



Conscious Life presents  
**HEALING TOXIC  
RELATIONSHIPS**

**Title**

**Guest:**

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**[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow**

Hello and welcome. I'm Jaï Bristow, one of your conference co-hosts. Today I am very pleased to be welcoming back the wonderful Rafaella Fiallo, a therapist and the creator of Healing Exchange, a mental health education and coaching practice that supports clients in rekindling their relationships, exploring their sexuality, and healing traumas. Welcome.

**Rafaella Fiallo**

Thank you. It's so good to be back. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you and to cover this really important topic.

**Jaï Bristow**

Well, I'm so grateful to have you here covering this topic. So why don't we dive right in? When we're talking about healing unhealthy relationships or healing toxic relationships, or when we encounter challenges in our relationships, where do we start?

**Rafaella Fiallo**

I think it's so common when we're talking about toxic and unhealthy relationships that we typically start pointing our fingers at other people. We start sharing stories about how we've been hurt, but we can all engage in behaviors that can be really unhealthy and toxic. We all have these parts of us who are really deep in the stages of survival and looking for safety and putting ourselves first.

In turn, that can look like crossing other people's boundaries, not being fully transparent, not advocating for ourselves. That can lead to harming other people, to hurting other people, to ending up being the villain in someone else's story. I think I'm hearing that a lot lately. Everyone can be the villain in someone's story or someone can be the antagonist because we're so used to being the main character in our own story.

It makes sense because our world revolves around ourselves, but we really owe it to ourselves to start looking inward, recognizing how our patterns, how our lived experiences impact other people, and not just how we are receiving other people's behaviors or their misbehaviors. I think, really, we have to start looking at it that way and also it just normalizes that we all mess up. None of us are perfect.

**[00:02:32]**

If I can own that there are some things that I'm still working on that I struggle with, ways that I have maybe overstepped or silenced someone else then I may be able to have a lot more space or capacity, or even compassion, to work with or help someone work through the things that they're doing to me, or that I'm witnessing maybe they're doing to someone else.

It really challenges this idea of having to other people, saying that we're going to put them in a category of all bad, all the time, as opposed to sometimes we do things that are inconsiderate, sometimes we're triggered, and that causes a response that is toxic, that is unhealthy, that is invalidating. When we can admit that for ourselves, I think we can start really doing the work of having healthier relationships that are more authentic, because it starts with being authentic with ourselves.

My belief is that our relationship with ourself is the foundation for all of the relationships that we have. Oftentimes you can see this pattern play out. For example, if I don't have the self-trust, if I don't honor my own boundaries, then it gets a lot harder to stand up for myself with someone else if they cross my boundaries, if I'm not standing up for my own boundaries.

### **Rafaella Fiallo**

I like to introduce this concept of, all right, where are you in your self relationship? What needs to be strengthened? What needs to be turned on its head and rectified? And then see it start to smooth out the wrinkles in the pages of other relationships? I don't know. Does that make sense?

### **Jai Bristow**

That makes a lot of sense. I think it's super important, as you say, one starting with focusing on one's relationship with oneself to be able to then have healthy relationship with others. I think that that's probably a message people are hearing a lot on this conference. It's a message that can't be repeated enough.

Also what you're saying about we all have unhealthy behaviors, we all have our traumas, we all have our triggers, we all have our patterns that are sometimes toxic, sometimes just unhealthy, sometimes just unhelpful. In this day and age, I feel like we're in a time where people are so quick to categorize, to create division, to create separation, to create good versus bad. The whole cancel culture, which started in one way and has developed into - if ever you put a toe out of line, then you are a bad person.

There's no room for humanness, for just recognizing that we're all doing our best and not always doing such a good job of that. Maybe not everyone is doing their best. Maybe everyone's best isn't at the standard that we want, but I think it's really important that if people are willing to show up to this conference already, if people are willing to work on their relationships, then recognizing okay, that might start with looking inwards, with recognizing, befriending and getting to know our own shadow side if it were, our own more uncomfortable patterns so that then we can work on those with other people as well.

### **[00:06:01] Rafaella Fiallo**

I love that you mentioned cancel culture too, because to me it just brings up so much intolerance. I think in our culture, especially when you're looking at more liberal and progressive sides, it's like, oh, we're very forward thinking, we're very open. We're creating this lane of curiosity and creativity and creating new worlds, but then we can also be very intolerant when it comes to anything that seems to not push it forward.

It keeps us stuck, because what we end up doing is replicating the same systems that we're trying to get out of, the same systems that we're saying are harmful and toxic. We do it every single time. I see it all the time from different communities and cultures where it's just like labels and boxes. Okay, so you are in a relationship and maybe you're breaking out of the world of monogamy and you're going into open polyamory, but now there's all these rules and this is how you have to do it.

Oh, maybe you're identifying as queer or trying to expand that, well, you have to dress like this or you have to perform this way or you have to sound this way. It's just like, I thought we were trying to be free. I thought we were liberated over here, but now I just have to fall in line in a different way. If you don't, then you're canceled. You're not doing it right, you're not welcome here. Maybe you're not ready to play on this side or something like that.

Where is the patience and the compassion and also just the memory of where we all have been. It's hard to transition, it's hard to do new things. It's hard to get in contact with the shadow self or the part of ourselves that are hiding in the corner. The part of ourselves who never reveal themselves because it's so intimidating and scary.

We've been there, so what do we do to help people along that journey instead of saying, oh, well, you haven't figured it out, come back when you have figured it out. Isn't that what we're trying to do is welcome people so we can help each other figure it out, even if it's for themselves and yours doesn't have to look like mine, but it can still be in this place with us? I don't know.

### **Jai Bristow**

Absolutely. Go ahead.

### **Rafaella Fiallo**

I was just going to say and also I do understand that sometimes - because as I was speaking, I was thinking of folks who are just like, what if people hurt me? Are you saying that I should forgive them? Are you saying that they should get a pass? No, I don't think we're just going to give people blank passes all over the place, but I do think that we should have some type of process in our communities where we have a system, we have a people, we have a group for those who are genuinely trying to figure out like, hey, how did I miss stuff? How did this hurt this person? Oh, I have my own wounds that actually were activated and attacked this thing, how can I heal that?

Versus the folks who are not interested at all at repairing relationships and at self-growth. I think we have to be mindful of that as well because sometimes it can feel really invalidating to the people or to the person who is harmed. But we also have to say, if we're trying to create better communities and none of us are perfect what does that mean when we mess up, because we will inevitably mess up at some point. Do we just say, well, I messed up our rules, I guess I'll show

myself out of this community? Or do we have something in place to say, hey, come over here, let's talk about it. Let's figure out what repair looks like. I just wanted to add that piece.

### **[00:09:48] Jaï Bristow**

I love that. I think it's so important what you're bringing to this conversation. This idea that intolerance promotes stuckness, that intolerance ends up creating more good, bad and division, rather than progress. And that as you say, when we're so focused on intolerance and on vilifying the other, we do it with ourselves as well. Then there is no tolerance for when we mess up. We end up judging ourselves, criticizing ourselves, hating ourselves, rejecting ourselves, or feeling all of that from others.

Again, if we want to create healing, we need compassion, we need care, we need empathy, and we need a lot of tolerance towards ourselves as well as towards others. Like you say, I think people misunderstand the idea of forgiveness. Forgiving and forgetting are two very different things. Often forgiving is more about personally not holding on to the anger, the hatred, the upsetness, not holding onto the story, not perpetuating the story that creates a villain and a hero.

It's interesting because I think it can sometimes go both ways. You talked at the beginning about how people are quick to point the finger, how people are quick to say they're a bad person. I'm in the right, and I think that's true. But in today's culture, I think sometimes people, because of the intolerance, sometimes that can get turned inwards as well. The idea can be I'm a bad person, other people must be right, I'm bad, I'm not adequate, I'm not good enough, and all of that. Maybe we can talk more about these stories that can sometimes become self-fulfilling prophecies even, and this idea of these rigid roles that can happen within the stories as well.

### **Rafaella Fiallo**

Yeah, absolutely. You just hit on so many things. Okay, let's see where we go. But it's very clear, and I think we all have a lot of experience with stories. They are everywhere. We learn them for good reason. They keep us on our toes, they teach us patterns, they teach us about culture, they help us stay alive. It's easy to understand or see how it's so appealing.

Even when we look at these stories from Disney and fairy tales and things like that, people grow up feeling like, okay, so my life is supposed to be like this. A regular story is like, you grow up, you do well in school, you go to college, you meet the person that you're going to marry. You marry them. You have the career of your dreams. You have a kid, maybe a couple of pets, then maybe another kid. You have the perfect house and you live happily ever after, no problems. That's like the dream across the land because of these fairy tales.

If it doesn't look like that, then what does that mean about me? Insert I'm not good enough, I'm not smart enough, I'm not pretty enough, I don't have XYZ enough. When we have these stories that we are telling ourselves, then it also can influence the relationships that we allow or that we don't allow in our lives. The behaviors that we tolerate without accountability, without deeper conversation of trying to make changes that feel good, that uphold our values, our needs, or even our morals, if we want to get down to that.

I think another thing when we're talking about just stories in general, typically in a story we have the villain or we have the antagonist and the protagonist. When we have these really strict roles, then what happens? Someone has to fit them. Very often if something has happened in my life that

has caused me to feel like I'm not good enough or I'm bad, or I can never get it together, I'll never be anything. Maybe someone told me that at a very young age. You'll never be anything. Everything that a partner or a friend or a coworker or something like that, everything that they would do, I may internalize and take it personally.

### **[00:14:20]**

Oh, this person doesn't care for me, so they forgot to order my lunch and they got everyone else a lunch because they don't care about me. So I personalize and make it about me, as opposed to maybe this person is disorganized or maybe they have a lot going on or something like that. Or my partner comes in and slams the door and I must have done something wrong, I didn't do XYZ enough, when really maybe they're having a frustrating day. They had some road rage or something on the drive home and now they're carrying that into their day.

Or on the flip side, if we feel like we are the protagonist of our story and someone else is the antagonist or someone is the villain, then we may look at them like everything that they do is a problem. They just can't get it together. They're not trying hard enough, and it just really warps the story. Something that's really important when we're in any relationship is to slow down and pause and say, what is the story I'm telling myself here.

If you can go a little deeper, noticing what comes up for you in your body as you are in this experience, but then also as you say it out loud to yourself, or maybe you're saying it in your head. Okay, the story I'm telling myself is that my friends don't want me around because they didn't invite me to the party. I feel that in my chest, it's heavy and I can't breathe. Okay, then what do you do with this, if this is a story that you're telling yourself?

Well, next time they reach out, I might give them the cold shoulder. They don't really care about me. They're not really my friends. Maybe I block them. Maybe I unfollow them on social media. I'm going to get you before you get me. Or maybe I quiet myself and I withdraw when I'm in front of them or in group with them because I just don't really think I can trust them.

Maybe a couple of weeks later, you found out that the text never went through and they didn't know. So you were invited, but something happened because technology is technology and things happen. But because of the story that we told ourselves, we lacked curiosity, we lacked compassion, we lacked courage to even say, hey, y'all, you all are meeting up and I saw your Instagram story. I didn't get an invite. What happened?

Something like that to try to challenge, what's the word I want to use? Interrupt the story that we are starting to run with. How can we catch it before we start filling in the rest of the pages of this whole book, of this one perspective that is likely rooted in something way younger or way older from this very moment? Oftentimes when I'm working with folks and it doesn't matter, it could be work with an individual regarding their friendships or partners or I've had friends come to therapy before.

So often it is the story that we tell ourselves that is causing the most pain, that is really keeping us from looking outside of whatever view that we have. But we also have to slow down as the friend, as the other partner, as the coworker, because oftentimes I think - okay, finish that thought. We have to slow down to think about where is this person coming from? I think we owe that in the relationships that we have, that we want to have, that we want to nourish, that we want to create a culture of compassion and conversation with.

**[00:18:13]**

So often when we're talking about this healing work, it's like, okay, I'm the one with the trauma. I'm the one with the negative thoughts. I'm the one XYZ. I have to do all this work by myself. I have to figure it out. I have to say, hey, the story that I'm telling myself is that you don't like me because you slammed the door and you marched to the bedroom and didn't talk to me or something like that.

Sure, you have to do that work, but what is the responsibility that we have in our friendships, in our partnerships, to say, I'm noticing something different about you. I came home and you didn't greet me. Are you having a bad day? What's going on with you? It doesn't have to be just the broken person, the traumatized person, the hurt person to do all the work. We have to all step up to say, I notice you. I see you. Something is different. What is up? And then that other person, you have a choice. Do I say the hard thing of like, I felt really hurt when you came in and slammed the door because I thought you were mad at me.

Does that feel vulnerable? Does it feel risky to admit your feelings and your experiences to the other person? Essentially, I'm talking about creating a space, creating a culture in your relationships where you can have these hard conversations, where you can say, actually, this is what's happening. We can all be honest and take accountability and say, here's how we can truly show up for each other. Guess what? You don't have to do it by yourself. I have my things, you have your things. Together we can try to figure it out and hold each other accountable and in a loving, compassionate space.

### **Jai Bristow**

I love that. I think it's really important what you're saying about how basically we receive these messages often early on in our life, whether from parents or society or whatever. These messages then influence and create our beliefs, our thoughts and our behaviors. They're influenced by these messages and then we create these stories around that, because of our thoughts, beliefs, behaviors. And then because of those stories, like we were talking about earlier, they become self-fulfilling prophecies.

It's oh, this person slammed the door because I'm somehow unlovable, basically is the quick route, or whatever, rather than taking the time to be like, oh, what's going on with this other person? We're so quick to create and reinforce these stories, to create roles for ourselves and for the people in our lives. Meanwhile, most of the other people are doing the exact same thing. Meanwhile, they're like, oh, I came home and I was upset. I came home in a rush, and I was clearly upset because I slammed the door. The person didn't even ask me what was going on, but just went and sulked off or whatever it was.

It's the cycle. It perpetuates it because we're all taking on roles. Recently, I was in a long-term relationship, friendship with someone where their belief was very much tied to the victim role. Again, I'm simplifying. Most of the time, that left me - if they were the damsel in distress in the story - that left me two roles. Most of the time I was a knight in shining armor who protected them from the evils of the world. But if ever I put a toe out of that role, then I became the evil monster or dragon or antagonist that was hurting them and that they needed protecting from.

**[00:21:59]**

That was I think their vision. For me, on the other side I saw them as this very fragile person who needed protecting and who I had to protect from all the evils of the world. I had to be strong and I had to take on this role of protector and guardian, but it also limited me because then I felt like I couldn't be vulnerable, I couldn't be weak. I also couldn't be upset. I couldn't be angry.

If I was, then I became the villain. In my mind, they became the villain as well. The reason I'm sharing all of this is to show how quick and easy it is to get caught up in these beliefs, these thoughts, these stories that you're talking about, and even with people that we love, even with people that we know. I love what you're saying about just taking a minute to slow down. If we're able to notice one of these thoughts, one of these behaviors, or one of these beliefs, to take a moment to slow down.

What is the story I'm telling myself right now? How does it feel in my body and to, again, like you say, work on our relationship with ourself first to then and we'll move into this next, have these conversations. I really want to remind the people listening that these conversations and doing this work, it's not easy. It's a practice. As we've said, we're going to mess up and it's okay to mess up. The whole point is to practice and then we can repair with ourselves, with others.

There's both things that you mentioned. There's the stopping and starting the conversation with someone. Hey, I noticed that you were slamming the door. Are you okay? What's going on with you? Or there's the receiving the beginning of that conversation and it feels vulnerable. It feels risky. As you were saying, it can be scary. So let's talk about that, how do we have these conversations? Because we're talking a lot about relationship with self, how do we take care of oneself as we have these conversations with other people?

### **Raffaella Fiallo**

The first thing I just want to name is that when it comes to these experiences, sometimes why we engage in so much avoidance, is because to a part of us, it feels unbearable. It feels like if we let it out, it'll never stop and then we'll always be in pain. There will be no relief. That doesn't sound good right. It sounds like a completely reasonable thing to want to avoid.

Just being able to acknowledge that first, what are the concerns around safety and security here? What is the fear? Because almost everything that we do is to survive, to be safe. There's a fear of something being taken away, being removed, or not having access of something. If we can reframe that, then it makes so much sense why being vulnerable feels like a huge risk. It makes sense where it may feel like, is this worth it to say, hey, I felt hurt because if they look at me and say, oh, Raffaella is weak. She can't deal with me being upset after a hard day, she makes it all about her. I don't get my reassurance or I don't get the clarity that I'm looking for, that's like, oh, it has nothing to do with you.

Whatever I'm looking for, I don't get that information. When we are looking at vulnerability and the risk of having these conversations, we really have to assess our relationship. I'm sure there are some signs or some history in each relationship that says, can this person hold space for me in the way that I need. Go a little deeper. Whatever you're looking at, is that accurate? Because again, that's a story we're telling ourselves too. We may immediately say, no, I can't tell them anything because the last time I did, XYZ happened.

**[00:26:40]**

Slow down there. What happened? What were the circumstances surrounding it? Okay, is there anything we need to update or we need to clarify with this person or with ourselves? Maybe we misread something. Maybe we actually cut that person off because we were trying to be vulnerable, but then we backtracked and was like, oh, never mind, I'm fine. Don't worry about it. And then we told ourselves, see, I can't tell them anything. They can't hold space for me. It's a lot of slowing down.

This is also hard because our nervous system really needs predictability. Our nervous system likes to be able to say, I know what's going to happen, and if I don't know, I need to have some type of stress. This causes stress, which leads to a response of fight, fawn, fall. I'm missing one.

### **Jaï Bristow**

Freeze.

### **Rafaella Fiallo**

Freeze. Thank you. Freeze. When we have that type of response, then it can feel really confusing to everybody involved. Just being able to understand our own patterns, let someone in to even say, hey, I want to have a conversation with you. Typically it brings up this type of response in me. Here are some ways that I can take care of myself, and here are some ways I'm wondering if you can support me.

Of course, this takes a lot of insight, and like you said, it takes practice to even know, what do I even need in the situation? If I'm so used to fleeing or freezing or fighting or people-pleasing, whatever the case is, what do I really need in that moment? How can I start working on giving that for myself and then being able to ask someone, can you show up for me in this way, because this is what I need? This is what will help me. Give them the time to maybe ask some questions, maybe have to come up with a compromise.

I really appreciate you sharing that with me. Maybe we can try it this way because that will work for me. How does that feel for you? How can we come together? It doesn't have to be oh, you can't do it exactly like this, then screw you. It doesn't have to be. If that's what you really need, then maybe that's not the person for that. Maybe there's someone else you can go to after you talk to this person, say, okay, this is how you can support me. And then after that, I'm going to go over to this friend because I know they can show up for me this way.

This is why we need community, because we can't have all of our needs met by just one person for one reason or the other. Either their capacity or it could be their skill or it could be where they are in their own journey. But we have to recognize that, otherwise we're going to just continue to engage in this cycle where this story is just getting fortified. See, here's another example, I can't trust the world.

Instead of where and how can people show up for me and how can I allow them that space to do that and that be true and go to other places where what they can do can be true. Therefore no one's just written off with a blanket statement. When it comes to determining the worth, I think the



other thing that is really underneath the core of why we don't want to be vulnerable is going back to that. How are they going to respond? Will it be safe? Will I be okay?

**[00:30:44]**

As the person on the other side of it, that's where our responsibility and accountability comes in. How do I make a space safe for someone? How do I show up in a way that shows people they can come to me, that they can call me in about something, that they can put their mess on the table and I'm not going to be like, what the heck is all of this? Okay, thank you for showing this. But you know what, I have a whole table of my own. I don't think I could really be in a place to help you with all of yours right now.

Being honest and being transparent. But we owe it to ourselves and to that person, because when we can be that authentic, then we can also take care of ourselves. When I can say, I have a lot going on, I really appreciate you telling me what you need, here's where I can meet you. That also helps me when I'm looking for help, when someone tells me no or they can't or not right now, I'm not going to say, oh, because you don't care about me. Thank you for being honest and taking care of yourself and telling me how you can show up for me. And now I go over to another person and say, hey, I need some support. Can you show up in this way?

**Jaï Bristow**

Absolutely.

**Rafaella Fiallo**

Does that make sense?

**Jaï Bristow**

It does. I think you've touched on a lot of things. That's okay. You've touched on a lot of things so I want to recap a little bit. The first thing you were talking about is the importance of safety and security. I think this might seem obvious to some people, but I remember when it clicked in my brain that safety and security is also about emotional safety and not just physical safety. I remember how I used to - as someone who was socialized as a woman for 30 years, I was always taught, beware of your surroundings, beware of men, be careful walking alone at night, all that kind of thing.

But I remember being in a situation where I was like, okay, I'm perfectly safe physically, but I am not safe emotionally. This person is verbally attacking me. This person is triggering me. How do I take care of myself emotionally and protect myself in that way? I think when you're talking about making sure the person opposite you has the capacity to hold space, making sure that you're questioning the stories you're telling yourself, wondering what the stories they're telling themselves about you are in that moment, all these things can contribute.

Again, as we said, practice, practice, practice. These aren't easy things to decondition, deprogram ourselves when we've been taught certain ways and what safety means. Which is why talking to a therapist, having guidance from a coach, working with NVC, the nonviolent communication tools and resources, to get in touch with needs, relying on community as you said. All these things are

really good practices and really good tools that can help us have these difficult conversations, that can help us show up when we need to.

**[00:33:51]**

And then what you're saying about that authenticity, that vulnerability, that being able to name your capacity and not go beyond your capacity to help someone else. Put your own oxygen mask on before helping other people. I know that in a previous conversation, you and I talked about the importance of modeling behaviors. So actually, sometimes saying, hey, if someone comes to you and wants to talk about something, sometimes saying, hey, I hear this is important to you and I really want to give you the time and attention that you need and deserve, but right now isn't it. I'm really busy doing this other thing. How about tomorrow at 10:00 a.m, or whatever it is?

How about we have breakfast tomorrow and I can give you the attention. Even though that might feel initially unhelpful or mean, or maybe it's going to trigger the other person, or maybe it's going to reinforce their story that no one's ever available to them, it actually is a way of modeling that sense of, okay, I'm looking after my needs, as well as wanting to support you in your needs.

I think you've touched upon all these really important pieces and that thing of being on both sides of how do I ask for what I need and make sure that the person opposite me can meet my needs? If they can't, how do I get my needs met by either someone else or some other community or in some other way? But also, how do I create safety for other people? How do I make sure other people feel okay coming to me and feeling like I can give them what they need to feel safe?

As we've said again and again throughout this conversation, we're not always going to get it right. If we don't get it right, if for whatever reason someone didn't feel safe with us in that moment, or we felt like we betrayed ourselves for them or we betrayed them for ourselves or whatever it is, then we go back to all our basic practices that we've mentioned throughout this conversation.

We ask ourselves, what's the story we're telling ourselves? What are these thought patterns? What are the beliefs that are coming up? Where do these messages come from? How can I interrupt as you said, these patterns, these unhealthy behaviors and get out of the loop, get out of the cycle and the self-fulfilling prophecies and stories?

### **Rafaella Fiallo**

That was beautiful. That was a great summary. Something that you said at the very beginning, call to attention this other thing I just want to name for a moment when it's about asking for help, because we have to notice sometimes we ask for help from people that we know can't support us. It could be for a variety of reasons. Maybe we're going to a person who perpetually overbooks themselves, who is going through a lot of things and we know that they're going to tell us no.

Sometimes I see this pattern with folks. I'm not really a big fan of the whole self-sabotage concept, but there's something there. There's a part of us that is a self-fulfilling prophecy. I like that better. Yes, a self-fulfilling prophecy. See, no one makes time for me. But if you look at the folks that you've engaged with, were they available? Did they have the capacity to meet you where you were trying to go? Was there something subtle or intentional about you reaching out to that person?

Was there something that you subconsciously left out when reaching out to that person so that they had the information they needed to say, oh, you know what, actually, now I have this bit of

information I can prioritize. I need to move some things around, but maybe you left it out for some reason. I know, I've been there. I'm still working on asking for help. It's something that's just a part of me that a lot comes up, so I have to do a lot of work. A lot of sitting with myself to identify and care for the parts that feel weak, that feel unintelligent, needy or something if I have to reach out for support or help from someone.

**[00:38:20]**

I have to sit and soothe and calm and say, hey, I trust this person. I hear you, I see you. I know you're questioning, why the hell do you think this person will ever help you? Or that they can help you. Usually that's my thought. No one can help you. You have to do it all by yourself. But I owe it to myself and to that younger part that has a lot of concerns, that has a lot of reservations.

That way they don't say, okay, well, don't tell them you really need this right now or else XYZ will happen. Because then what does it mean for people to show up for you during your deepest needs, during your deepest vulnerability? Is it them knowing that? Is it them seeing that about you that brings up some narrative, a story that you're trying to hide? Are you unable to take in the love and the community and the care and the support? Why is that?

I think that's always a really good question for us to sit with. What's the story I'm telling and how am I trying to make it true? How am I trying to make sure that it follows the storyline every single time? Because that's what we're used to. That's what our nervous system likes. It likes predictability. Please give me the story the way it's been written, or else it's going to be pure chaos.

I cannot tolerate that. I cannot tolerate someone running off lines and going, I don't know the language that writers and stuff use, but I think there is a word for when you go off script or something. I can't tolerate someone going off script. I need to know exactly what's going to happen. I just wanted to put that out there because we owe it to ourselves to reflect and to sit with that and then even be honest.

Essentially, I think what we're talking about - I know that you and I have done some work around this, just individually, and we're talking about it like, oh, just do this. But this stuff is hard. It's not missed upon me that this is not something that you just like, oh, okay, I'm just going to start asking people to meet my needs and having these tough conversations. No, if it were that easy this conference wouldn't exist. We wouldn't have any of these problems, these struggles in the world.

But just sit back and remind yourself with that part of you, that you owe this to yourself, that you're deserving of relationships with people that feel loving and that are compassionate and that help you determine what safety is. Relationships that make it more clear for you what stability and security feels like for you. Being in your body and even noticing that sometimes things get activated, but it's from ten years ago, and it's actually not what this person is doing right now.

How do you sit with that and navigate that? Not so much now, I think we're moving away, but definitely words like triggered and stuff come up and everything is triggering. That's good to understand because it's giving us insight to something, but then what do we do about it? I think we've gotten so much in the habit of going way back to the beginning of our conversation, just throwing things away, like, oh, we'll just cancel this person. They're triggering, they're toxic.

**[00:41:39]**

Instead of actually doing the work of oh, actually, this has nothing to do with this person. This has everything to do with that thing that happened when I was 16 or when I was 22 and I had my first job out of university or something like that. I don't know. Whatever it is, we owe it to ourselves to reconcile these events and these memories and our storyline, and to invite the people in to add more clarity so they can speak for themselves and we're not writing their lines for them.

### **Jai Bristow**

Yes. I think it's so important that piece that you're bringing in about predictability, better the devil you know is a famous expression and it's so true, our nervous systems. That's why we often end up in the same patterns with different people because we've already, like you say, we've written the script. We create self-fulfilling prophecies. We attract people, we cast the right people in our play. We choose people who have the opposite or whatever.

It's like what I was saying with my friend, where she would see me as a protector and I'd see her as fragile. We choose people in our lives that are going to do a good job of helping us create our self-fulfilling prophecies, of helping us write our stories. That thing you just said about don't write the lines for other people.

For me, I'm someone who recently came out as trans and nonbinary, and I really remember how, again, I had all these messages about what that meant and so much internalized transphobia. I'd be going to meet old friends and I'd already be defensive and expecting what they were going to say and how they were going to react. But because I've done this work and yes, it's hard, but it's possible because I have my practice, I'd notice it before I'd get there. I'd be like, oh, that's so interesting.

How about I let go of the story that everyone's transphobic and that people are going to misgender me, use the wrong pronouns, use the wrong names and whatever. How about instead I go just with an open heart and open mind, but also with my tools and ability to stay connected to myself, to set boundaries when it's appropriate. Because I think it's a fine line between what we're saying and just giving an excuse to everyone being oh, everyone has their trauma and their ways of being and their unhealthy patterns. I'll just let them treat me badly.

That's not what we're saying at all. We're saying, question these beliefs, but also ask people other questions, find out what their stories are, heal together in community. I wish we had more time, but unfortunately we don't. Rafaella, how can people find out more about you and your work?

### **Rafaella Fiallo**

Yes, you can find me at [rafaellafiallo.com](http://rafaellafiallo.com) or [healingxchg.com](http://healingxchg.com). All of that will be written out for you. At our practice, we center relationship sexuality and trauma therapy, education and coaching. So check us out, learn more, reach out if it feels aligned. Thank you again so much, Jai, for this opportunity and to the conference for reaching out. This has been such a pleasurable, insightful and affirming conversation. I'm just so grateful to be here. Thank you.

### **Jai Bristow**

Thank you. I love all our conversations and I've really enjoyed this one too. Thanks, Rafaella.