



Coming Home To The Body

Guest: Mark Walsh

Alex Howard: Welcome everyone to this session, where I am real excited to be talking with a good buddy of mine, Mark Walsh. Firstly Mark, welcome.

Mark Walsh: Good to see you again, Alex.

Alex Howard: So let me just give people your professional bio for people that may not be familiar with it. We're then going to jump in a little bit with your own personal story, so people get more of a sense of the human side as well.

Mark Walsh is the founder of the Embodied Facilitator Course, Embodied Yoga Principles, the Embodiment Podcast and the Embodiment Conference, a groundbreaking event attended by over 15,000 people worldwide, 18 months ago, with the October event this year on track to have over 200,000 participants. With an honors degree in psychology, 20+ years of yoga experience and an aikido black belt, Mark has dedicated his life to embodied learning.

These days, he teaches and mentors young embodiment teachers all over the world. Mark has also taught trauma education to numerous nonprofit organizations and militaries, both in the UK and in areas of conflicts. Mark's also the author of *Embodiment - Moving Beyond Mindfulness*, which is a book I recommend.

Put another way, Mark is the man on all things embodiment!

Mark Walsh: Seems to be that word's stuck with me a little bit these days.

Alex Howard: So Mark, I think a good place to start, I always like to land these things a little bit in the personal. But I know you've also had your own journey with trauma both personally and as a professional piece. So do you want to just start there?

Mark Walsh: Yeah, sure. So I grew up in a rough, rural but rough, area of East Anglia. That was full of cousin marriages and hard drugs in an alcoholic family. And that was my first instance of trauma, really was just going, okay my dad - God love him he's deceased now - was a good man in many ways, but he certainly had his flaws and I didn't feel safe at home. And that feeling of not safeness, I think, is really at the heart of trauma. Really going, okay, I - in my bones in my body - don't feel safe. And I certainly had a degree of hyper arousal which was a symptom of trauma, which would probably now be diagnosed as ADHD, something like that.

And in the school that I went to, I again, did not feel safe, I had a lot of conflict in the school. So I didn't feel safe in the day or in the evening and that was where I grew up. And I eventually was led to studying the martial arts, which is a way to feel safe, to feel, hey, I want some power, I want to feel good in myself. And there's practical reasons for that as well. And the martial arts were my first example of an embodied practice. And all I mean by that is, a practice where you're body-aware, so mindful based, but where one is developing oneself through the body.

So in a martial art, you're learning punches or kicks or throws or whatever. But you're also developing yourself as a person through that, and expanded out to meditation and yoga and dance. And now I do all sorts of things, I ended up working in areas of conflict. First for a nonprofit organization and that was really interesting. And I think, as like many traumatized people, I was looking to find somewhere externally that was as intense as I felt internally. So it was actually, with this Covid crisis that's here, I actually just felt totally comfortable, at ease, since it hit. I was like, okay, I was talking to my colleague Daniela, who used to work in Afghanistan like I did. And we were like, this is just Tuesday, there's a way in which that's the whole system as someone with trauma symptoms can feel at ease in conflict.

However, that's where it got real, some full blown PTSD type symptoms eventually wash back at home. Totally alcoholic myself by that point, really now suffering from lots of trauma symptoms, I was trying to medicate myself with alcohol, I was numb in some ways, hyper aroused and others. And I treated myself, I got treatment and I got sober and a few years later, I would then start training other aid workers. Because they would say, I was running a psychology training company, but they'd say, "well, you wouldn't understand." And I'd say, "well, actually, I would and here's a few stories" and I'd share. And they'd go, oh, and they start trusting me and they realize.... And I would work usually with therapists, I'd bring in other people and gradually got more skilled.

My main mentor, Paul Linden, is a trauma trainer. So then we started training other NGOs and recently doctors, I've trained militaries, even in the House of Lords once, which impressed my mom. So that was my own journey and it's the only thing I do. I'm known for this embodied approach generally but that intersects with trauma in quite a few ways. So a bit of a long story, but I hope that lays out the territory for us.

Alex Howard: Absolutely. One of the things I really want to pick up on is that you described that feeling of not feeling safe. And one of the ways that you work with that feeling was, well, a few ways you describe, one of which was to learn to defend yourself and protect yourself, physically. Another was to almost normalize that feeling by putting yourself in extreme environments that made the outer match the inner. And it just strikes me that people, because of course others with trauma will do the opposite, they will want to live in a totally safe bubble.

Do you want to say a bit about how different people respond to the same core wounds or the same issues in such different and such polarized ways?

Mark Walsh: Yeah. I was maybe even more of an activation stage rather than a closed down stage. Someone with, maybe, more severe trauma might have gone more into a kind of full

and closed down. And that might relate to some of the health conditions that I know you work with.

But equally, being stuck in that fight, flight arousal, it's hard to digest properly when you're in that state. It's just not uncommon for people in that state long term, to have stomach issues for example. People like Kathy Kain or Irene Lyon are great on this, how it intersects with health, which I know a lot your audience are interested in. And it was more healthy ways I was looking at, so for example, learning self-regulation. I've become an expert in censoring. I've read a whole book on self-regulation. I'd say I'm one of the top people out there for self-regulation techniques.

So, also through intimacy, how we deal with intimacy, how we find healing through intimacy. Different cultural things like, I talk about the intensity, I quite like being around Israelis or Russians or, cultures that had fairly hard time of it, there's a certain familiarity there. I married a Ukrainian girl, a member at my wedding, my Irish family - and Ireland of course has its own trauma history, not quite as recent as some, but still in the bones - my Irish family got on really well with the Ukrainian family and the English side not so much, a bit less trauma there.

So these things don't always have to be bad and certainly my story shows it's not a life sentence. This healing that can happen at a gross level, like there was a point where I was alcoholic and couldn't sleep without getting drunk. And then the next level is, can you basically function, can I have a job, can you have an intimate relationship? And even now, I still have therapy fairly regularly and EMDR, or I talk to therapists and I like really somatic work, of course. And I realize that there are subtler layers, and I'm like a bit defensive with certain kinds of people. Okay, stuff around authorities coming up and that's part of my pattern. But different people have different patterns, trauma is very individualized in some ways, this basic fight, flight, freeze and collapse pattern is cross-cultural. But different people may be on different parts of that, like a learned helplessness collapse from prolonged victimhood. That's a very different thing than someone who's stuck in a fight mode and that fight mode is actually working reasonably well for them, that's the different part of the physiological sequence.

Alex Howard: Yeah. And I suppose the thing is, sometimes people's, their ways of dealing with their dysfunction actually become highly functional. And sometimes in life they even get rewarded for those things and that can then make it quite difficult to get out of those patterns.

Mark Walsh: Exactly. You can be a bad ass martial arts teacher that can, I've got lots of energy, people say, how do you get so much done? That's also turning symptoms into something positive, but then I find there's a cycle with that. You find a way of coping, which is the best thing you can do at a time and it's better than nothing, even if it's alcoholism. Alcoholism was a whole lot better than nothing.

Alex Howard: It saved lives.

Mark Walsh: Yeah. And then eventually that comes at a cost and eventually that cost becomes unbearable. So there's a cycle there with any coping mechanism and we do get

rewarded. I know people who say, "he's very cool and calm under pressure." And it's like, well, he's just totally dissociated, he's totally numb, that comes at a cost to his relationship or whatever. So I think of it as a spiral of healing.

Alex Howard: Yeah.

Mark Walsh: You hit the same issues at different levels and you learn to let go of some of the stuff you've been rewarded for as the other consequences of that become more severe.

Alex Howard: Let's take a bit of a step back here, with this concept of embodiment. I know it's a kind of central theme in a lot of the different pieces that you're involved in. For some people, they've heard the phrase many times before, others haven't. But the phrase makes sense just by hearing it and others it might be, what is this thing, embodiment?

So maybe just give a bit of an embodiment 1-0-1. What are we actually talking about?

Mark Walsh: Well first of all, Alex, nobody has a clue, especially anyone who's using the hashtag right now. It's become trendy, which is good, it's good that it's popular because things like the conference are popular, but it's also not so good that it's become a buzzword. Like anything that becomes... mindfulness has become a trend. So you can think of it in several ways and it's good to look at it in several ways and people may refer to it in several ways. So you can think of it as the umbrella of all the body mind arts, an umbrella term for body mind arts like yoga and conscious dance, martial arts, and body work, improv even, body therapy. That's about it, somatics there's like six or seven of them, so they need an umbrella term, anything that's an awareness based body art.

A good definition I like is, the subjective view of the body. So a view of the body which instead of viewing the body as a brain taxi as my friend Francis Briers would say, as an object that sees the body as part of who we are. And of course anyone interested in health knows this. If you're psychologically and emotionally tense, you're physically tense. If you're psychologically, emotionally well, physically, your body will be relaxed, expansive, whatever. This is not rocket science. You get a cold when you're upset. This is this is not news to anyone. So we can say that whole body mind link, that's what embodiment refers to. There's a few other definitions, you can look at it as a type of intelligence, there's a few. But the subjective view of the body is a pretty standard one for it.

Alex Howard: One of things that's certainly true in my experience was that I was very disassociated for many, many years. And it was only when I had experiences of really coming back into my body, and the good and the bad that went with that. Having to feel the feelings that hadn't been felt, but also the sense of deep rest and calm that came from being fully embodied. It was only then that I really understood what embodiment was in a felt sense.

And I think sometimes when people are so conditioned to be either in a trauma response or indeed just a disassociated state. It's very hard to cognitively really get what we're talking about here. I don't know there's anything that you can say to help land people a bit more in the felt sense of what it means to be embodied?

Mark Walsh: Yeah. Well, first thing I'd say is, one more clarification, there's unconscious and conscious embodiment. So we're all unconsciously embodied, our personality, our way of being is laid down in our patterns of movement and breath and posture. You get this right? You see someone that's got a certain way of being across, you cross the road, or a certain kind of person dogs like, and kids like, there's a certain attractive or repulsive quality to certain embodiments. And this is how we talk about chemistry in dating or so many things that we might use every day.

So there's always embodiment, but to become consciously embodied, to bring through the gateway of mindfulness, usually quite often, getting more in contact with ourselves. And as you said, there's often very good reasons people aren't in contact with themselves. So in trauma by definition, there's an experience of overwhelm, there's a leaving the body. Now, that might be a full dissociative blackout, or it might be just a general little by little numbing out over time. But as you say, you can't selectively numb so you're also numbing your good emotions as well as your bad. And this is why you'll see, for example, some people with trauma will be really attracted to extreme sports because they can feel something or self-harming, some attempt to at least break through the numbness, the dissociation and to feel, just to feel alive. So that is a key, key thing here.

And often titration is the principle I think Peter Levine probably labeled, of slowly coming back to the body. I sometimes talk about coming home to the body and also I'm aware not to force people too quick to that. So doing something that - either if someone has a lot hyper arousal, that might be like jumping around. I couldn't meditate for ten years, I had to do martial arts. I had to do something that burned off some of that hyper arousal charge and then I could be lying on the floor exhausted afterwards, having fought a bunch of guys or whatever. And I was like okay, now I can feel my heart rate. Or it could be the very gentle, subtle, little by little, gentle yoga, not going into overwhelm. There's actually some seductive traps in body art for people with trauma backgrounds, like really intense yoga, hot yoga because that covers up the feelings.

So if you're in a thirty degree yoga class, your hamstrings are screaming at you. You're not aware of the subtle existential angst nagging at your soul, you're numbing that, you're covering it up with something much more. It's like playing very loud music to cover up quiet music. So that's one trap and then there is the OCD trap, because if you think of trauma as an experience of being out of control, it can lead to a degree of control freakery. For example, most forms of yoga and martial arts where you can control rigidly everything which might make it feel safe. But ultimately, that's not the way to go in terms of your life. So these kind of things around safety and control and intensity are all worth bearing in mind if you have a trauma background, and sadly, most teachers don't know about this. Increasingly yoga teachers are finding out about it so things are moving in a positive direction.

Alex Howard: And although it's very much implicit in what we're saying, I think it's probably just worth making that part of what happens in the trauma response is people disassociate as a strategy to survive. And it's interesting what you were saying about even alcoholism could be a strategy. This is effectively a survival strategy that people use.

Mark Walsh: Yeah, one that might not be great long term and has a consequence, but I'm almost certain I'd be a suicide if it wasn't for alcohol. So at least it enabled me to get through

10 years of my life before I found martial-arts and then therapy and all the other things that I now - nature connection, spiritualism. I'm a big believer in multi-faceted ways of looking at trauma, but I also believe that if the body is involved you're not getting a trauma. I mean, basically the trauma brought back the body. Bessel Van der Kolk wrote this *The Body Keeps the Score* article and therapy was very cognitive like cognitive therapy up to that point, analytic therapy, whatever. And he said, "well, the body really matters here in trauma." that brought the body back in such a big way to all the therapy. Because you can't ignore the body, trauma has a physiology not just the psychology.

Alex Howard: And of course, feeling all of that can be so utterly overwhelming and so painful that in a sense, the trauma response is a disembodied response, in a sense, of that. There's a wisdom in that and there's an enormous amount of suffering and problems that's then caused by that.

Mark Walsh: There's a cost to that, which might be health costs, we can even look a moral cost. When we're disembodied, we're not feeling our values based ethical reaction. So if you look at the lives of a lot of people that have really hurt people, Hitler or someone, they had horrific childhoods and part of that has been numbing out of their own emotional embodied ethics, Paul Linden talks about.

So that's another consequence here, not everyone obviously, but that is a consequence here that could be there. The health ones we mentioned, and just being less alive. We've all had this feeling of being - I don't know, maybe we're on a holiday with friends, the wind's on our skin, the sun's on our skin, our bellies full, we go into rest and digest. Maybe we've been running around, we're feeling our body and that sense of ease and safety in that which is engaging the whole social engagement systems or relations. People always say, "Ah, the locals were so friendly on holiday, the locals were so gentle." Well, yeah, but you're also in a mood which enabled that, which recognized that, the world starts to look different, perception is embodied, cognition is embodied, our relationships rely upon this ability to be embodied.

So trauma is toxic to relationship, this numbing of empathy is so, so toxic to relationships. I mean, you think about it like, you're talking to your wife, you say something maybe not very kind, but then you notice her response, you pull back. You say "I'm sorry honey I said that." Because you've got that embodied relational response, assuming you're not a psychopath. But if you're a bit numb and you'll see that and the tension bands as well as in the spacing out, then you're not picking up on that so quick. And it's possible those relationships go *ptong* before you know it.

Alex Howard: Well also disconnection feeds disconnection. So the more disconnected we are, the more we act towards others in ways that create more tension and more difficulty and the more we choose behaviors that disconnect us further from ourselves.

Mark Walsh: You've got virtuous and vicious circles with connection, and embodiment's all about connection to self, connection to other, connection to values, we could say spirit or something higher if you're into that, and certainly environmental planetary connection. And then trauma's about disconnection and it's where we step in and I think any trauma work is heroic work. Trauma work is piecemeal, trauma work is community work.

If you're not looking at it in that lens and people like Gabor Maté will bring that out really fully. That you need to be looking at trauma through all those lenses because it's impacting all those lenses. And we're either, right now you're my friend, we know each other, that social engagement system's kicking in, we haven't quite got eye contact because we're online, we're not hugging which would help. But still we've got a nice flow and I started to feel more relaxed about being interviewed and you start feeling more relaxed and it's cool, we're in that nice flow. However, if I came to this interview super stressed and tense, you might have picked up on that. Like, what's wrong with Mark? He's looking at me funny, and then you look at me funny. Then I feel, why is he looking at me funny for? And before we know it we're in another cycle.

Alex Howard: Let's not go there!

Mark Walsh: Sorry did I freak you out with your imagining of that? That's something human beings can do that most animals can't, we can get stressed just by thinking of stressful things.

Alex Howard: I think one of the things, well actually something I wanted to just pick up on as well is that - one of the things that's very true in chronic illness and in health conditions is that, for the body to heal, we have to be in the body on so many levels. But just from a simple - to be able to listen to the body's communications, we have to be connected to it. So there's also something that happens, kind of building on this point around these virtuous cycles and these negative cycles. The more disconnected one gets, the more one makes poor choices towards our body, which then perpetuates that, in a sense, form of, it's a strong phrase, but that almost form of self-harm or self-abuse that people can have.

Mark Walsh: That's a really good point, Alex I like that a lot. I'm not a health expert, but I think it stands to reason that if we're not listening to our body impulses, if we're trying to impose that from the mind, it's gonna go wrong. I'm drinking this vitamin drink today and it's like, I need to know that I'm thirsty to stay hydrated, it's a simple, simple thing, am I thirsty? If I'm not in contact with that, I'm gonna get dehydrated. Am I overeating because I'm not aware that I'm full? I mean, I'm an embodiment teacher and I still catch myself doing that. I'm like, what, why am I eating this? Some emotional drive maybe that I'm not really aware of in the background rather than, I'm actually not hungry right now. And oh, look, I'm sad. Maybe I should put the ice cream down and pick up the phone to my mom or whatever. That stands to reason to me and some people ask me, what's the most advanced embodied body practice, handstands or extreme sports? I always used to sometimes joke - I'd say, "sleeping when you're tired and eating when you're hungry." That's the high levels.

Alex Howard: Or even calling your mom can sometimes be the highest level.

Mark Walsh: Yeah. So apologizing to your wife, those daily life things where sometimes that half a second of just catching it before you ruin your day. Like, I'm in the wrong here, I need to shut up and apologize. Or you know what? Actually, I need to go for a walk. The other day, I was just really angry with this lockdown, kind of frustrated and looking for somewhere to take it out. I just need to go out in nature and put my feet on the ground and let some of that charge settle, do a couple of belly breathing exercises while I'm there. And then go back to work 20 minutes later, that probably saved my day, three days ago.

Alex Howard: Yeah I've certainly been there. I think people at this point hopefully will be really understanding the value and the importance of coming home to the body. But I think one of the challenges can be - one of the gifts of the Internet is there's enormous amounts of information, and paths, and places people can go. If we go back 20, 25 years, perhaps, when you and I were early on in our paths, it was like you went to the local church hall and there was a yoga class. And that was the choice that you had, it wasn't what yoga? What path am I going to go down? Or is it yoga or is it martial arts or is it embodied whatever? You had a very limited choice, and that's the path you went.

It's almost the opposite now. There is such an enormous amount of choice that, that can be utterly overwhelming. And as you made the point, I think sometimes people will choose the paths that actually perpetuate the problems, because that's the resonance, that's what's familiar for them.

Mark Walsh: Our neuroticism generally in our choice of practice.

Alex Howard: Yeah. So how does one navigate that and find a path which is likely to be most fruitful for this particular stage of their development?

Mark Walsh: Yeah. I mean, I'm obsessed with this question, I can talk for hours on this, but let me just do a few basics. We coach people over a nine month program to help them establish this, this is not necessarily a simple question, but let me give one simple answer. If someone falls in love with an embodied practice, assuming the teacher isn't abusive and they're not hurting themselves physically or whatever, just go for it in the first instance. Because it's better to do one thing and things open up. So, I'm studying martial arts, it's not particularly emotionally orientated, but at a certain point that develops out of something else. So it's not particularly relational in some ways, but then that develops out of being part of a club or whatever.

And I did learn some very key skills like self-regulation through martial arts and then eventually after three, five, ten years, just be open to, you might need something else. And this is where we can get our heads involved a little bit more, where we say, what am I trying to build here? All this time building emotional self-regulation just to stay with that example. Maybe I want to go dance five rhythms and learn emotional expression and let it all hang out. That's what I did for example, tango and study passion and beauty and sensuality, no one cares about those things in Aikido. Naturally that will emerge anyway if you're paying attention and you don't get fundamentalists about the first thing you did.

That question, what am I trying to build for an embodied art? I think it's important and just watch out for your neuroticism. Maybe you're a control freak, you take up Iyengar yoga, maybe not such a good idea. Maybe you're, what is it my friends says, "escape artists and control freaks, Adam Barley says this. If you're totally like, no one cage me and I want to be free. Maybe conscious dance isn't the best thing for you. But you might need to do that just for a few years because it's a safe place, because it's familiar, just to get into your body a little bit. And if you can find trauma aware trainers then do ask teachers, you don't have to join an Aikido class, you can watch one, you can look at the other students, how do they speak about the teacher? Does everyone hang on every word they say like they're a guru? You can watch and observe and do due diligence as well.

Alex Howard: One of the challenges I think people face is that, if any teacher that's really passionate about their discipline. So let's say you've got an Ashtanga yoga teacher vs. kung fu teacher, not in a fight obviously. They're both going to be, part of the reason why you're probably drawn to them as a teacher is they're deeply passionate and in a sense, part of what often goes with that, is this path is the path and the path for everyone. And there's something I think is really important about committing to a practice, even when it's a struggle. For example, my work on the therapy side, it's like the moment that therapy is most difficult is often the point there's the most potential to grow. But at the same time you get, as you very well-articulated just now, you get different benefits from different practices. And so sometimes your growth edge is not just going deeper into one path it's actually the opposite.

Mark Walsh: When do you choose?

Alex Howard: Yeah. How do you avoid running away when it's tough vs. hanging in there when that's not helpful?

Mark Walsh: The Dalai Lama said, "you should review your practice regularly every 10 years." So that's good advice.

Alex Howard: I haven't heard that before, it's very good.

Mark Walsh: He really did and he didn't mean it as a joke either. So he was like, no, no you do something for 10 years and you review it. So think of it like dating, at first you have a lot of dates. Let's say you're at university, 20 years old, you have lot of dates. And then you go steady with someone for a while. But at a certain time, you need to get married if you really want to get the full fruits of a relationship and if not formal marriage, moving in or kids or whatever the equivalent is. And without that, if we just go for a shallow kind of consumer - sweet shop I call it - approach, we're never going to get to anything interesting. You need to dig a deep well. So I would say after a dating period, with students we sometimes say, do three classes of three things and then pick one for six months, and if you like that do it for the next 10 years. So you've checked it out, the teacher's not abusive, it fits your schedule, and your body, and your age, bla bla bla. And then commit.

I've done a lot of Aikido, at a certain point - also so one problem is not committing. The second problem is not being able to be unattached - I was very attached to Aikido. And run a mile from any teacher who says, this is the only way for everyone. I mean, they might say that because it's worked for them and they're passionate and they're sincere, they're not con artists. More people are just naive, not con artists, I think. That is a naive view, one thing definitely doesn't work for everyone. And don't be afraid after a certain period of time that you've committed to, you can get divorced, that's allowed. So for me, I rarely train Aikido anymore, I love Aikido still, I occasionally swing by the club and usually I'm out of shape from it, but I still enjoy it, but it's not my main art anymore, I've got other regular practices. So I think, doing something forever isn't a great idea. One solution I have as an embodiment teacher, I do things for year. So I try random classes in every new thing I haven't heard of at least once. So if I'm at a festival and it's called like Indonesian potato peeling cat loving kung fu, I'll give it a go.

Alex Howard: Sounds just like you Mark as well.

Mark Walsh: I'll give it a go. Yeah, it sounds perfect. But even though, in any year I'll only really be committed to a couple of practices - and there's some things that go through my whole life, yoga, meditation in particular. For me that year long commitment you can get a lot out of it and it can add - if you learn to dance tango for a year, you'll be a pretty good dancer if you dance two nights a week for a year, you're have the basics, you won't be a pro, but you'll learn not only a skill, but also an element of embodiment. There's no reason why everyone out there can't do a year of martial arts and learn to fight. That's a basic life skill as far as I'm concerned, and yes, it might have to be with certain clubs where they feel safe. And I'm not suggesting people jumping to hardcore cage fighting if they're from a trauma background.

Alex Howard: You and I have had various conversations privately in the past, we both, I think, share a bit of an interest in cults and charismatic leaders and some of the problems that come with that. What would be some of the warning signs? So someone says, you got to go and check out this class or this teacher and they go along.

Mark Walsh: A great question. So they have a red dot right in the middle of their head. So a few questions, check, lack of checks and balances. So, for example, I always have a co-teacher and that co-teacher on any of our major courses has veto power over me and I over them. So that's an example of a check and a balance.

Alex Howard: A veto power would work how?

Mark Walsh: They would say you're not allowed to do that. So for example, I was teaching with someone and they were making the group continue and the group were clearly exhausted. So I stepped in and said, "this has to - no, we're having a break". There's something I did once in a session last year and I was challenged on afterwards. And when my colleague says, "hey, what's going on, is it ethical?" The second thing I would say is there should be some kind of code of ethics that is there, so it's very clear what counts and what doesn't. So, for example, a classic one, in our code of ethics, "in all organizations, teachers cannot sleep with students." It's just a very straightforward thing and, there's cooling off periods and this and that. But if, I'm sorry, Alex, if you came to study with me on EFC this year, we wouldn't be able to have sex. It's just a no, no. It's a clear black and white.

Alex Howard: It's the only reason I was going to come on the course!

Mark Walsh: I know, I'm sorry to disappoint you.

Alex Howard: That's just my registration rejected.

Mark Walsh: So it's just very clear. And that's laid out for everyone, it's public. Colleagues have different rules. So I had two colleagues who fell in love and it's a different thing for them. So if they don't have a clear understanding of power and consent, if consent is regularly overridden, like if you're in a yoga class and the teachers goes to touch you and you say, "no, thank you" and they touch you anyway, which is so common in yoga, so

common. They're clearly not respecting boundaries and consent. So you can see it with the little things.

Alex Howard: Yes.

Mark Walsh: And the other one is just, when their students talk about them, their eyes go funny. They're like, Alex is amazing, everything he says is amazing, if there's a sort of tone I think to those. Lack of humor, when humor's gone, fundamentalism is normally in. So there's a few. I can think of a few more. In my book there's a little chapter actually called Health Check for Teachers. And it is interesting, no-one teaches you as a teacher how not to become a guru, because I'm a relatively charismatic guy, I don't like to boast, but I've got some skills. How do I not become a guru? Because no one told that to teachers in the 60s and 70s. Things like having mentors should be mandatory to be in therapy, mandatory for anyone who's doing embodiment work or spiritual work, these things I think are essential.

Alex Howard: I think part of this as well is, one, having enough of a relationship and respect for one's own feelings and emotions and instincts. Because often when these things go awry, one does have some sort of inner response that's like it doesn't feel clean.

Mark Walsh: Yes.

Alex Howard: It doesn't feel okay. And often one has just learned part of the trauma response is they've learned my feelings don't matter, need to override that, this person is the expert. So I guess this is a nice way of coming back to this broader conversation about reconnecting to the body. How does one rebuild that relationship with oneself? How does one reconnect and start to build safety with one's own emotions, one's own feelings, one's own internal landscape?

Mark Walsh: Slowly. So in one word, slowly. In two words, slowly and practice. In three words: practice, slowly and community. So around a community of support, which is ethical. So that's the very short answer to your question.

Alex Howard: Say a bit more about that community piece because it, again, that's a bit of an implicit theme, what we've been talking about here. And I think particularly with these practices, they tend. Yes, I suppose someone can go on an online yoga platform and practice at home. But often these things work better in communities.

Mark Walsh: Yeah. We're wired for community, we're absolutely, that's our neurology. Solitary confinement is a form of torture. Also, your neurology is basically equivalent to the five people you spend most time around. So if you're spending time around a group of people who are also numb and disassociated, that's a problem. If you're spending time around a group, people who are connected and warm and in that rest and digest social connecting mode, you're going to learn that physiologically, just being around them.

Also, communities that have an ethical framework where it is genuinely safe to go to your body, because there's consent and calibration are the two ones that keep coming back to. Calibration's that idea of titration or little by little, like you've seen me teach centering, right? We don't suddenly scream at people, but we work up to the serious shocks by starting

with throwing tissues at each other, Kleenex, really gentle things. And consenting all the way along the way is to make sure there's capacity for that calibration that's happening. Consent, capacity, calibration and community, they go all the C's.

Alex Howard: It's almost like you talked about this before, isn't it? I want to take a bit of a side step here. I think a lot of what we said so far will already feed into this. But resilience, part of what is important, I think, in navigating the particular, like Covid-19 as an example has really highlighted, I think those that have a level of resilience. And those whose personality and life is a bit like built on a pack of cards, got a bit of a shake and the whole thing comes crashing down a little bit.

Say a bit about resilience and how that relates to embodiment.

Mark Walsh: Well, let's be honest Covid has highlighted how comically weak, and weird, and out of sync with our biology and our evolutionary background society's become, let's be honest. And it's shown a fragility to people and to society generally. In terms of what makes people resilient, well, you're inter-resilient. So are you nested in community? Think about evolutionary background, there's the basic health and wellbeing stuff, which is kind of boring, but it's super important, particularly when stuff hits the fan. There's the ability to self-regulate - talked about that - and to not get traumatized.

We spent a lot of time talking about treating trauma, what about preventing it? So having people who are able to connect socially and reach out, and have those communication skills, who are physiologically able to orientate themselves, who have a certain robustness. A lot of trauma work is orientated, very sensitive and delicate, people might be if they're an abused child or whatever they need that. But we need to build adult robustness because life is difficult - if it is not Covid, it's your dad dying. I did the eulogy at my dad's funeral two years ago, you better hope you're robust. And that's not, I'm not weird, I hope your dad dies before you do. That's just the best case scenario in terms of what nature does to us, cancer and heart attacks and whatever else. It's like these skills about robustness, and I feel passionately about it, because it's like, we can't coat the whole world in cotton wool. We need to learn this robustness, it needs to be part of our educational system.

Alex Howard: Well, I suppose part of the challenge is in being trauma informed and responding to the vulnerabilities and sensitivities of people which have been through, sometimes awful, and sometimes just a lot of tricky, difficult situations is the need to create safety and create safe containers and be delicate and holding of that. The problem can sometimes be that then, one just then expects the whole world to be delicate the whole time. And you end up creating an almost bigger prison when you do that.

Mark Walsh: There's several problems there, first of all, you can either wear shoes or you can put leather on the whole world. Which is a better solution? Wearing shoes is resilience and robustness. Trying to put leather on the whole world is trying to sugar coat everything, make everything delicate.

The other thing is, there's no such thing as a safe space, like it doesn't exist. Life is fundamentally unsafe, okay. However, there are places where special conditions for certain situations - you want an abused child to go with therapies and have a certain set of

conditions in this particular place, while they're learning robustness, that's the whole point. You also become a kind of tyranny saying, well, you know what, Alex? I'm offended by blue jumpers, that triggers me. So therefore, you're not allowed to wear a blue jumper, Alex, because I say so. So that can become very controlling.

Alex Howard: You just wiped out most of my wardrobe.

Mark Walsh: So I'm really sorry mate, I'm really sorry your dad wardrobe's out. But do you see what I mean? It can become a way of controlling people, which is not how it was originally intended. So we should be really careful with this language as well, is something really a trigger or do we just not like it?

So a trigger, for me, is something which has a strong association with a traumatic memory as opposed to just like, don't like your whatever. Are we using our insensitivities in a weaponized way to control people? Are we actually teaching robustness? I mean, I find many of the younger generation, to sound old, comically un-robust, comically so but also very sadly. Because if a word is enough to make you so triggered, you can't even talk, I mean, come on. Life is tough. Life's going to throw worse at you than this, it's going to throw viruses that wipe out large sectors of the population. This whole unprecedented thing with Covid, no, it's not, it's totally precedented, this is human history, war and disease and suffering. Like, you better be ready, buddy. So I hope I haven't stressed all the listeners with this, but I don't want to make a safe space, I want to make a space which robust adults can enter into to confront reality.

Alex Howard: Well, it's interesting. It's something that my wife and I have talked about a lot of in the context of parenting. Because you have, as a parent, you have an instinct, which is that you want to protect your child from everything. You don't want them to ever get hurt. You don't want them to be upset. You want to constantly make it okay. And then you get this idea that the perfect childhood is a childhood where my child is in bliss and one with love and magic the whole time. And then you realize that, if that was the perfect childhood, it would leave a child utterly ill prepared for a world which is almost gonna be the opposite of that.

Mark Walsh: That's a Steiner school.

Alex Howard: Let's not go down that path. But there's something about, it's not so much the events that happened to a child. It's how those events are responded to and how both, in terms of that masculine place of you've got this, you're strong, you can handle it, and that more traditionally feminine quality of, I love you as you are, you're perfect, I adore you.

Mark Walsh: Classic scene in the park, dad throwing the kid up in the air, mom saying, "be careful."

Alex Howard: That would be my family.

Mark Walsh: That classic scene. But they're both right, it doesn't have to be gendered as well, hold your complaint letters. They're both right and we need both sides of that, we need the loving and acceptance, even with ourselves. There has to be that complete acceptance,

you know what? This is just how I am and it's not my fault, and I've had a certain set of circumstances, I want to be kind to myself. And it might be my fault, but it is my responsibility now. And I might need to kick myself in the ass a little bit. And I'd better have some discipline. Like the cold shower I had today, as a way of developing that discipline to be able to do something uncomfortable. A life of comfort is "A" impossible but "B" an absolute disaster.

And this is what we're seeing in the modern world is, we've had it so easy for so long that we've forgotten about - I remember my Polish friend, when we were living as Aikido students together, he'd had a pretty tough childhood, in the communist times, he just went, "Mark, in my country. You would die in the snow." And I kind of realized there was this guy so much tougher than I was. And maybe I taught him to be sensitive so there's other skills.

But it is an important thing and for me trauma awareness doesn't mean just being super sensitive the whole time and trying not to upset anyone. It means intelligently grading a set of challenges. Like you've got a kid, you teach him to swim, you don't just throw them in the end straight away, you give them bands and whatever. So that's an intelligent and kind approach to challenge I would say rather than just trying to remove any kind of upsetting stimulation.

Alex Howard: There's something about achievement here I think, what's really coming into my mind as you're talking. There's something about, as a parent towards a child or indeed as one's own relationship towards oneself, really being attuned to what is actually needed in this moment. Is it a bit more of a push or is a bit more of a backing off? And I guess embodiment is a great way of cultivating and developing that sort of achievement.

Mark Walsh: Absolutely. I mean, that's why parenting is so easy, right, Alex?

Alex Howard: I'm glad you think so, Mark.

Mark Walsh: I've never done it. So, I mean, absolutely the ying and the yang, the attunement, the do I back in, do I? One of my teachers says, "what's too much, what's too little?" And it's an incredibly profound question actually, sounds so simple. And that's what we do all the time, is this something that's going to help me grow and to confront my fears even though I'm afraid anyway? Or is it a bit much right now? And what I really need to do is chill out right now? What I really need to do is just go home and eat biscuit, that's fine.

So it's knowing that balance and it's a delicate one. I tend to see that most of the world errs on the side of brutality and most of the trauma world errs on the side of being supposedly kind, but actually being cruel in its over-kindness in a way.

Alex Howard: Mark, for people that want to find out more, I realize you and I could go on for hours.

Mark Walsh: We could.

Alex Howard: And I'm mindful of time. For people that want to find out more about you and your work. What, and it might be a slightly different answer based upon people's levels of experience in the area, but what are some of the signposts you give?

Mark Walsh: Meet me at the crossroads at midnight. No.

They could go to the embodiment podcast if they just want to learn more about embodiment, that's free and super like our YouTube channel. The Embodiment Conference of course, if they want to check out that. We have, as I said, we have a thousand presenters, so it's a pretty epic thing in October, including you Alex, so they're all super welcome at that.

If they like books, there's this *Embodiment - Moving Beyond Mindfulness* and the *Embodied Facilitator* if they are a coach. Basically just Google embodiment and I come up. So there's a few options, some of which are free, some of which aren't.

Alex Howard: Awesome. Mark, thank you so much buddy, appreciate your time.

Mark Walsh: Alex, total pleasure as ever, mate. Thank you for having me on.