is medicine and allows us to co-create these states of resonance of understanding.

[00:09:35] Jaia Bristow

Incredible. And would you say then that those are the two main types of anxiety or at least two main types that you work with? It's either the separation and aloneness or a fear for safety and basic needs?

Sarah Peyton

Yes. And there are three others that I've found research for, and one of them is the anxiety we have when we're out of balance physically, like if our electrolytes are off or if there's something wrong with our blood or if we have high blood pressure or if we have some sort of a-fibrillation, all of the things that can go wrong with human bodies. When we sense something going wrong with our body, that's a kind of anxiety I found research for.

Another very interesting one is the experience of being torn between two authorities. So let's say you grew up in a restrictive, fundamentalist religion that believed that sex outside of marriage was wrong. And you grew up and you left that religion and you were like, sex outside of marriage is just fine, but you have this anxiety. And if you ask yourself, am I torn between two authorities? Am I torn between my authority that says it's fine and my authority that says it's wrong?

And when we can name that being torn between two authorities, a lot of times anxiety will also calm and then people can have anxiety about their anxiety. Because anxiety is not fun to experience. So when people get to a state of calm, they can be like, oh my God, I'm calm, but when is it going to come back? And that can be an anxiety all of itself. That's anxiety about anxiety.

These are the five kinds of anxiety that I've found really good research for.

Jaia Bristow

Interesting. So there's the, I'm just trying to recap again, the aloneness, the separation and the aloneness can cause a lot of anxiety. What was the second one you said?

Sarah Peyton

Fear.

Jaia Bristow

Fear, of course, fear. And that's very much around basic needs and fear of losing something or someone important or basic needs.

Then there's the physiological imbalance, it sounds like. And in your experience, is that the imbalance that can cause symptoms of anxiety or anxiety about one's health? How does it work?

Sarah Peyton

What will happen for people is they'll get the imbalance, they'll start to feel anxious, and then they'll start to feel anxious about the anxiety. So it's like combining the homeostasis anxiety and the anxiety about anxiety start to mount up. And then we can feel alone in our experience of ill health, and we can also feel afraid for our physical safety. So we can get all the kinds of anxiety.

[00:12:36] Jaia Bristow

All of them.

Sarah Peyton

Yes. It's a wonderful anxiety cocktail that has as its main ingredient, our cortisol.

Jaia Bristow

Interesting, because, again, that's what I was going to say, even though there's these five types, they're not separate. Often they can play into each other and they can intersect. And so would you say that resonant language is useful for all of them?

Sarah Peyton

Resonant language is so useful for four out of the five. And it also helps us to calm a little bit when we're experiencing health issues. But if it's health issues that's giving us anxiety, then it's really good to get those health issues addressed.

Jaia Bristow

So is that the fifth one that you say that resonant language wouldn't?

Sarah Peyton

Yes.

Jaia Bristow

And it's really interesting to hear that because I think there's lots of different ways anxiety manifests, lots of different interpretations of anxiety, lots of different types of anxiety, and we touch upon as much as we can on this conference. And so it's interesting to hear your take on those five key areas of anxiety that you have researched and that you work with.

And of course, I think the tools that we're going to go into now can support all of those areas, including the anxiety around the health. But if you have physiological symptoms, then it's also, as you said, important to get those looked at.

And it reminds me of some of the other conversations I've had on this conference. For example, I speak with Dr Sophia Graham about DBT skills, and she talks about different ways the skills can bring into managing anxiety.

And one of them is, if there's a problem, the first one is to try and solve the problem. So again, with health, that would be again, seeing your doctor and seeing if you can solve it would also help, as well as the skills we're going to talk about today.

So it was really interesting when you talked about resonate language, that you were talking about talking to yourself first. You did that kind of experiment and I assumed that it was two different people and that resonate language is all about being resonated with by someone else. It was really

interesting to hear you say and offer the audience listening the opportunity to try it for themselves in their own name.

[00:14:51]

And I did it even inside my head, as you were doing it, with my own name. And it was really interesting to see what popped up. In that moment what I was feeling was more the second order, depending on which order you take it in, more the aloneness, the separation from loved ones felt more strong in that moment for me than fear.

And so even though I'm not feeling particularly anxious right now in this moment, just tapping in and seeing what's most there.

So tell me a bit more about these resonant language skills and how they come up and what are some ways to use them? And are they better used on one's own or with other people? And let's explore that a little bit.

Sarah Peyton

Well, one of the wonderful things about human brains is that we have a prefrontal cortex and we have an amygdala. So if you were doing the brain in the palm of the hand, which is something that Daniel Siegel developed, we would be able to put the amygdala into the limbic system in the middle of the brain. And if we curl our fingers down around the limbic system, we kind of have a model of the human brain.

And the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala are very distinct brain areas, and they do very different things. What happens for babies, is babies are hardwired for their amygdala to communicate with the rest of their brain and with the rest of the world. So we have this communication that we're hardwired to do, but we don't have any hardwiring that lets our own prefrontal cortex come into relationship with our amygdala.

And this is what scientists call emotional regulation or self-regulation. We don't have those neurons. We have to grow those neurons. Those are our software. The software needs to be installed, and it can be installed by moms who say to their babies, of course you're scared. Of course you feel lonely. Of course you need some touch right now. Of course you need to be clean. Of course you need to be dry. Of course you need to be warm.

All those things, as the mom is saying 'of course' in all the different ways that moms say 'of course' with their voice, with their words, with their vocal tone, with their gestures, with their facial expressions. So if we're upset and angry and impatient with a baby, we're not saying 'of course' to that baby.

So if a baby is crying and we're upset and anxious, our touch itself is not, before words even come on the scene, our touch itself is not conveying, 'of course'. Our touch is conveying, you're wrong, you're wrong to feel this way. You're upsetting me feeling this way. Instead of our body with its gentle touch saying, oh, of course you would experience distress. Let me help you. That's an 'of course' message.

And so the more 'of course' messages there are, the more the secure attachment there is. And secure attachment makes us more immune to anxiety. And secure attachment gives us a really good immune system and a long lifespan. So secure attachment kind of rocks.

[00:18:02]

And so you're probably thinking, everybody out there is like, well, I'm screwed then because I didn't have that. My mom was anxious and stressed, and her touch did not say, 'of course' to me. Her touch said, be quiet, stop crying, quit bothering me.

But the cool thing is that no matter how old we are, if somebody comes into a state of resonance with us, and we can say yes to them, we are starting to grow these very neurons of secure attachment. We're starting to make ourselves more anxiety resilient. We're starting to improve our immune system. We're starting to extend our lifespan.

So it's a very beautiful and important work that we're doing, this conference that you're having that gives people a sense of, 'of course'.

There's a way that your conference, with all the different speakers, is putting its arms around the listeners and saying to the listeners, of course your experience matters. Your experience makes sense. Your experience has roots, it has a foundation, and you belong on this planet. And you are not wrong to feel anxiety. Anxiety has reasons. It's not just some kind of extraterrestrial plague that descends upon humans and takes over their bodies. It actually makes sense. It comes from somewhere.

So your beautiful work is also holding people to grow these neurons of, 'of course'.

I'll stop for a minute because I got really excited. I can't remember exactly what the rest of your question was.

Jaia Bristow

No, I love that. There's so much in what you're saying.

I think one little thing I want to just add is, maybe replace the word mother by primary parental figure, for example, for all those listening who weren't raised by mothers or all those raising children who aren't mothers.

And it's so interesting. I love attachment theory. One of the other conferences that I've co-hosted is the Relationship Super Conference and we talk a lot about attachment theory on there.

But it's so interesting noticing how it doesn't just impact our relationships, it impacts so much. It impacts our relationship to ourselves, to the world, our anxiety, our mental health. And of course, it's related to trauma as well, which is another conference that we also host, the Trauma Super Conference.

And so I love as well what you're talking about, that of course it's more helpful if you had secure attachment as a child and then you don't have all this anxiety to be dealing with. But even if you didn't, even if you have this anxiety and have insecure attachment, that you can still rewire things as an adult, you can still create these 'of course' messages, this holding.

And as you say, just having this conference, having so many experts from around the world acknowledge that anxiety is real and a real issue, and that there's so many different types of anxiety, and that people are valid in their experiences of anxiety, that there's nothing wrong about them, they're not broken, that there are different paths that they can go down to explore it.

[00:21:13]

For example, the health path, if it's maybe more physiological. There's a social aspect, there's a psychological aspect, there's existential anxiety, there's climate anxiety, there's racial anxiety. There's all these different elements, and yet it all impacts our nervous system and brain in a very similar way, as you're saying.

And so, again, maybe there's some practical tips and practical exercises that we can offer the audience to help regulate when they're experiencing anxiety.

Sarah Peyton

Thank you. This question brings me back to your initial question, which was like, here I had been describing resonance, and then all of a sudden I started using resonance with myself. What was up with that?

What research shows us is that a part of what happens when we have these connections between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala is that these areas both get to be linked, but they also get to be differentiated.

So the prefrontal cortex, my favorite epigeneticist, Moshe Szyf, says our mother is in every cell of our prefrontal cortex. So the way we try to take care of ourselves is the way that our mother tried to take care of herself. Not even necessarily the way she tried to take care of us, but the way she tried to take care of herself, it becomes even more replicated within us, in our brains.

So however it was that our mother cared for her emotional self, we tend to replicate. And then we start to upgrade that with things like going to these types of conferences. We start to change the cells in our prefrontal cortex and how they relate to our emotional self.

So what science shows us is that it's very healthy to have a distinct sense of our prefrontal cortex and a distinct sense of our emotional self. And that when we use our own name, as I was offering in the exercise, we're almost letting there be a dialogue between two people inside of our own brain.

So when I say, Sarah, I wonder if you're feeling alarmed aloneness? And if I say, yeah, I feel that alarmed aloneness, it's in the pit of my stomach. It sounds funny to have a conversation between ourselves and use our own name, but that's one of the practical skills that allows for the growth of these neurons, is to use our own name with warm curiosity and to be genuinely curious.

Because I can ask myself, Sarah, I wonder if you're feeling alarmed loneliness? And I can go, well, there's some alarmed loneliness, but mostly I feel disgust. And I'm like, whoa, disgust, where did that come from? Because if I don't have that inquiry, if we tell each other how we feel, this is another of the very important skills of resonance, is having a warm inquiry.

If we have a warm inquiry with a question mark at the end of our sentence, then the experience can be more expressed, more nuanced. There can be a more detailed answer. Rather than me saying, Sarah, you're feeling alarmed aloneness, then we never get to discover that there are other emotions there.

[00:24:35] Jaia Bristow

I love that. And I think that's very true when speaking to ourselves and when speaking to someone else, having that element of curiosity and open questions rather than telling someone what they're feeling is so important.

So again, and we can still use specifics like, are you feeling alarmed aloneness? Rather than, you are feeling it. But also rather than, what are you feeling? And then sometimes that's helpful to have it so open, but sometimes it can feel, when you're anxious and everything feels a little overwhelming and everything feels a bit too much, having such an open ended question can be difficult.

So asking, are you feeling alarmed aloneness? Are you feeling fear about your financial situation? Are you feeling fear about traveling tomorrow? Are you feeling, or whatever it is. Then the specific questions, but still open ended of, 'are you' rather than, 'you are', sounds like it's really great to guide that inquiry, guide the exploration of what's going on for oneself. And again, whether talking to oneself or talking to someone else.

Sarah Peyton

Yes. There is a genuine way that we can step into curiosity that's very nourishing for ourselves and for others. A genuine curiosity.

Jaia Bristow

And so you talk about the skill of talking to oneself, of being curious. What are some other skills?

Sarah Peyton

And having a question mark at the end.

Jaia Bristow

Yes.

Sarah Peyton

And sometimes I'll say, I'm sure you feel alarmed aloneness. And then I'll go, oh gosh, that wasn't a question mark. I wonder if that's true? To soften it and let there be a question there.

Another beautiful skill for us is to begin to notice the different flavors of emotion. I was very surprised and delighted to discover that there's a piece of research that shows us that when people are securely attached, they tend to be able to say what they're feeling. They tend to be able to name their emotions.

So for those of us, certainly I was one of those of us who started out not knowing my emotions, that's a breeding ground for anxiety, not knowing what the heck our emotions are. So beginning to practice a little bit.

For a long time I had a set of magnets that had feeling words on them that I had on my refrigerator. And when I was upset, I would sit down and I would pull them all on the floor, and I would pull out all the magnet words for feelings that felt like they applied. There could be 20 different feelings, like, gosh, I'm feeling so many different things right now. And that was a way that I started to learn.

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And there are card decks of emotions, and there are emoji charts with emotions. There are a lot of different ways to put this up in your environment if you're someone like me who started out going, what do they mean? Am I feeling something?

Jaia Bristow

And you talked about not knowing your emotions can provoke anxiety. And I think not knowing in general is definitely very anxiety inducing. That lack of control, lack of knowledge. And so when it's so personal, when it's not even knowing how one feels and feeling expected to know and to put a name to that, can definitely bring up a lot of stuff.

And I love what you're saying about sometimes you'd have 20 of these magnets with emotions, because so often we feel like we're only allowed to feel one thing, maybe two if they're related.

And so often, again, I'm someone who didn't always, I knew how to express my emotions in some ways, but not always name them. And I've done a lot of personal development work, and now I'm quite good at naming them.

And one of the things I notice is how sometimes I have seemingly contradicting emotions at once. And so it's what I can call, 'both and'. It's okay for us to not fit neatly in boxes. It's okay for us to experience things that seem contradicting or opposing, because if that's our experience. Then that is legitimate because that is what we're feeling.

We don't have to feel some way that we think we expected to. Or so often we try and repress our emotions, which just makes it a lot worse, because there's this idea that we shouldn't feel that way or we should feel such in such a way in this situation.

And I know that that can be very true often in, sometimes we feel like we're expected to be happy about something, but actually we're feeling stressed or nonchalant or something else. Or we received some news and we expected to feel sad or angry and actually we don't. And so that creates anxiety, putting all this pressure on how we should and shouldn't feel.

Sarah Peyton

Yes. And I think this takes us right back into alarmed aloneness. That when we're getting the message that we shouldn't feel the way that we feel, then all of a sudden we start to be separated from other humans, and we don't have a sense then of belonging. And we worry that our emotions will make us not belong.

And we can even have unconscious contracts, agreements with ourselves that are very sudden. They're very rigid. They really require a lot of us. And it's not so easy just to say, oh, I shouldn't express my emotions. I'm going to start expressing emotions. That can be quite a leap because we can have an agreement with ourselves not to express our emotions in order to keep our mother sane, in order to keep her balanced, in order to keep everything okay.

We can have an agreement with ourselves not to express emotions in order not to be attacked by siblings or by bullies. We can have an experience that we have an agreement with ourselves not to express emotions so that we can keep our father's respect because he would become contemptuous if he saw us cry.

[00:31:12]

We can have really these old coding that's a part of growing up in our family of origin that makes so much sense, that saved our lives when we were little, because who wants to receive a father's contempt? Who wants to be bullied if you show that you have an emotion? Nobody. Those were very good contracts when we were little.

But as we get older, those old contracts, that old coding, that old programming might not be as helpful as it was, especially since if we repress our emotions, it impacts our immune system. And we're living in a pandemic, we are at the end of a pandemic, hopefully, but we need to have all of our resources, which includes the expression of emotions, to keep our immune system so well and fully functioning and able to support us in such times.

Jaia Bristow

And these unconscious contracts, how are they formed? You spoke a little bit about some examples of keeping one's mother happy or one's father. So are they always formed in childhood? Where do they come from? How do they impact anxiety and keep us stuck in anxiety? And how can we start to break those patterns and release ourselves from those unconscious contracts?

Sarah Peyton

Well, the contracts really are very much part of the programming that we take away from childhood, but they can also be formed and programmed into us in moments of trauma. So we can have lived through a lovely, lovely childhood where nothing went wrong, we can get into being in our 20s and all of a sudden there's a huge trauma where we experience being in public and seeing some sort of violence happen, some sort of knife attack or something.

There we are. We're standing there, and our nervous systems will make an agreement with us because the amygdala, that little guy in the thumb, is so good at codifying and making real any decisions that we make in moments of trauma. I will not breathe again in order not to bring attention to myself so that I can stay safe.

Then we can walk away from this trauma not breathing, and continue to not breathe for 10 years until we're in our 30s or later and somebody says to us, let's time travel to that moment. Let's make sure we catch all of your feelings in that moment. Did you stop breathing? And you can say, yes, I did stop breathing. Do you feel terror? Yes, I feel terror. Do you feel anger? Yes, I feel anger. Do you want to be able to protect the people who are getting hurt? Yes, I want it to be able to protect the people who are getting hurt.

And then as we do this work of self connection, then we can even unearth more contracts that are even older, like a contract to believe that we're responsible for the bad things that happen. That's a childhood contract that kids make all the time.

So then we discover that this person who's witnessing violence in their 20s, is tying back into an experience of being a little one, perhaps in a home that had domestic violence. And the little one was like, I know that I am the problem. If I were just okay, none of these bad things would be happening.

And so it's like this subterranean route that runs between the person experiencing the trauma now to the person experiencing the trauma then. This person walks away, and all of a sudden, this contract to

believe that they're bad has been activated. They're walking around in a state of shame and completely bewildered by the strength of the shame.

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Because for their rational self, they're going, there's nothing I could do about that violence. I was a witness. I was a bystander. I don't have any martial arts training. I didn't have any way to help. But their child self is in there going, this is me, I did this.

And those are interesting juxtapositions. It's almost like the amygdala has no sense of time. It just brings together the bad things that happen to us and tries to make sense out of them based on old patterns. And this, of course, can be very anxiety producing, because a couple of the things that you named earlier, that it's really hard not to know what's happening when an act makes us anxious.

And there's fear that's running through both experiences, fear of physical safety. And then there's the alarmed aloneness, because if we had enough people with us who were going, no, let's stop this violence, we can safely work together and stop the violence. Then we would be able to stop the violence. And then there's the alarmed aloneness of being a little one in a home where violence has happened and that helplessness.

So there's so much that happens for us as humans, so many ways that our history is interwoven with our present.

Is this making sense, Jaia?

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I think, again, you're tying back to what you're saying at the beginning about how trauma and anxiety are connected.

And I think it's interesting because people often think of anxiety, about worrying about the future, but this shows how anxiety is also about our past and our present.

And we know that trauma is moments that are frozen in time and so it feels present in the moment. When that trauma is being triggered by something we don't think, oh, it was 20 years ago or whatever. I mean, there might be, as you said, there's the rational part of our brain which might think that, but there's the immediate physical response. And that's what can be so difficult sometimes and what can be so anxiety provoking is that kind of disconnect between our rational brain and our physical response.

I was recently, a few weeks ago, maybe a couple of months ago now, attacked by someone with a knife who was trying to rob me. And I fought them off and it was definitely a traumatic situation, but because I've done so much trauma work, I've done a lot of what I need to do to process, and mentally and rationally I've processed it all.

But every time that I'm out at night, even if I'm accompanied, if someone, especially a man, moves quickly near me, my whole physiological response is that it's a trauma response. And then afterwards I feel anxiety, and then I start feeling anxious about the fact of, can I go out? Even though I'm not actually afraid someone is going to attack me. I'm now almost afraid of the trauma response itself. So as you said, it's all so interconnected.

[00:38:26] Sarah Peyton

Yeah. Wow. I can tell from the way that you're talking about this that you've done a lot of work.

And I also noticed that there's kind of a tenderness and a compassion for your body where you're going, of course you're having a trauma response. Even though we're with people, even though this is very unlikely to ever happen again, I see you body. I understand. Of course, you would be afraid for our physical safety. Just like that. Warm connection is so nourishing for our bodies when things like this happen.

Jaia Bristow

And would you say, is that another skill that you would bring into this, that kind of speaking, not just to ourselves but sometimes to our bodies? And as you said, there's a curiosity, but there's also bringing in compassion and speaking to ourselves kindly.

Sarah Peyton

And also to our nervous system. They almost seem like the nervous system has a different quality when we speak to it. So you would be able to tell the difference by, sometimes when we have these kinds of experiences, there can be a protective hit.

Like we could take a blow on a forearm, for example, and we could still feel the blow on the forearm and we could talk to those cells and say, were you scared? Do you need to know that you were doing everything that you could? Did you get so worried? Do you have so much love and care for the person that you belong to? There could be just this really sweet conversation with those particular cells.

And then there's an interesting, different, beautiful quality to having the conversation with the nervous system. Say nervous system, do you need some acknowledgement that you went on alarm and it's hard to figure out how to get off? Nervous system, do you need acknowledgment of terror, of stark, bone cracking terror? And do you need acknowledgement of how much you want to keep your person safe?

And we can have these wonderful conversations between ourselves and the different parts of us.

Is this making sense also?

Jaia Bristow

It is. So what I'm hearing is that in the same way you were talking about being able to talk to ourselves using resonant language, that it's not just, we don't just have to say, at times it can be, Jaia, are you feeling afraid right now? Jaia, are you feeling alarmed aloneness? Jaia, are you feeling like your body is difficult right now? And at times you can talk to parts of yourself.

So it's like talking to my nervous system, for example, and when I say my, I mean each person talking to their own and talking to specific cells in the body. And really, I think it also helps with a lot of other practices that I've learned and I've introduced people on throughout this conference, about bringing the awareness and the attention to one place.

[00:41:42]

So if you've injured yourself and that's causing something, I know, for example, I had stitches in my thumb after the attack because I had to grab the knife. And so when I touched my thumb, it was like there was a lot of trauma there. And I felt anxiety around that. And so I spent a lot of time just gently massaging my thumb and not putting too much pressure on it. And now it's totally fine. It's totally recovered.

So that's what I'm hearing. And I think that's what you're saying is that you can talk to yourself and you can talk to different parts of yourself, and you can talk to your body or a part of your body or your cells or your nervous system.

Sarah Peyton

Yeah. And all of those kinds of dialogues have a growing sweetness. Like with every conversation that you have, I often think of this as a permaculture garden of neurons that we're trying to grow and that each little conversation puts out another tendril, another neural tendril in this permaculture garden of neurons. And it becomes more and more resilient and more and more able to have imagination and generosity and more and more able to say to all of our feelings, of course.

And you had asked about the unconscious contract, how do we release them?

Jaia Bristow

That was going to be my next question. Yes. I'd asked it before, but I was going to loop background to that. But before we do that, I'm also curious about when we're talking to ourselves or parts of ourselves, you spoke to when we're talking about ourselves to really use our name, would you say the same when you're talking to your nervous system or your cells or a part of your body? Does it help to use names?

Sarah Peyton

Well, I would probably say cells. Sometimes when I'm leading it with somebody else, I say cells of Jaia's body, cells of Sarah's body's. Jaia's nervous system, Sarah's nervous system.

Jaia Bristow

So it's great to name the part that you're talking to, cells or nervous system. And then if it's someone else's to also name that. Interesting.

So, yes, let's go back to the unconscious contracts and how we can release those.

Sarah Peyton

What's important with unconscious contracts is that there's a part of the contract that is not known to us, and that's why the programming is so resistant to change.

And so if we look at this contract, we say, the first part, the part that we usually know, I will never cry. I will never let anyone see me cry. Now, the next thing that we do, that's kind of the plan of the contract. It's up above the ground that we can see. Now in order to be able to let go of this contract, we need to know what the roots of the contract are.

[00:44:40]

So we go under the ground by putting the words in 'order to'. So I will not let anyone see me cry in order to, and then we might say, be safe. But be safe doesn't tell us who we're being safe from. It tells us that we've gotten into the root stem, but we haven't gotten into what's happening with those little tiny root hairs. We still don't know what this is.

So we say, I will not cry in order to be safe from, and then we say, oh, this contract makes me safe from my older brother, who would actually physically harm me if he ever saw me crying. I will not cry in order to be safe from my older brother.

So now we've gotten a sense of the whole plant, the plant with its above ground structure and the plant with its below ground structure. And at this point, people's bodies are often involved. There's a sense of heat, there's a sense of tension. That's how we know we're onto something good. Sometimes people cry. Then we know we're really getting the root hairs.

The next thing we do is we've most often made these contracts with ourselves, sort of in this amygdala to prefrontal cortex way. We've made these contracts with ourselves, so we get to ask ourselves, do you want this contract? Because now that we know what it is, we know whether we want to pull it out of our garden.

And so we say to ourselves, Sarah, do you like this contract? Sarah's essential self, the very center, most purest essential part of Sarah's being, the least impacted by trauma. Sarah's essential self, do you like this contract?

And we would say, well, it was very good when I was small because it did keep my brother from hitting me. But it's not so good now because my brother doesn't live with me anymore and he's actually a little better behaved now. And it's really important for me to cry, because when I cry, it releases cortisol, it reduces stress, it reduces anxiety. I want to be able to cry.

I release this contract, we say to ourselves. And this is us pulling this plant out of the earth. We say, I release this contract, I revoke this vow. Then we're left with a hole in the earth. What do we do next? We need to put in a new plant, so we make a blessing.

So we say, instead of this contract, I give you my blessing. And in some languages, the word blessing doesn't work. We say, I wish for you. That's a very easy way to say it instead of blessing. I give you my blessing, I wish for you instead, Sarah, that you gently begin to know that your brother is not here and that you are safe in many different ways and to very gently start to explore the possibility of letting a tear go once in a while.

Just like a starting, we're putting a little sprout into the ground to see whether it will take root and whether it will start to grow and flourish. If it doesn't grow and flourish, there might be another contract that's deeper in the ground that we have not yet found. So then we just can go back to that.

Am I describing this in a way that makes it a little bit doable, Jaia?

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And what I'm really hearing is the power of language and the importance of curiosity. So, like you say, it's asking a question, and they're not just stopping at the first answer. It's not just, oh, I am

not crying to keep me safe. It's like, okay, to keep me safe from what? And to keep questioning until we understand where this originated.

[00:48:47]

And sometimes we have to go back quite far. Sometimes we remember the most recent trigger, for example, but it's to continue questioning until we really, and as you say, you feel it in your body. You feel heat sometimes, you feel discomfort. I've practiced similar practices to what you're describing, and I know how powerful it is.

And I think my main question, because I think there's some wonderful practices you've given us today, and my main question is, do you recommend doing these on your own or for people to do them on their own with other people, with a guided therapist, like yourself, for example? Or how can people put these into practice?

Sarah Peyton

If you're somebody who likes to work alone or who doesn't have a lot of trust in humans, then I recommend getting the books. There's, *Your Resonant Self* which is all about the neuroscience of self-compassion. And there's the *Your Resonant Self Workbook* which is all about the unconscious contract and all the different ways we can have unconscious contracts with lots of practices to release the contracts.

I recommend this if you know that you don't trust people and you want to work on your own or if you just really like working on your own.

And then another possibility, if you like working with other people and you have some friend groups who enjoy this kind of thing, is to get the group books together and read them together and practice the exercises together.

And then the third thing, if you have quite a bit of trauma and it's quite overwhelming and you get lost when you try to step into it, then I think working with a therapist is so helpful. And you can even bring the book with you and say this is what I want to work on. And therapists will then often help with that, going through that and making it less overwhelming, because that's their specialty.

And then if you're just like well, I love this work but I don't really need a therapist, then there's a large group of people who train with me and who have certification with me. And you can find them on my website, sarahpeyton.com and find somebody whose picture you like and work with people who are specifically trained in this material.

Jaia Bristow

Amazing. Well, thank you so much for your time today, Sarah. Thank you for sharing your skills with us. Thank you for sharing your workbooks and your website.

I really encourage people who feel that this would be beneficial to them, to check all of that out.

Sarah Peyton

Thank you so much. Pleasure being with you today.

[00:51:31] Jaia Bristow

Thank you.