



Conscious Life presents

# TRAUMA SUPER CONFERENCE

## Trauma: a universal language

**Guest: Florence Bernard**

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### **[00:00:10] Jaia Bristow**

Hello, and welcome back to this Trauma Super Conference. My name is Jaia Bristow and I'm one of your hosts. And today, I am delighted to be welcoming Florence Bernard. Welcome, Florence.

### **Florence Bernard**

Thank you, Jaia. Thank you for inviting me to be a speaker at this wonderful Trauma Super Conference. I'm really happy to be there with you.

### **Jaia Bristow**

I'm really happy to have you join us. It's particularly interesting to have you because you're usually doing my role where you're interviewing a lot of experts for the Quantum Way Trauma, Attachment & Resilience Summit. So as well, Florence, as well as being a psychotherapist trained in IR, Polyvagal Theory, IFS, IFIO, and energy psychology, who works with clients in English and French, you are also the managing director of Quantum Way, a company that has created a bridge between leading English speaking authors and psychotherapists, and the French speaking public.

And as part of that, like I said, you host the Trauma, Attachment & Resilience Summit, which is available from March 13th to 18th. Is that correct?

### **Florence Bernard**

That is correct. March 13th to 18th.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Brilliant. So anyone who wants more trauma events after this conference can go check that out next month. So I'm curious, Florence, we talk about... We're both hosting these events, talking about trauma, and you specifically around trauma and attachment, why do you believe that it's such an important topic? Why is it important to talk about these things?

### **Florence Bernard**

I think, indeed, it's the most important topic. And, you know, we've begun with other conferences, like on energy psychology, and then we did a conference on fear and anxiety. And at one point, we

said, well, the background of everything is trauma. And if we help people or people understand why talking about trauma is so important, we'll really help heal the world.

**[00:02:20]**

That's really one of our missions at Quantum Way. And that's what I want to do as a therapist also. And trauma is really, everybody's experienced trauma once in their lifetime. And what we want to do is give people a language, a common language, like if I'm talking about trauma as a therapist, but my client doesn't understand what a trauma is, it's going to be more difficult than if my client knows about trauma.

So it's really also giving the same language to everyone. That's one point. And the other thing, and why it's so important for us French people, is because in the English world, in the English speaking world, we talk a lot. It's been a long time since we've spoken about trauma, but in the French market, I don't know why I say market, but in France, talking about trauma is quite new. So that's why we wanted to put that together.

The other thing is that when you are trauma informed, what I think, what I believe in, is that being trauma informed is a path to healing, is a way of beginning our journey towards healing. So I talk about the language, about the path to healing. And also, I think it gives people, I don't know how to say it in English, people get rid of their shame and their guilt because they understand why they are behaving a certain way or why they are always repeating the same mistakes, or why they are always in relationships that are not okay for them.

And they say, well, there is something wrong with me. And if they understand that underneath that, there is definitely a trauma and that the trauma produced these behaviors or this kind of relationship, if they understand that the trauma is there, they will get out of guilt and shame. And that's really important and that's really part of the healing.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Absolutely. And I really appreciate what you're saying about this common language. It doesn't matter if it's in English or in French, just this common language and framework that can give us an extra lens of understanding to this complex nature of trauma, which impacts all of us. And it might impact us in different ways and to different degrees, but, as you say, when we have repeating patterns, when we notice that we're caught up in harmful loops, when we notice that, whether it's to do with our relationships or work or all kinds of other aspects.

And that so often if we bring in a trauma informed lens, we can bring in an extra layer of understanding. And that if we have the language around that, it adds a framework where you can better understand yourself and have healthier relationships, make healthier choices. But you can't do that without that initial step of seeing, understanding, becoming conscious of.

### **Florence Bernard**

Yeah. And you know, that way of saying, having a common language, comes from a conversation I had with Deb Dana this past October at the Polyvagal Conference in Florida. And Deb Dana was saying and I think she has talked or she will talk at this conference and Stephen Porges also. And we are translating her book, her last book, and she was saying that this is so important for her.

**[00:06:49]**

And whatever the language, we all speak the same Polyvagal language, our autonomic nervous system reacts exactly the same way because it's in the body and it has its own language. And if we understand it, we understand each and everyone and we understand each other. And when we understand this language, this common language, we also become more compassionate toward ourselves and toward others.

Like if we know that, as we say, it's not my fault if I'm doing that or saying that or if I'm suddenly very angry and I don't know where it comes from or I'm suddenly very sad and I don't know where it comes from, if I know that it's my nervous system or it's my emotions that are reacting or it's my parts, because I work in IFS or Internal Family Systems so I think we have parts, and if we begin to have this common language, the nervous system language, the parts language, the trauma language, we can really be more compassionate.

And compassionate, and I insist on that, toward ourselves and compassionate toward others because we understand. We understand, and we have the same background and we're talking about the same thing.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Absolutely. And I think that element of compassion is so key to healing. You talked earlier about the importance of talking about trauma to be able to heal. So the first step is understanding, becoming conscious of our patterns and having this language in common, which is universal. It goes beyond the different languages we have in different countries, for example, which is why I so appreciate that at Quantum Way you have this bilingual summit in English and French for people to attend, where we can see that even though we're speaking different languages, there is a universal experience.

Our bodies have this universal nervous system which will encounter and express things in similar ways. And that once we have that understanding, then the next step is compassion. And, like you say, compassion towards oneself as well as compassion towards others.

Now, I'm curious, Florence, you talk in your work as a therapist, can you share a bit more about your personal story and how you became a therapist? Because I know you didn't start off as one, and a little bit about your own personal journey.

### **Florence Bernard**

So I became a therapist about ten years ago after being a marketer for twenty years. And at one point I got divorced. And so many things changed about ten years ago, and I really wanted to find something that makes sense for me. And going into the healing field was something that was there, that had been there for a very long time. I'm from a family of medical doctors.

My grandfather was a doctor, my father was a doctor. And when it came to choosing something to do out of my life, I was saying, I'm going to be a doctor too. And then I said, no, I don't want to be like my parents and my grandparents, so I'm going to do something else. So I went to the marketing field, and I was okay. I really enjoyed it, I had fun.

**[00:10:41]**

But at one time I said, no, I want to go back to my core mission, which is to heal. And so I dig into that and then said, well, psychotherapy is really what I want to do. So I went there, and the very root of that is that my mom, I grew up with a mom at that time, we were saying that she was manic depressive. I don't know how you say it in English, or depressive manic, I don't know. It's bipolar now, but at that time that didn't exist.

And so she went from one therapist to another. So psychotherapy, analysis, I didn't see really healing in her. She was carrying this mental illness and she was looked at as like, she's mad, she's mental, ill. And that was terrible for me. And I've always wanted to heal her. So I tried to as a kid, as any child wants to heal their parents when they see their parent is not okay.

But we don't have the tools as kids. And she didn't find the tool at that time that would help her. And when I discovered all these new therapies, like energy psychology, that's where I began with, but IFS and Polyvagal informed therapies and relational intelligence, which is another model that brings together Polyvagal attachment, and IFS.

When I discovered that, I said, wow, I would have liked my mom to be here and now because she died 27 years ago. But I was saying this is so important that those new ways of seeing mental illness as not a mental illness, but as a coping strategy or an adaptive behavior, that is so different and that is so, as I said, you take the shame out of the people when you say, well, it's not you that is wrong.

Something wrong happened to you. And my mom has a trauma history, of course, and that's why she developed this "mental illness". And that's why I'm so happy now to be able to spread the world with those new therapies that you are also talking about. And I know this Super Conference has many, many more viewers than we do, but that's how I became a therapist. It's because of my past history and my trauma history.

And when my mom died, I was pregnant and that was a real shock because that was all of a sudden. And I've kept that inside and said, no, I'm strong, I'm okay. I'm going to manage. That's okay. But when I went into therapy and then I worked on my traumas, this came along. The death of my mother and the first suicidal attempt of her. There was, I think, ten.

And these are the core, each time I work on my trauma with a therapist, I come back to that. And now I can talk about it and it's okay. And I can have gratitude for my mother because she fought, she really tried so hard to heal and she could not because she didn't have the tools. So I'm happy I can do that now with people.

And when people arrive and say, I'm bipolar, I'm depressed, I say, okay, let's put that aside and let's talk about you and talk about what happened to you and see what's in your body and see how you react, how your body reacts, because that's the way we're going to take the path. We're coming from the body to the mind. And in France, we've done that a lot, going from the mind to the body and not even thinking about the body.

Talking therapy, talking therapy just cuts us here. It's all here. But as Bessel van der Kolk says, the body keeps the score, so you have to go through the body.

### **[00:15:58] Jaia Bristow**

Well, thank you for sharing. I really appreciate hearing your own story and your story with your mother as well, and how therapy helped you process and you wish she had access to the modalities that you now have access to and that we're trying to bring into the sort of general public and the collective consciousness.

And I'm reminded about how you say that here in France, there is less access to that or it's still new. And so the importance of bringing it into the collective consciousness and touched by the way you understand mental health disorders, not so much as what a person is, often we say, I am bipolar, I am depressive, I am these different things.

And I think in the French language, even more so because, for example, with ADHD, for example, or other things, it's je suis TDAH, or I am ADHD in English. And so that you're like, no, okay, these are some labels, some diagnoses that have been assigned, but let's see about you and bringing it back to the human, to the individual, to the understanding that these are the consequence of trauma. These are trauma symptoms, these are trauma responses.

And bringing about that understanding so that we can have the compassion, which, of course, is not to say that it's an excuse either. I think sometimes in this current climate where people do talk more about trauma, they might use either diagnoses or trauma as an excuse for certain behaviors, which isn't what you're saying. You're talking about really bringing that understanding and that compassion to explain, rather than excuse, a lot of these symptoms.

### **Florence Bernard**

Yeah, that's very important to say. It's not an excuse, because when we get out of that, sometimes, let me think about why it's so important to say. It's not an excuse. It's not because we've had difficult childhoods or we've had something that happened to us that we're caught into that. That doesn't excuse aggressive behavior also or anything.

But we can understand that. We can understand the aggressive behavior of a kid. We can understand the aggressive behavior of a partner, or a friend. We can understand that there is something beyond that, we can go and find something else behind the scene. And once we begin to go behind those, behind the symptoms, behind the behavior, we find so many different stories and so much vulnerability, often shame and guilt.

And people don't want us to be seen as vulnerable, so they hide their vulnerability. They think that they have to be strong. And sometimes say, well, this one is very strong, but this is just like, I'm trying to cope with things that I can't deal with inside. So outside, I will show aggressivity, I will show shyness. I will show, I don't mind, I don't care about you. That's really what we see. But we have to see what's beyond that.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Absolutely. And I really appreciate what you're saying, that having that compassion, that understanding, that if someone exhibits aggressive behavior, it's not because they're a bad person automatically. It's understanding that there's some underlying stuff that needs to be looked at. And so maybe you can say some more about that thing about not categorizing people so much as being good or bad people, but helping people become more aware about what's underlying.

### **[00:20:27] Florence Bernard**

I can say some more. Dick Schwartz, who developed the IFS model, says that there are no bad parts and that's his latest book, *No Bad Parts*, because he says that every part does something with a good intention, trying to protect us from being hurt again or from feeling hurt or feeling wounds.

And so it's really important also to understand that those are only parts and those parts are trying to do something so we can be in the world and manage things and cope with everything. So this is one very important part, the fact that we are multiple, we are made of parts and all parts are welcome, whatever part it is. I'm not sure I'm answering your question, by the way?

### **Jaia Bristow**

But what you are sharing I think is really important, this idea that we have these different parts. Because often we live in a society that tries to categorize us constantly, right? When we try to describe ourselves, especially these days, I spend a lot of time on dating apps and you see it's like, describe yourself in a few words.

But most of us as human beings are so full of contradictions and that's because we're made up of all these different parts of ourselves, these parts that are sometimes contradictory, and yet, as you say, all these parts are trying their best, just like all of us as humans are trying our best. And that might express itself in healthier or less healthy ways, but I don't think many people are intentionally "bad".

And again, I put bad in quote marks because I think the world is a bit more complicated than just good or bad. And my question, yeah, was about that. I think you did answer it, was about helping people become aware that just because you do something that may be harmful, or because someone does something that may be harmful, that doesn't automatically mean that they are a bad person. It's understanding that a lot of our harmful patterns come from trauma.

### **Florence Bernard**

It's really going from I am bad, I am a bad person, to something bad happened to me. And I think that's really the process of healing and of therapy, going from there, I'm bad or I behave badly, to something bad happened to me and that's why I am this way or I behave this way. And that's very important with children.

I have a lot of children in my therapy office and they usually come because there is something that's wrong at school or in the family or they get angry, they fight in the class or they fight with their siblings. And so it's like we have to fix something. So the parents bring the kid and say there is something bad with him or with her or with them. And I say, okay, forget it. Well, we have to say hello.

So I say, no. Now let's listen to the story. Let's listen to what's happening inside this young child and why is he aggressive with the other kids at school or why is he aggressive with his siblings? And maybe when we get to give him they say, well, you know what, your nervous system is reacting like that. You have a part that really wants to get him away or to make him understand that he hurt you.

**[00:25:25]**

And I think we can do it as adults too, but it's really like, you're not bad. And when children listen to that and say, oh, when I'm doing that, it's because I'm trying to protect something inside me, or I'm trying to say something that I cannot say, or I'm trying to put the other one away from me because he's not good for me. Not that he's not a good person. He's not good for me.

And really, children do get that. And if we understand that their aggressive behavior or maybe sometimes their ADHD or they disappear, it's because we understand them, because at the core we say, well, you're not bad. You're a good person. You're just trying to make something understood, or you're just trying to be recognized, or you want to be seen. And that's okay. That's really okay.

And I think we have to think about that when we are adults, that we also were those children and that we also tried hard to have a place in the world, to be loved, to be recognized, to be seen. And that's the core of everything.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Absolutely. And I think it's so great that you're doing this work with children already because we can accumulate trauma in this lifetime, but we also are born and inherit a lot of ancestral and intergenerational trauma. So we're not born as blank slates, as I've talked about already on this conference in some of the other interviews, and so already to learn from that young age that you're not inherently bad, that it's just trying to find healthier ways of expressing your needs, your wants, your desires and looking after yourself.

And I do a lot of NVC courses, non-violent communication, and that's, for example, one tool that is really helpful in looking at stripping back all the strategies we use to get what we want and understanding the essential core needs that we have as humans. And that whether you're a child or an adult or anywhere in between, that we all have the same need to belong, to be loved. For connection and that we don't always go about it in very healthy ways because we, first of all, don't always know what it is we're trying to do.

So what you're talking about is already bringing that understanding in what we're trying to do and then we can have healthier strategies in place to ask for what we need, so rather than just lashing out it's, again, that language of understanding the compassion towards oneself and others and then being able to request in a healthy, kind way what's needed or express why we're acting a certain way.

### **Florence Bernard**

You were talking about connection and connection is really important when we're talking about trauma and attachment. And trauma is a loss of connection. When we are traumatized, it's because we didn't have the chance when the trauma happened, we didn't have the chance to be connected to a compassionate human being, or compassionate even being like a cat or a dog or a pet.

We lost connection and so we've been left alone, with our trauma, trying to cope alone with the trauma. And part of the healing also is understanding the trauma or understanding how it impacted us, but also understanding that we're going to heal it in connection with another one.

**[00:29:47]**

And if we understand that, when trauma will come later on, because we're experiencing trauma all lifetime, I would say the first reflex, the first instinct, you will have is to go to another person and share that story with a person, with a compassionate person, someone who can really listen to you and listen to what happened.

And so this connection, if there is connection, the trauma will not become a psychological trauma, it will just be an event, a traumatic event, but not a trauma. And connection is so, so important when we're trying to begin to understand trauma.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Absolutely. And I think that definition of trauma as disconnection is really helpful to see how it can happen. And that the way of healing is through connection. So if you see someone in your life, or you see in yourself, the way that you're pushing away people as a trauma response, then the answer isn't to discard those people. The answer is to connect and help. And that's how the healing process begins.

I'm curious if you have any more you want to add on that healing and the different modalities that you have found supportive in that healing.

### **Florence Bernard**

All those therapies, as I was saying, I wish my mom had access to. For me, what really was game changing for me as a human being, as a woman, as a mother, as a partner, as a therapist, are all those modalities that I've been trained to. I know there are many, many, but the most important for me, when I met IFS, that was the first game changing thing. Saying that I am multiple. I have parts. And I have protective parts and exiled parts.

And the protective parts are trying to protect those exiles, those wounded parts and those wounded parts are often stuck in the past. That's simple, that's really in one minute, like IFS really did. And I said, wow, when I discovered IFS, I said, wow, that's the thing. I want to get trained into that. So I got trained and then I was really introduced to trauma and I've been trained in different neuroscience and understanding trauma, how trauma is in the body, in the brain, what happens to the brain when the trauma is coming and why the trauma is going on and on and on and on.

And also attachment theory was so important to understand that most of our adulthood relationship is framed by what happened in our childhood and how we attached to our attachment figure, to our caregiver. And so attachment theory says, oh, we have to understand that too. And then came Polyvagal theory and I was, wow, this is also so important.

And so when you bring all that together and somatic experiencing and also energy psychology is really important to understand that we are energy and we are bodies, but we also are energy and the energy is going from one person to another. And so all those different ways of understanding who we are, what happened to us has really been very important.



**[00:34:02]**

And I would say that Polyvagal theory today is something that nobody could ignore. I'm really a big fan of Polyvagal theory. I really thank Dr Stephen Porges for understanding what happens in our body, and this can really infuse in all different modalities. It's really the common, we say at the very beginning, it's the common language. We all have a body, we all have a nervous system and our nervous systems are really simple, the way they react, the way they make us react, the way they make us move or go forward or withdraw.

And so I'm really glad that Polyvagal theory is really now understood and spread, like many different modalities of treating trauma and treating psychological difficulties have understood what they were doing, like somatic experiencing what they were doing, it's so much more understandable when you understand Polyvagal theory.

So those are some of the modalities that I've been trained in and that I'm really fond of and I really hope that many, many people get at least informed, if not trained. And I know through your conference, through ours, there are many, many different conferences that bring those together and this is really important.

### **Jaia Bristow**

Absolutely. And I really appreciate you talking about these different modalities that have supported you both in your personal and professional life. And I know in my own personal experience, as well, how helpful it is to look at different things, to have different lenses, because I often talk about trauma layers a bit like an onion, where you keep peeling back different layers.

And so when you come at it with different modalities, different lenses, different understanding, then it helps peel back more and more layers. So, I do lots of sort of mindfulness meditation practices which help me take that pause and that step between being in the feelings and observing the feeling arising or happening. I do, like I said, NVC practices which are really supportive in learning to sort of listen and reflect and communicate and have empathy and compassion towards oneself and others and seeing the human and the needs.

There's ancestral trauma work, intergenerational trauma work, family constellations work, so many different things. And so I think these conferences are a fantastic opportunity for people to hear about more and understand that trauma is complex and healing trauma is complex, but each individual can find the combination of modalities that works for them to begin this process.

And the more people commit to healing trauma, the more we will have a positive ripple effect in the world and be able to support each other rather than continue perpetuating and reinforcing the trauma cycles that so often happen.

### **Florence Bernard**

Yeah. Thank you.

**[00:37:47] Jaia Bristow**

Thank you. Thank you so much for your time today, Florence, how can people find out more about you and your work?

**Florence Bernard**

The easiest way is to go to Quantum Way, [www.quantum-way.com](http://www.quantum-way.com). That's the easiest way. We're on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and the website.

**Jaia Bristow**

Brilliant. I really appreciate this conversation and all of your time, so thank you.

**Florence Bernard**

Thank you, Jaia.