



Conscious Life presents

## Creating Safety in Intimacy

Guest: Darshana Avila

*Disclaimer: The contents of this interview are for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This interview does not provide medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or psychological condition.*

### **[00:00:09] - Jaï Bristow**

Hello and welcome to this conference.

My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am very pleased to be welcoming the wonderful Darshana Avila.

Welcome, Darshana.

### **Darshana Avila**

Hey, Jaï. So glad to be here. Thank you.

### **Jaï Bristow**

So glad to have you back! So you are a somatic sex and intimacy educator and trauma therapist, and you are one of the experts on Netflix's show *Sex, Love & Goop*.

So today we're talking about intimacy and trauma. Do you want to start us off by talking about the impacts trauma can have on intimacy, and perhaps maybe defining as well what you mean when talking about intimacy?

### **Darshana Avila**

Sure. Well, and I think I can kind of answer those together. Most of our trauma, if we're speaking about developmental trauma or we're speaking about attachment trauma, it happens in relationship. So there's actually an intimate connection that in some way, shape, or form was impacted that results in the trauma that we're carrying.

And that also means then that intimacy and relationship with others is where the healing is available to us. So they're very bound up in one another. I'm speaking about trauma from the lens of that being the relational piece.

I'm not the one who is working with folks who had the major car accident or something like that to remediate their trauma so much as I'm helping people who did not get what they needed in their formative relationships, who have gone through abuse of different sorts, whether physical, psychological, sexual. And those are all things that involve at least one other person and a breakdown of trust in relationship.

**[00:02:01]**

So it's both where the pain can result from, but it's also where the healing can be born from as well and that means we've got a lot of possibility, actually, is what's really cool about that.

**Jai Bristow**

Yeah, 100%. And I really appreciate bringing in this theme of relational trauma, but also relational healing, right?

And so when we're talking about intimacy, then intimacy can be lots of different things, right? It can be sexual, it can be more not sexual. It can be just being close. It can be just a conversation. It can be momentary. It can be... Describe a whole relationship type. There's very different ways of describing intimacy and relationship in general, I think. And the ways those are impacted.

**Darshana Avila**

Yeah, absolutely. I want to say I'd be remiss to not say not all trauma is created equal. That does not mean that we're having a competition of whose trauma is more or worse. But it is accurate to say that it's not all created equally.

The origin of our trauma can arise in a lot of different ways. And it's true when you ask, how do we define intimacy in these contexts? By no means is that exclusive to sexual or romantic relationship. There is a lot of intimacy to be had and to be experienced in platonic relating, in family relationships, in community, in friendships.

We might also find, and this is actually something that literally just happened to me over the weekend, I was at a talk being given by a well respected kink educator who gave us all sorts of ample warnings before she went into sharing her story because she spoke about her trauma history and even just hearing her share about her journey activated me.

And if I didn't have certain resources in my toolkit, I might have been sitting in that audience going into a full blown trauma response, not because she and I have a direct relationship, but because she was intimately sharing about her experience in a way that intersected and impacted with my own.

So really, we can actually go very wide with our understanding of what we mean when we say intimacy and what we mean when we say relationship, as we speak about trauma and the potential for trauma to both get activated as well as to be remediated.

So both of those things are here in this conversation and here in most of our personal journeys, so it's worth mentioning that.

**Jai Bristow**

100%, and I really appreciate that you brought in that example, right? Because I think, yeah, intimacy isn't even about the intimate relationship. Like you say, someone that you barely know can share something really intimate, and you can be impacted by that.

And a lot of these interviews, sometimes there are intimate sharings of, sometimes I share personal experiences, sometimes the speakers share personal experiences.

And I think that's really important as part of the healing as well, to be able to witness those conversations, that sharing, and of course, it can also impact us, right? And sometimes it can activate things within us. So it's really important to know how to take care of oneself once we're being activated in that way.

## [00:05:32] - Darshana Avila

Absolutely. And that's as a somatic trauma therapist, which is to say that the lens that I look at trauma through and support people in their healing is all about basing it in the body. The wisdom of our body, the experience of our body, and that doesn't always look like actively, expressively doing something with our bodies. Sometimes it does.

But it's very much about our ability to learn how to track what's going on in our embodied experience, to notice what's going on with my heart rate? What's going on with my breath? Am I shut down and in a freeze? Am I not feeling any emotions? Am I moving into big kind of dramatic expressions of emotion? There's a pendulum that swings for all of us between some really big, bold expressions of our activation, and for some of us, it goes in the opposite direction, and it's like we're wearing a mask and completely frozen within ourselves.

And whatever our go to is, wherever we might exist on the spectrum of how we respond to trauma, which, this is natural, right? This is actually wired into us, I want to say. I imagine many people listening to a trauma summit have some familiarity, whether you came in with it or you heard another speaker say, we have different responses to threat that are hardwired into us.

Fight, flight, freeze, and then I add appease or fawn if we want to keep it in the f, is one that has been kind of brought into the mix in more modern understandings, of ways that we are wired to respond to threat, to keep ourselves safe.

The nature of trauma, however, is that that very natural response gets something comes at us, it's too much, it's too fast, it's too soon, and we're unable to move out of the way of it, whether that's a physical moving out of the way or in terms of our attention or energy, to pivot ourselves away from this thing that is coming toward us, and if we don't have the ability to fully enact our threat response and then kind of settle back down to stasis, get some relaxation in our system, some grounding in our system immediately on the other side of that, that's how trauma gets imprinted, right?

And so it can look different ways for different people. The body based approach to understanding trauma, then, for each of us individually, is that we get to learn about what is our mechanism, like, what's our go to? And if it's not actually serving us, which is to say, if we are stuck in a really activated, hyperactivated or hypo, so again, like the big expressive or the completely shut down version, or the I got to get out of here version, we get to grow a greater capacity and cultivate more resilience to actually occupy the full range of our experience.

And bringing that into relationship is everything, because if we're hijacked by a trauma response in relationship, we cannot be fully present. We cannot be fully present to give attention to another, to receive attention from another, to show up for all the vast array of relating, for lack of... Really, there's so much goodness that is available to us, again.

Whether this is sexual, romantic, platonic, familial, community based, whatever the context may be, I'll use again this example that I already brought in of what happened to me just a few days ago. If I had not been able to regulate myself in real time, I would have missed out on most of what this really incredible educator was saying, and that's what I was there for. I was there to learn. I was there to get inspired. I was at a conference with hundreds of different things being offered, and I was like, this is the session I want to go to. It was a high priority for me. And if I had not been able to actually assess what was going on and give myself things that I needed in the moment, I would have missed out on it, right?

It's one of many examples of how, when we really learn how to be in relationship with our own selves and with what our body is experiencing and needing, we get more access to our aliveness. And for myself or my body of work, that is erotic wholeness, aliveness and eros are synonymous with one another.

**[00:10:04]**

So the reason that my work is erotic wholeness, even though, yes, I do focus a lot on sex and intimacy in romantic relationship or partnered relationship, really what I'm here to do is help people occupy their erotic nature fully and well. So that means, sure, be sexy, be sexual, but also be creative, be dynamic, be passionate, be engaged, be available to the full spectrum of your emotions and that life force energy that is our aliveness.

And when we are stuck in trauma response, we are not actually able to occupy ourselves that well or that fully. And the healing then is that we gain access to that aliveness. We gain more of that resilience that I mentioned before, and what we have access to then in our relationships just unfolds exponentially from there.

### **Jai Bristow**

100%. Thank you so much, because I love everything you just shared, because it's really highlighting about how trauma can impact intimacy, right?

But also how they play into each other, basically. And so how when we're in those trauma responses, we can't be intimate with another. We're often disconnected from ourselves, right? When we're in freeze, flight, fight or fawn even, and so bringing in that somatic piece to recognize when we're in those states and how, like you say, you couldn't even hear what the person was saying anymore. You were totally disconnected from your surroundings, and so, of course, you're disconnected from any possibility of intimacy, right? And it makes sense.

That's an example of a speaker and you're just witnessing. So the speaker is oblivious to what's happening for you, you're aware of it. But if you're engaging in a conversation, for example, with just one other person. And again, it doesn't matter if it's a partner, a friend, whoever it is, and you're in that state, and you're suddenly sort of shut down from being able to relate, from being able to be intimate, from being able to have a connection, and that person might not realize what's happening.

And so then they might feel like, what's wrong with you? Why are you not responding to me? What's happening? Or whatever. Or they might not even be aware and then it can create this whole chain reaction. So I think it's really important to recognize how much trauma impacts intimacy, and then how they can also become a bit of a vicious cycle, a self fulfilling prophecy, right?

Because intimacy, like you said, someone sharing very vulnerably and intimately about their experience, also activated your trauma response, right? So again, it creates this... And then different people's trauma responses can activate or triggers or whatever it is can activate that in someone else as well. So it can become this chain reaction of trauma.

And so that's why it's so important, I think, to have, and I think we're going to go into this bit next, is to have the healing, the holding, the ability, as you say, to not perpetuate each other's trauma, but to hold and heal with each other. And I love that piece you're bringing in about Eros and the importance of Eros as part of that process.

### **Darshana Avila**

Absolutely. And everything you said, like, total yes to it. And what I want to emphasize is that I really encourage intimacy with self as the foundation. Always. There's, like, no opportunity where that does not apply. However, I want to make clear what I mean there.

Intimacy with self is not saying that you then have everything you need to get a handle on your own trauma in the moment and you've got to do it for yourself.

**[00:14:09]**

The intimacy with yourself is to be aware of, what is the nature of your trauma? What are the things that are likely to trigger you into your trauma? How do you show up when you are activated? Again, do you go into fight? Do you go into appease?

And to your point that sometimes we might be in a direct one to one relationship with someone, and they're either like, hey, what's going on? Where did you go? Or for many of us, and I've got both of these versions, we might be so good at pretending, we might have dialed it in to act as if everything is fine on the outside, while on the inside, we're having a very different experience.

And that right there is one of the most significant blocks to intimacy in relationship, because we're not actually representing ourselves accurately to the other person. And if we're speaking now about very intimate friendship or family relationship or partnership, lovership of some sort, this becomes incredibly problematic because we're never fully there and we're not fully allowing ourselves to be seen.

We're probably not seeing the other person fully as well because we're looking at everything through the haze of our trauma response and our protective strategies and so on and so forth.

And I'm not saying that every relationship is safe enough for us to go fully into our vulnerability, so discernment matters here. Knowing with whom and in what circumstances it actually is safe enough, and I'm going to always put that word enough after safe, because there's never a guarantee of complete safety.

But what I tell my clients and students, for instance, is like, great, if you're going to come and work with me, here's what I can offer you. I can offer you one of the safest spaces to explore your trauma. I can offer you a container that has a lot of skill and a lot of kind of structures put in place to support you having a sense of safety.

I can promise you my own non reactivity and non judgment to your experience, right? So these are things that can be offered in this case, like a practitioner and client relationship or a teacher and student relationship where you might find a therapist or a guide or a coach or somebody that you can begin to explore your trauma with.

And the whole reason for this is not so that you just go have great sessions with your therapist, wonderful as that can be. The whole reason to do this then, is so that you become more self aware. You cultivate that intimacy with your own self about what activates you, what settles you, where you've got some strengths, where you've got some opportunity to grow more strength.

Because it's not a weakness, like, let's be really clear, trauma is very, very real, it can be very, very debilitating, and it is not something even though many people might feel shame about their trauma, objectively speaking, there is no shame in holding trauma.

It's what you do with it that has the potential to then transform your life and your relationships. So once you have found those safe enough spaces to really start to explore and understand yourself, you get to harvest all the good of that and then go bring it into your relationships.

And that's where the magic really happens, because all of us are traumatized in some way. And again, it's not like the trauma olympics. We're not competing with one another. We are coming to... I'm going to use an example that is pretty commonly understood by many. If you know anything about attachment theory, chances are you've heard that anxiously attached people and avoidantly attached people tend to be attracted to each other.

**[00:17:54]**

There's a really good reason why, because we have everything we need to activate the fuck out of one another and then heal together. It's incredible, right? And I'm not making light, I don't mean to make light of how intensely difficult it can be when you're in those dynamics. I have been there many, many times over. I know that agony from the inside out. I also know the incredible liberatory potential that exists, the tremendous healing, the reclaiming of your own sense of power and agency that is available when you are consciously relating with another person who is like, yeah, I want to do this healing work. Let's figure out how we actually leverage our interlocking wounds and our trauma bond.

You've maybe heard that term too, like the thing that brought us to one another. What happens when we get really intentional about using our relational dynamic as a healing ground for that? Doing with and for one another what our parents couldn't do, or our caregivers couldn't do, or a past partner couldn't do, or the clergy person, or the teacher, or wherever the imprints of the trauma came from, here is a relationship where you might actually have the possibility of healing that.

And that's an incredible opportunity. It's an incredible gift. If you can really get the resource and the intimacy with your own self, and they can get the resource and the intimacy with their self, and then you come together and you make magic.

### **Jai Bristow**

Fantastic. No, I love the way you're describing, it's almost like the perfect trauma fit, right? It's like that game that three year olds play, or however old, where they have to put the right shape in the box, and it's like, how can you find someone with the right shape for your trauma kind of thing.

### **Darshana Avila**

And again, I would be remiss to not say, everyone is not going to be the right piece for your box. By no means. I'm not trying to glamorize this and be like, go out and look for the most traumatized person out there. There are undoubtedly people who are very unaware, unable, potentially unwilling to do this level of work.

And so I'm not proposing that somebody should stay in a toxic or abusive relationship. I am simply illustrating that the potential exists for finding people that might really be on board to do this work in earnestness and with integrity and see that the relational dynamics and particularly the challenges that you might encounter together can become an integral part of your respective healing journeys and your wholeness.

Because that's what it's ultimately about. Reclamation of power. Reclamation of pieces of your own self that have kind of had to get... There's like a metaphor that the poet Robert Bly evokes, I'm going to go a little like esoteric right now, which is talking about our shadow.

And he describes it as the long black bag that we're all dragging behind us. And we go through life and the pieces of ourselves that we don't feel safe to be, the pieces of ourselves that either might be bound up in that trauma or that have been shamed or what have you, they get tossed into that black bag until before we know it, we're basically dragging a body behind us.

And when we come into relationship with someone, and again, this might be in a professional context, this might be a friendship. I've done some of my deepest, deepest healing work in those two categories and then brought it back to my lovers and partners.

**[00:21:36]**

I become a more skillful partner. I become a more skillful lover because I'm highly therapized, because I have intimate, chosen family friendships where we know we're helping one another to heal so we can be better partners. It's not only dependent on finding that magical other to do the work with. It's actually having a whole ecosystem of others that can be integral parts of your journey so that you really can claim your wholeness and relate from that place.

### **Jai Bristow**

Beautiful. And I think it's a really important distinction that you were making there about, it's not about trying to find the perfect trauma person or like trying to stay in toxic, abusive relationships. But again, it's about the potential, and like you've been saying from the beginning, that starts with intimacy with oneself.

That starts by doing the work oneself and showing up differently in these relationships and knowing that it's a practice that we're not going to get it perfect right away, right? But that ability to be authentic and making sure, as you say, it's safe enough that that ability to be authentic.

And I was thinking recently about a new relationship I have and relationship in the broad sense of the term, with someone and how I was setting boundaries or I was showing up, I was saying something about myself and they immediately had a response to that. Like had a kind of, why would you say that? Or why would you do that? Or whatever it was, right?

And there was the realization of just, this is where I'm at and how much of my life I spent trying to be someone different based on what I thought the person in front of me wanted from me, and instead being like, yeah, maybe I'm doing this, and maybe these are my boundaries, and maybe this is my request because of my trauma, and maybe it's something I need to work on, but ultimately, this is who I am right here, right now.

And knowing that, expressing that, making a request, setting a boundary, doesn't feel unhealthy, right? Because I think sometimes we can idealize how we should be or how we should respond or how free of trauma we should be, especially if we've done some therapy and be like, I should be totally cool with that. I shouldn't experience any jealousy. I shouldn't have trauma responses. I should be healed.

And all these shoulds actually impede our relationships instead of supporting them. Actually end up getting in the way of authentic intimacy, because we end up hiding parts of ourselves, right? Doing different forms of therapy, through having these conversations, through working on my relationship with myself primarily.

And I even was in a monogamous relationship with myself for the last six months or so, which has been really beautiful and nourishing and where I learned a lot, and I see now that I'm dating again I'm dating from a very different place than I was previously.

I'm dating from, this is who I am right here, right now. I'm really comfortable with who I am. And also, I now have, again, as you said before, I have relationships in my life that might be friendships or other forms of relationships which have helped me heal and which are modeling what I want from any form of intimate relationship, whether with a friend, a partner, a lover, a housemate, and even from my family members.

That ability to be able to name and be authentic and have set limits, set boundaries, make requests without feeling judged, without feeling like, oh, I should be further along in my journey, or whatever ideals or critics or judgments we might have about that.

## **[00:25:33] - Darshana Avila**

I heard the word should come out of your mouth so many times in that chair, and I heard the word boundaries come out of your mouth so many times in that chair, and I want to speak about those things.

First of all, yeah, anytime we're shoulding ourselves, that's like a little red flag, or maybe a very big red flag of, like, wait a second, wait a second, wait a second. Where does this should come from? Whose standard is this? Whose measuring stick am I measuring by, right?

So shoulds very often are bound up in conditioning, in things that have been upheld as the standard of. Maybe it's like the wider dominant cultural standard. Maybe it's very particular to a relational dynamic or a small subset of community you're part of, whatever the case may be, the shoulds that we are telling ourselves very often are not our original ideas.

They're not authentically ours to begin with. So when you notice that you're in a story that's predicated on shoulds, that's a really awesome opportunity to check in and be like, wait, is this actually true for me?

The boundary piece, what I want to say there is all of us are working on our boundary issues. Some people have very rigid boundaries, overly so. Walls up, no entry, like that kind of energy that is problematic in its own right in many instances, because it's blocking connection. It's not allowing for true intimacy to happen.

And then you've got other people who have no boundaries effectively and allow everything in and don't really center themselves and their needs and how to create a healthy balance. That's a spectrum. It's not just one or the other. There's a lot of range in between them. And we might operate with hard, heavy boundaries in certain contexts and relationships, and have absolutely no boundaries in other contexts and relationships.

Wherever you are in any given moment, trauma healing is boundary work, any way you slice it. And whatever your trauma is, again, this is not the trauma olympics, we're not competing, you are in some way, shape or form working on your boundaries anytime you are working with your trauma.

So to your point of, instead of making yourself wrong for having boundaries and measuring against some giant should list that may have no bearing on where you, Jaï and you, every individual listening to this, like where we are in our journeys, it's a highly personal and subjective thing.

What we need to be, what our growth edge is, what the opportunity immediately in front of us is in any given moment is going to be very specific to so many different variables and particulars of our own journey.

And so, yeah, you might be in a place where you need the boundary or chose the boundary of six months in primary partnership with myself, in a monogamous relationship with myself. I don't need other people's energy right now. I need to focus on me is a boundary, that's a beautiful one. And then your six months is up, and look at that. You're reevaluating your boundaries now and it's like, oh, well, okay, maybe this is the moment where I want to start dating other people.

How I date people now may look very different than how I dated people a year ago. Cool. Boundaries are not static. We are not married to them forever. They are very much to be respected when they are given. However, we don't need to get too attached to our boundaries because our boundaries are fluid. They're going to change as we evolve.

It's not the same thing as saying that our boundaries should be porous or that very different. It's to say that the boundary I set for myself today in base of where I am in my journey, what's going on in my inner landscape, what do I need, may look different than the boundary I set tonight even.



**[00:29:36]**

So, we might be dealing with very small measures of time, and we could be dealing with much larger arcs of time depending upon where we are on our journey.

It's all to say that everyone has a right to their boundaries, and it's important to understand that those are dynamic and are changing. And in general, many of us have a tricky relationship simply to the word boundary. Because the connotation that is associated with that for most of us in dominant culture, is that it's a bad thing.

Whether it's the complete absence of those boundaries or having too many of them, it always gets spoken about somehow as like, oh, that's not okay. When in reality, boundary is a gift to relationships. Boundary helps us to know where we stand in relation to another person. And it is the most honest and authentic way that we can show up. Because, for instance, let's know if I'm like, hey, Jaï, how about we go on a date? You're cute. Let's see what's here.

But you're in the midst of your six months monogamous relationship with yourself, and you're like, oh, well, Darshana, she's on netflix, and maybe I should just try to impress her. I'm going to say, yes. You're giving me a fake yes. You're giving me a yes that honors what you think I need and want, but does not honor your truth.

So we are, by default, not actually meeting one another in an authentic and honest way. There is no way on earth that I am going to truly be satisfied on that date because you're not fully there, and you are going to then probably go into some self betrayal stuff on the other side and feel kind of weird about, like... It does not allow us to meet each other authentically and well.

Whereas if you said to me, hey, Darshana, I really am flattered by that, thank you so much. I'm not dating right now because I'm really focused on my relationship with myself. Now I get to honor your boundary. I get to see you exactly where you are. I get to experience that you have a capacity to hold yourself well, you know what? Now I like you even more.

And it's on me to hold that and respect, like, cool, there's your boundary. I'm going to have to take care of myself in whatever ways I need to. If I still want relationship with you, it's not going to be on my terms only. It's going to be on where we actually have an authentic and natural meeting point between us.

And so you might say, I'm happy to have a coffee as a friend, and we can have a great conversation and I can take off the table any thought that this is going to be flirtatious or romantic or something of that sort, we're going to just sit down as two humans getting to know each other. Cool.

Or I say, you know what? Thank you for your truth and I'm going to just kind of put my energy elsewhere because I'm really looking for a hot date right now. I'm just kind of riffing on an example here, but I hope that the underlying lesson of that, that you can pull that out and apply it in so many ways, that the boundary is our communication of our truth.

And if we are not actually being truthful about our boundaries, we're not being truthful in relationship, that's problematic. And that actually has the potential then for retraumatization.

Because the absence of our boundary, the overextending of our boundary, though, whatever it is, is related to how we got traumatized in the first place. And if we don't actually stand for ourselves in current relationship, we're simply reinforcing the trauma pattern.

Whereas we have the opportunity to interrupt that pattern and move in the direction of our healing when we learn how to give our boundaries in clear, concise, authentic, loving ways that invite the possibility of intimacy truly being there.

## **[00:33:36] - Jaï Bristow**

No, I love the way you described all of that. And I think this topic of boundaries is so important and there's so many discussions to be had on it. And in fact, on the Healing Toxic Relationships Super Conference, there was a lot of incredible conversations had on it. There's a whole day dedicated to it.

And you were part of that conference as well. Not on that day, but on another one. And so if people want to check out more conversations on this topic of boundaries, I really recommend people check out that conference. And people can also access all those videos on the Conscious Life platform.

Yes, Darshana, there's so much juice in what you're know. I love what you were saying about the shoulds and where do they come from? Because sometimes it's obvious, sometimes it comes from our family system, sometimes it comes from the cultural environment. But I loved what you were saying as well about how sometimes it can come from our more small community, right?

A lot of people who live more alternative lifestyles, more on the fringes of the mainstream, will still experience those shoulds. I remember the first time like, started exploring ethical non monogamy or honest non monogamy or polyamory, there's lots of different names for it, right? And there was. Suddenly it felt like there was a whole new rule book.

And Meg John Barker has written a book called rewriting the rules, which is exactly about that, about not going from one rigid set of rules to another rigid set of rules. And I love the way you were talking about boundaries being exactly not having a rigid set of rules for yourself, but more like tuning into what you need in any given moment and then keeping that firm, right?

So it's not about, like you say, them being porous and just giving up the boundary, it's about, this is what I need right now. This is how I'm communicating my authenticity and where I'm at right now. This is how I'm letting you know my truth and what's going on for me. And at the same time, maybe 2 hours later, that will have changed. Maybe tomorrow that will have changed, maybe... And so then I can come back to you.

Maybe, if we're taking the date example, someone asks me on a date and I go, oh, actually I'm feeling really overwhelmed. I've got lots of work. I'm tired. My existing relationships, whether they're friendships or whatever, I don't have time for them, so I'm sorry, I can't right now.

And then two weeks later, I can reach out and be like, hey, do you still want to go on that date? My schedule's cleared up a bit more. I have some time, and you seem like someone awesome that I'd like to connect with, for example. I like how all our examples are about going on dates, but...

## **Darshana Avila**

It comes up like, what we're speaking to is very part and parcel to consent culture, as it can be applied in so many ways and so specifically I'll talk about it in a sexual context because I think that this is a really important one, that people should get beaten over the head with as many times as they need to in order to take it in.

Because there's a misunderstanding that many people have with regard to consent, that it's like, okay, I'm going to just keep using us, so we're going to have sex tonight. Great. And because in the past, our sex has included making out with each other and a lot of oral, let's say, I assume then that you've been a yes to that in the past, so we're going to do that again tonight. That's not how consent works.

Consent is something that, in order for it to be truly and freely given, it needs to be informed, it needs to be enthusiastic, it needs to be ongoing. And what that looks like in practice is that even in

the middle, if you and I had already started having sex and you initially were like, yes, please go down on me, Darshana, that would be amazing. And I'm like, cool, I'm here for it.

**[00:37:24]**

And then all of a sudden you have something happen for you that leads you to feel a clear, like, I don't want this anymore. A truly consensual relating then in that moment would be you saying, I need to pause, this is not working for me anymore, I might have some feelings about that.

Okay, so it's not that I don't get to have feelings, but my feelings are not more important than your need and your boundary in that moment. We, because we have co created a dynamic together that is rooted in consent, are both agreeing to uphold our end of the bargain.

In this case, I just gave you the role of recognizing that your boundary changed in real time. Okay, so that's your experience. I'm in the role of the person I'm relating with just had a boundary change in real time, and we are relating. So we are doing this together.

You have the responsibility and opportunity to communicate what it is that you're needing different than what you needed a moment ago. And I have the responsibility and the opportunity, because it's both, and I really encourage and invite us to see it as both. It's a responsibility for our own selves and for each other, but it's an opportunity in that it's only ever going to lead to the possibility of deeper and more authentic intimacy when we're actually honoring these things.

To bring it back to the trauma piece, it's only ever then going to mean, hey, here comes the opportunity for us to do some healing work. For all those times in our past experience when maybe we didn't speak up for our needs, maybe we felt it inside that, I don't want this anymore, but we didn't feel safe enough to say so. We didn't feel emboldened or empowered enough to say so. We didn't know we could say so.

You speak up and you say, this is not working for me anymore. All of a sudden, you are having an incredible reparative experience for yourself, particularly if I can meet you in that and say, thank you for telling me what you need.

When someone gives you a no or when someone gives you I need something different. If you're the person receiving that, the correct response is, thank you for telling me what you need.

Again, doesn't mean I'm not having feelings about that. But right now, my job here, my opportunity here, is to recognize that I'm being invited into intimacy with you. You are courageously and vulnerably sharing your truth with me, and I have an opportunity to meet you in that, which is also going to really do a wonderful thing for me.

Because now I'm like, oh, my God, I'm relating with someone who actually is going to be honest with me. I can trust their yes. I can trust their no. The possibility and the opportunity that opens up for here just grew exponentially because we're relating honestly and authentically with one another.

We're not doing the whole performative, people pleasing, let's follow the dominant cultural script or the subculture script or whatever it looks like. We're actually meeting in presence with one another. Presence right here, right now. Me, you, the truth of our experience. That is where intimacy is born.

So it takes work. I'm narrating a storyline here that is very aspirational for many of us. I am not sitting here saying that this is going to instantaneously be available. However, I do want to hold it up as a very, very real possibility when you choose it. Because it is.

**[00:41:01]**

So if you choose this for yourself, this is what we were saying earlier about then, how the relationships, even with interlocking wounds, even with matching traumas, if both of those people are coming to the relationship conscious of that and really earnestly wanting to do the healing work, this is what you get to grow toward. And it's really powerful, beautiful stuff.

### **Jai Bristow**

Absolutely. And it's so true. And I think that this is where it ties in with trauma again, right? So, like, the example you were giving of going down on someone, and then they're suddenly in the middle, like, stop. This is no longer working for me.

Often it's likely that they're having a trauma response in that moment to cut it off. It might not be, but it's very likely that that's what's happening. And so again, this is an opportunity, if the person stops immediately, says, thank you for letting me know, and hold space, and then maybe even brings in some curiosity like, what do you need right now? What's going on for you? Are you okay?

Depending again, because when you're in a triggered state, it can be hard to communicate. So maybe it's after that, right? But that respect, that holding is what's going to be healing.

Whereas if the person's like, what, why? But you said yes earlier! Or whatever, and starts becoming like defensive or dismissive or in any way rejecting of that boundary, then of course that's going to retraumatize and perpetuate not just that trauma pattern, but also the idea, again, those shoulds, this idea of, oh, I shouldn't say no, I shouldn't stop, I shouldn't reinforce, because now this person's upset with me. Now this person doesn't like me. Now this person no longer wants to have sex with me or whatever the case may be, right?

So I think it's really important, and like you say, yes, it can be very aspirational, but also very powerful to relate from a place of authenticity and presence.

But my question is, like you say, it's aspirational for a lot of people so what can people do in the very real reality that sometimes if someone expresses a boundary or tries to do the work or is in some ways authentic or vulnerable about where they're at, and the other person or persons become defensive, dismissive, rejecting of that, then what are some ways to manage those types of situations?

### **Darshana Avila**

I appreciate you asking because it's a hard question to answer, I'm going to be completely honest, and it's an experience that many of us are going to find ourselves in, so it deserves an answer, right? Both things are true.

In the best case scenario, like I said, we've got that aspirational dynamic for many where the person on the other side is like, thank you, I'm going to slow down, I'm going to back up because these are the kind of things that you want to do.

If we are defining trauma as the too much, too fast, too soon, the anecdote to that then is we slow it down, we back it up. We really adjust things to create space to attend to the needs that are there. So if that's not what's happening is the question that I heard you ask, if you get up the courage to say, this is not working for me, and the person is reactive instead of responsive, because that's what's going on then.

The response, re-sponsibility, is that I am re-sponse-able. I can respond to you by saying no thank you. The reaction is, what, you said you wanted this. Now what's going on? I take offense to it. My defenses come online, right? If that's what's going on, here's the reality. The person who gave the

boundary to begin with may or may not have access to and the resource to truly advocate for and take care of themselves.

**[00:44:44]**

So once again, I'm going to be narrating something that, in a way, is aspirational because it's going to be different for everybody. But in the best case scenario, you back yourself up, whether that is physically, energetically, you slow it down. You say, I need to take a little physical space right now. I need a pause.

I get that you're having feelings about this, and I need to tend to myself, I'm not available. It actually might look like getting up and walking out of the room. It might like some kind of departure. Not as a flee response, but more as, okay, this is the best I can do to take care of myself right now, because what I need in this relationship is not actually available.

If you're doing that in a way that is still attempting to tend the attachment dynamic, like, let's say you have enough goodwill and enough reason to believe that this could be resolved, that the rupture that's happening could be repaired, you might say to the person, look, I get that you're having feelings right now. I know we're both trying to take care of ourselves. I'm going to leave because that's what I need. I'm going to take some space again, step outside for fresh air or leave if that's what you need to do.

And if you want this, if this is what's authentic, say, can we check in in an hour, or can we talk tomorrow? Or, I want to be able to do this with you and right now is not that moment. So again, it is aspirational because for many of us, if we are newer to working with our trauma or even not, because this is nonlinear and some of us might do a tremendous amount of work, and then all of a sudden, we're triggered beyond belief and we don't have access to our tools and our resources.

So please, do not judge yourself, do not shame or blame yourself if you do not show up fully resourced and skilful in every single moment, even though you've done a lot of work. Or if you are brand new to it all, understand that this too is always going to take some degree of resilience building and capacity building.

It is a big deal to be able to say, I need to take space for many of us. That's an incredibly courageous move. So, yes, that is aspirational for some and for others that might be exactly where we're hanging out. We might be really comfortable saying, you know what? You can't respond to me right now. I'm out of here. Great.

The priority being that we both, again, responsibility, opportunity, both of them. We have the responsibility to take care of ourselves as best as we are able, does not mean that we do everything for ourselves, the best that we are able. And then we have the opportunity to kind of harvest the fruits of that. That unto itself might be exactly the repair that we need for past experiences.

Crappy though it might feel to have somebody that you're intimately relating with in a present moment suddenly become reactive and not meet you, if that provides you the chance to kind of tap into your own resource, to become your own advocate in a way that maybe you hadn't done previously, that is going to be integral to your healing and wholeness journey, because now all of a sudden, you know, you've got a capacity that you didn't have before.

That's a really big deal. So again, I don't want to glamorize these dynamics, and I want to represent that there is growth and there is something generative to be had in these moments. Whether it's that we give an opportunity to hold our own selves better or we have the opportunity to do it with the other. That is what we are aspiring to, getting held. So there's different ways to go about that.

**[00:48:34] - Jaï Bristow**

Yeah, 100%. No, I really appreciate all these elements that you've brought in. I wish we had more time to go into them all further, right? There's still so much to be said, and yet, sadly, we don't have more time today.

But I was speaking to Sanda T. Jones on this conference about, you know, being in triggered states, and what to do when you're in a triggered state trying to avoid them, but what to do when you're in them, and how to find freedom from them.

Because, as you say, sometimes it's hard when you're activated or triggered, to be able to know how to respond, to be able to apply everything you were saying. But it is possible to continue doing work, to better understand oneself and to notice that, and to be able to even just do timeouts when you're in one of those states, right?

And to just be like you say, just if you need to walk out the room, if you need to signal, and you can always come back and have the conversations later when you're in a calmer state, and so is the other person.

Darshana, there's so much more I want to talk to you about, but sadly, we are out of time. So how can people find out more about you and your work?

**Darshana Avila**

Thank you. Yeah, this was an incredible conversation. My website is my name, [darshanaavila.com](http://darshanaavila.com). That is one of the best places to connect with me because my social media presence has pulled back.

I have all sorts of offerings there and I don't know when this is going to be released, but it's possible that by the time I do, there's going to be a new YouTube channel. You're hearing it first. So that more of these conversations can happen, but I welcome to reach out. I have group offerings, I have private offerings, I have juicy newsletters and all sorts of good stuff out there.

So yeah, I welcome you to lean in if you'd like to explore your erotic wholeness with me.

**Jaï Bristow**

Incredible. Thank you so much.