



Conscious Life presents

Safety and Healing in Non-Monogamy

Guest: Mel Cassidy

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[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow

Hello and welcome to this conference. My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. Today I am so, so happy to be welcoming back the marvelous Mel Cassidy. Welcome, Mel.

Mel Cassidy

Thank you, Jaï.

Jaï Bristow

Mel is a relationship coach and creator of the Monogamy Detox course, and they are dedicated to creating somatically integrated and trauma-sensitive spaces where all can flourish.

Today we're going to be talking about safety, and particularly orienting to safety in non-monogamy. Mel, do you want to kick us off by defining what the word, or the term safety means for you in this context?

Mel Cassidy

Thank you, what a great question. I think there's many different ways we can define safety, but in this context, I'm thinking of safety as, what is our nervous system experiencing? Our nervous system has this wonderful ability to, it's obsessed, it's constantly looking to assess, am I safe or am I not? It's keeping us safe.

What that means is that we are free from threat, and when we are free from threat, or even perceived threat, there is a calm, and a grounding, and an equipoise that happens in our nervous system. Our nervous system can be resilient and present, and we can show up in the here and now.

[00:01:40] Mel Cassidy

When I think of safety, I think of it as an inner experience where I'm able to be present to the here and now. And when I have a lack of safety, then I may struggle to be present to what is here and now.

I maybe struggle to be present with myself. I might struggle to be present with my partners. I might struggle to be present with what's happening in the world around me. Sometimes we can look at this definition in terms of, okay, what happens when that safety is absent?

I think it really boils down to an inner experience, where there is an absence of threat, an absence of fear, or at least an absence of imminent fear and threat, and that we're able to be present.

Jaï Bristow

That's a beautiful definition, and I really appreciate how you talk about it's very much an inner experience. I appreciate how your definition takes into account, physical safety, emotional safety, psychological safety. It takes it all into account if we bring it back to the nervous system.

I'm curious, when it comes to open relationships, why is there so much fear, and apprehension, and perhaps that feeling that it's not safe, even when it's something that people know that they want, or that people at least want to try and explore, but feel like they can't, for whatever reason.

Mel Cassidy

There's a couple of different elements to this. One, which I think we've talked about in the past is, it's unfamiliar territory, and anytime we walk into unfamiliar territory, our nervous system goes, well, we don't know what to expect. The unfamiliarity of it feels unsafe.

But there's actually something else that's happening. Normally, the way our nervous system processes experiences, when we have a novel experience, whether that's positive, negative, disruptive, whatever it is, it's a novel experience. Our nervous system uses all the information it has to determine, is this safe or not?

If the nervous system goes, we're safe, this is cool, then we're fine. If the nervous system goes, this doesn't feel safe, then it's going to go into, okay, how do I want to respond to that? Do I want to fight this perceived threat? Do I want to run away? Do I want to roll over? Do I want to appease this person? Do I need to reach out and ask for help? We have all these wonderful strategies in our nervous system.

But that's if we get to the point of determining that we are not safe. I think when it comes to open relationships, or any kind of queerying of monogamy, the nervous system often doesn't have enough information to determine whether we are safe or not.

Mel Cassidy

In somatic experiencing this is called a disrupted orienting response. We're not even able to get to that point of knowing whether we're safe or not. Then there's a whole bunch of stuff that happens

to the nervous system. We're stuck in this state of hyper-vigilance. And that's a lot of energy going into the nervous system, trying to figure out, am I safe or not?

The image it brings up for me is like a small animal just running around in panic. And in that state of panic, we're not present to the here and now, we lose connection to the people around us, we lose connection to our partners.

It becomes this catch-22, because you lose connection to the things that are actually going to give you the information about whether you're safe or not. This isn't always the experience when people are exploring open relationships, but it is something that can happen along the way.

[00:05:45] Jaï Bristow

I think that's a really important distinction to make, is that not everyone will experience this, but many people will, simply because a lot of the time it's unfamiliar.

What does happen when people ignore this sense of something's not right, or I'm on high alert, and are going maybe into trauma responses, the fight, flight, freeze, fawn that you talked about. And then sometimes even try and override their nervous system.

I know that I've definitely done that in the past. That often also, that belief that I should feel a certain way, or I shouldn't feel a certain way. And that let me just get over this, and I rationally know that this is what I want, and so let me try and use my rationale to override my emotions.

Mel Cassidy

I think you described one of the things that happens there, which is when we are overwhelmed by a situation. When I say overwhelmed, I mean there's just so much going on, whether that is we're trying to read all the information around us to determine our safety, or we're exerting a lot of energy to push those signals away, all that energy becomes exhausting.

That's a lot of energy to be putting out. I hear this so often from people exploring non-monogamy, especially in the early days. They're like, wow this is exhausting, this is a lot of work. And I'm like, well, yeah, there's a lot of things going on. You're tracking a lot of different relationships now.

In that state of exhaustion, what will happen is our nervous system to keep us safe, to support us in an inner experience of safety, whether we are actually safe on the outside or not, it will disconnect from some of those pieces of information.

We might call that dissociation. I think I have a slightly different take on dissociation from what is classically looked at. I think it's not just we dissociate from the here and now. We dissociate from receiving all that information because it's just too much. We just pull that shut-down switch.

It's also we retreat into the parts of ourselves that we feel more safe and confident in. What you were just describing sounds like you retreat back into your intellect. I think that's a very common place for us to retreat to.

[00:08:22] Mel Cassidy

In non-monogamy as well, what do we have to support us in knowing whether we are safe or not? We have lots of intellectual material. There's an increasing amount of literature, which is great. I love that there's so much more literature now than there was, even five years ago. It's phenomenal.

But we lean in on the literature to help us understand our experience. We lean into the discussions to help us understand what other people are going through. That is all very much an intellectual experience. It's not an embodied experience. So we retreat into the intellect to try and understand the experience that we're having. And that is totally fair. That's a place to go.

But there's a cost to that, because if you retreat into the intellect and you're like, oh, it's safe here, it doesn't feel safe when I go into my body. It doesn't feel safe when I go into my emotions. It doesn't feel safe when I go into my creativity. I'm just going to stay up here in my head. Then we are dissociating from the here and now still.

Likewise, we might not just dissociate into our intellect. We might say dissociate into our body. What that could look like is that urge to be physically exerting a lot. For some people, that could look like they start going to the gym all the time, or they go out dancing.

For some people, that also means they need to shut down their mind. They might turn to mind-altering substances, they might turn to alcohol. They might turn to other things that help their mind shut down, or stop that, the cycles turning, the wheels turning in the brain.

Likewise, we can also retreat into our heart, and retreat into our emotions. For some people, being connected to our emotions and then disconnecting from our head, disconnecting from our body, is what feels more safe to go to, in that space we're really focusing on the emotions, so that we can better understand them.

But what that might look like on the outside is someone who is running a roller coaster of emotions, and maybe having what seems like, what may have in a past time been called histrionic reactions. I would call that an expression of emotions that is very intense because there's so much energy going on there.

That might also look like someone maybe not thinking through what they're doing, because they're not connected to their intellect, and they're just going on impulse. That emotional impulse of, this feels right. I'm going to connect with this person in this way, and maybe they don't make the best choices. Or maybe they forget about relationship agreements that they'd had.

Then I think there's also a way that we can dissociate into our eroticism. I call this our spirit, it's where our eroticism lives, it's where our spirituality lives, it's where our creativity lives. And that can look like really pursuing hedonism in a disembodied way, which is not something I see very commonly, but I think it is something that happens.

I know that I, in my own experience, have touched and tapped into that, and there's a certain kind of intoxication that can come in there. And that intoxication just helps you forget about everything else that's going on.

[00:12:14] Mel Cassidy

So when we are overriding those signals, and whether we are retreating away, or whether we are diving in deeper into something to tackle it head-on, we are disconnecting from parts of ourselves.

In that disconnection, we're losing the ability to be present, and then that has roll-on consequences. Especially if you're looking at, this is true for any kind of relationship, but I think especially in non-monogamy, when you're looking at engaging with multiple people, and you have complex networks of relationships. There is an impact, not just on your own relationships, but there is potentially an impact on all the people you're relating with.

Maybe the people they're relating with, and maybe the people that those people are relating with, there are ripple effects. This can lead to all sorts of complexity, then one person struggling can lead to a roll-on effect that creates, I want to call it a vortex of chaos for everybody.

Then you suddenly have not just one person whose nervous system is disrupted and dysregulated, but perhaps a whole collection of people whose nervous system is disrupted and dysregulated.

Jaï Bristow

It's interesting what you call the vortex of chaos, I call the negative ripple effect, which I think I've talked about previously. The idea how when one person is having an unhealthy relationship, for example, or has toxic behaviors, or is putting up with someone else's toxic behaviors, or something like that. How it doesn't just impact that one relationship, it will impact how the person is feeling, it will impact their relationships with everyone else.

Again, relationship in the broad sense of the word. This isn't just in non-monogamy, but I think it can be heightened in non-monogamy when there's multiple partners, but it can definitely exist in all types of relationships.

It might then have an impact on when they're talking to their friend, and then it might have an impact on that friend's relationship with their mother, who they're living with, or whatever it is.

I think that you're really pointing to why it's important to be regulated. I really appreciate how you've brought in all these very concrete examples of ways people can dissociate, disconnect, as you were saying. To me, what you're describing sounds like trauma responses, essentially.

Mel Cassidy

I should say, part of that vortex of chaos that comes up, is we're so used to relying on the support of other people to help us regulate our nervous system. That is healthy, that is how human beings have evolved. Our nervous systems co-regulate with other nervous system, whether those are humans or animals, and we also co-dysregulate.

If you are in a situation where your nervous system is dysregulated, and all the people who are proximal to you have a nervous system that is dysregulated. Who's helping to regulate the nervous systems? How are you accessing that co-regulation space in a regulated way rather than a dysregulated way?

[00:15:43] Mel Cassidy

I think there is a risk sometimes in non-monogamy, that because of all the stigma that people can face, people can become very insular in their little polycules and anacules, as I call them, and maybe not have people outside of that, that they can connect with to help regulate their nervous systems.

Jaï Bristow

That makes a lot of sense, I'm really glad you brought that piece in, I think it's really important.

I'm curious, Mel, because you're really showing that, okay, trauma responses, nothing wrong with trauma responses. They are very human and natural reaction. This is not to demonize anyone who has had any of the reactions that you've just listed, or others. Like I said, myself, I could recognize myself. And actually, quite a few of the ones you listed, reverting to intellect is just one of them.

At the same time, they are trauma responses, they're not particularly healthy. They're not conducive to healthy relationships with oneself, with other people. They can have a negative ripple effect on other relationships. So absolutely not demonizing, and at the same time, what is the alternative?

Mel Cassidy

We want to recognize these trauma responses as strategies to keep us safe. I think holding that compassion is really important. Very often in relationships, when we see, or experience a partner retreating away from us, that tends to be a trigger for us. And then we go into a trauma response, and then it becomes this little cascade of trauma responses. Been there, done that, got the t-shirt a thousand times over.

But if we can access other resourcing. So by resourcing, I mean reaching outside of our relationships for support, maybe that's to a counselor, or a therapist, or a coach, or a somatic experiencing practitioner, or whatever it is that supports you, and resources you, to then access a space of compassion.

We want to have that compassion for others. We want to have that compassion for ourselves. I think naming these things as trauma responses is really helpful. I love that you said it's not to stigmatize anybody, these are human responses.

If we're not responding in this way ever, then we either have the most regulated nervous system in the world, or something else may be going on. But we want to hold compassion for the trauma responses, and then we want to look at, okay, how do we actually bring all these different parts of ourselves back into connection?

Because the healing of trauma is the journey of coming back into being present to what is here and now. If I've experienced the here and now as being overwhelming, or scary, or just too much for me to ascertain whether I'm safe or not, then I need the support to be able to better engage in that.

[00:18:56] Mel Cassidy

That could look like all sorts of things. That could look like bringing in intellectual information. In my Monogamy Detox course, I talk with folks about, okay, who are your positive role models for the kinds of relationships you want to have? We struggle with that in our society.

There's not many rom-coms that include non-monogamous storylines in a positive light. We're lucky that there are an increasing number of examples in the media, in real life and fictional, but even so it's limited. It's not quote-unquote perfect, but we want to look at those role models, that can be something that helps.

I think also going into understanding what is it that your nervous system is picking up on? Can you work with an... In somatic experiencing we talk about, what is the sensation of something? What image does it bring up? What's the action or the impulse that you feel around that? What story do you hold around it? What's the emotional impact of that experience or sensation?

I think bringing in all those tools so that we can better understand, what is it that is either overwhelming to us, or that is disrupting our ability to engage. Sometimes what's disrupting our ability to engage is just perspective.

We just need the reassurance, and we need the role modeling, or we need the information. We need to hear that what we're doing is possible. We need to know that what we're doing is not going to disrupt everything in our life, or that if it does cause disruption, that we're going to be okay through that. We're going to be supported.

I think in that regard, having the support of peers is really valuable. And not everyone has the support of their family. We experience this in queer communities, too, we don't all have the support of our families. We may not always have the support of our friends when we're exploring non-monogamy, especially if they are not familiar with it, or they're very committed to their monogamy. So how do we resource ourselves with community?

Then I think bringing in how we combat all those other pieces of dissociation and disconnection, is slowing down the experience. I think having those questions that we can check in with ourselves, like, hey, right now I'm engaging in something, but who am I doing this for? Am I being authentic to myself right now? Am I doing this because I'm wanting to run away, or avoid something? Am I doing this because this is what the other person said they wanted?

I love the Wheel of Consent work, because Wheel of Consent, one of those questions is, who is this for? That's been great for me in checking my fawn response, my people-pleasing, and my self-sacrificing instincts that want to kick in all the time when I feel threatened. So that asking that question of, ok, who is this for?

We're only really able to ask that question when we slow down. So slowing down is one of the most important things to do. And that is hard because when we're faced with something that's uncomfortable and unfamiliar, our instinct is to rush through it. So slowing everything down.

[00:22:41] Jaï Bristow

I think that's such an important piece, and I spoke to Dr Alex Iantaffi and Dr Meg-John Barker on this conference about relational trauma. One of the things we talked about is slow relating, and why it's so difficult when you have trauma, and at the same time, how helpful it can be.

I think that thing of noticing how we have a tendency for urgency when we have trauma. And that actually when we notice that tendency, doing our best to find some space, and to slow it as much as possible, whilst also recognizing that it can be very challenging to do that.

I'm so glad you brought in the piece around the Wheel of Consent. I've had the privilege of interviewing Dr Betty Martin, who created the Wheel of Consent a couple of times on these different conferences. We talked about consent on one of them, and we talked about boundaries on another one. So people should also check out those interviews, which you can all find on the Conscious Life platform.

It makes sense what you were saying about the need for role models, because like you were saying at the beginning, that unfamiliarity is what creates that alert of, is this safe? I don't recognize this kind of thing, am I under threat or not? If there is no resources, or if there are no role models, or no representation, or no one in your life then that can really add to that.

Whereas if you have people where you see it being done, quote-unquote successfully, or you have representation, and it has to be positive representation, whether that's in real life or fiction, then that can be really supportive.

You were talking about peer support, I think that that's really important. At the same time, you were saying, your family, or your friends, or your peers, may or may not be supportive, but even if they are, if they themselves are not practicing non-monogamy, it doesn't matter how supportive they are, there's going to be certain things they don't get.

Or sometimes if you're struggling with an issue, they're going to say, "Oh, it's because you're non-monogamous." Instead of being like... I think whether or not your family, and your friends, and your co-workers, are supportive or not, it's really important to connect with community. To find peers who are going through something similar, and/or elders that you can look up to, or ask questions to, or who can reflect what's going on.

Mel Cassidy

I think the question of eldership is a really interesting one in the non-monogamy world, because non-monogamy is not new, this isn't some recent invention. Non-monogamy has been going on around the world for millennia.

I think the expression of it changes through time, and it's going to be culturally different in different parts of the world. It still is that way today. Even in the more or less hegemony of North America, there's a lot of different subcultures of non-monogamy that exist.

[00:25:40] Mel Cassidy

Finding eldership in there that reflects what you are doing can be challenging. Because I think where we have started to explore in non-monogamy is, non-monogamy has, I think the conversation has shifted along with conversations around feminism, and intersectionality, and all these other movements to disrupt the status quo and challenge systems of inequity.

There are some people who are practicing non-monogamy who are still very patriarchal, and they may not think of themselves as that way, but the way that they are engaging in relationships. Maybe the assumptions that they're engaging around gender dynamics, for example, could still be rooted in patriarchy.

That may not be the best role model for someone who's approaching non-monogamy from more of an anarchist and feminist value system. This is a challenge that we face today, who are the elders that we can look up to? Who are exploring the kinds of relationships that reflect what we are aspiring to?

I feel like every queer, non-monogamous person I know, myself included, has that dream of the poly-utopia. Of a piece of land where we all have our own little tiny home, or we're going to buy a castle in France and have a little commune. It sounds very lovely, but how many people have actually done that before us?

Then you get into the space where, gosh, there are no elders who've done this. Or if there are elders, where are they? I don't know about them. Or we discover who they are, and then we find out they're imperfect human beings, we can't just put them up on a pedestal. I don't think we should ever put anybody on a pedestal. But it brings in a little bit of despair for some people.

I notice that instead of quote-unquote elders in the non-monogamous community, we have people who are leaders, people who are writing, people who are researching, like you mentioned, Meg-John Barker, I think of them as an elder, and I hope that they're not offended by me calling them that.

But the people who are supporting everyone to be able to see their own experience, and to feel validated in their experience, and I think that's an incredible resource.

And when people exploring non-monogamy go to their therapist, or their counselor, if that therapist, or counselor doesn't have resourcing in non-monogamy, whether they're a non-monogamous or not. If they don't have resourcing, if they can't provide their client with those examples, then their client is still going to struggle with the non-monogamy piece. I feel like there is such a strong need for more non-monogamous resources for conventional therapy and counseling.

Jai Bristow

Absolutely, this is where I love the Internet. Because the Internet helps people find those role models, find the elders that are doing it in a similar way to them, that they wouldn't otherwise have access to. Martha Kauppi, who I've also interviewed, does some great work, her best book, or her

most well-known book is, *Polyamory, a Toolkit for Therapists (and Their Clients)*. It really supports exactly what you were speaking to.

[00:29:26] Jaï Bristow

I'm curious because especially when there aren't role models, it can be easy at times for, just like any relationship, but especially in non-monogamy, sometimes, because there are no templates, for it to be toxic. You and I talked about this on the Heal Toxic Relationship Super Conference.

When I say for it to be toxic, I don't mean non-monogamy as a whole, I mean certain behaviors, certain relationships, for there even to be abuse, sometimes emotional, physical. And again, this isn't only in non-monogamy, but this is what we're talking about today. We have to acknowledge the realities that it does happen in non-monogamy too.

When we don't know what the alternatives are, and when it's so unfamiliar, and especially if we're in those trauma responses, and trying to override our instincts. For example, because it's unfamiliar and we don't know what we're doing, then it's easy for those toxic situations to happen. I myself have experienced those.

I've also experienced super healthy, non-monogamous relationships, and some of the most beautiful, loving, fulfilling, healthy relationships I've had have been non-monogamous. And some of the most toxic, abusive relationships have been non-monogamous. That's what happens when almost all my relationships have been non-monogamous.

If someone has experienced trauma in non-monogamy, what does that mean? Does that mean that they need to revert back to monogamy? Or maybe not even revert back, does it mean that they should try something else? How do we heal from trauma experience specifically in, or from non-monogamous relationships?

Mel Cassidy

I think for many people the instinct is to abandon non-monogamy and go back to monogamy. That's a fair and valid instinct to feel. What I find is that, that's not always necessarily the solution. Because that can sometimes be, I'm going to quote-unquote, heal this by avoiding it.

That takes us back into that place where we're compartmentalizing stuff, and then what you're left with is what's called an incomplete trauma response, an incomplete self-protective response. I've seen people do that. Then what happens if their partner cheats on them? Or what happens if their monogamous partner, they think they're flirting with somebody at a party, and they have a reaction to that.

Going back to monogamy doesn't make the trauma go away. I think that we need to honor, if we chose to step into non-monogamy, what were the reasons for it? We want to come back into that, and really connect to that authentic part of ourselves. For a lot of people, they go to explore non-monogamy because they don't believe that one person can be everything for them.

They don't want to put that pressure on one person, and they don't want that pressure on themselves. What a lot of people do get to experience through non-monogamy is a really profound

level of safety. Because you're not just looking to one person to be your source of secure attachment, you're actually potentially experiencing secure attachment through multiple relationships.

[00:33:00] Mel Cassidy

To me that's the poly dream, that is the goal of, okay, not just one relationship that has secure attachment in it, but multiple relationships. For some people, that doesn't look like polyamory, that might look more like relationship anarchy. It may not just be the romantic connections, it could also be the platonic connections that come in, but there is that potential.

When that isn't what we experience, when all we experience is disruption, pain, hurt, harm, as you're saying, like the toxic experiences that can come up in that milieu of confusion, and disconnection, and dissociation, and we retreat away.

What we're actually doing often is pulling away from potential resources. Now, I'm not saying you should stay in an abusive situation, absolutely do not stay in an abusive situation. But this goes back to, don't throw the baby out with the bathwater, saying not all non-monogamy is going to be like that.

There are so many resources that have been created by people in the non-monogamous community, whether they're out about being non-monogamous or not, that help us to understand how we can reach out to wider community.

Because when we retreat, when we're in a state of trauma, and we retreat, we are often isolating ourselves to protect ourselves. And if we stay in isolation, how do we heal?

Healing, there's only so much we can do as an individual, eventually to heal rupture and harm that has happened in relationship. We need to experience relationship. And whether that is through the context of monogamy, or through the context of relationship anarchy, or through the context of non-monogamy, or something else, we are eventually going to have to go back into relationship to heal all of those things.

If you've experienced rupture in non-monogamy, healing through non-monogamy is possible. It takes slowing down, like you were saying, when we're hurt, we tend to rush through, and we want to rush to the end goal to know that we're safe. But I think slowing down, and revisiting things from the perspective of centering ourselves.

Very often when we have experienced that harm in relationships, we were experiencing some form of disconnection, either as a consequence of that harm, or the disconnection made it so that we didn't notice the harm was happening in the moment.

So to come back into connection with yourself, and then go back into those experiences, whether that's going into similar experiences, or just working through it with a professional.

It's important to be able to rewire our nervous system to know it wasn't the whole framework that was unsafe. It was that person and that behavior that was unsafe.

[00:36:21] Mel Cassidy

That's the sort of thing that I see happen when people abandon non-monogamy. They're making this association between, it's the non-monogamy that was unsafe, but it was actually the person and their behaviors that was unsafe. Does that make sense?

Jaï Bristow

It does absolutely. I would focus even more on the behaviors than the person. That's one of the things I really learned in the Heal Toxic Relationship Super Conference. Is to separate not just the relationship style, but separate also the relationship, the person, the behaviors, all of that.

Then you know what to look out for, because if you just say, oh, it's the person, then it can be easy to be like, okay, get rid of that person from your life, and then, fine. But you might start to notice patterns happening again with someone else.

It's also worth questioning yourself if you notice similar patterns happening with different partners. What's going on for me? What are some unhelpful, or harmful behaviors that I'm exhibiting?

Sometimes they can even be masked as helpful. I've seen people end up in very toxic relationships on a regular basis because they struggle to say no. Because they're a very caring, loving person who always wants to give, and rescue, and help the other. That sounds like a great person, but actually, if they keep ending up in these...

So that's why when you recognize the behavior, the way that person treated me was not okay. Part of that is saying, therefore the person who is doing that, especially if you've tried to have a conversation with them, and it doesn't stop, yes, definitely get that person out of your life. Definitely, if you need to.

But really looking at the behavior as being the traumatic experience, as being the toxic experience. So that you don't end up in that pattern again with anyone else.

I think it's also really interesting what you were saying about the different forms that non-monogamy takes. Non-monogamy literally just means not monogamous. You and I have spoken many times about the different forms it can take, so I don't want to go into that again today.

But I will say that I found for myself, that I was trying to do a very specific form of polyamory that happened to be the community that I fell into when I first started exploring honest, ethical non-monogamy. In the end, after a few years, I realized that that form didn't work for me, and that doesn't make me suddenly monogamous. But it makes me want to explore a different way of doing ethical, honest non-monogamy.

I think that that's okay. It's not so much about being so traumatized that you run away from the whole thing, and either go back to monogamy, or go, I can't do that. Again, learning about yourself, recognizing that it isn't fixed, that it's okay to be fluid, to explore different ways of doing things

until you find something that works for you, where you genuinely feel safe. That's coming back to the start, where your nervous system feels relaxed.

[00:39:20] Mel Cassidy

What we're talking about here, is what we've talked about before in one of the super conferences, is that radical self-relationship. How impactful it is to relate to yourself in a loving way. I want to acknowledge that can be a journey for so many people.

We may have experienced so much shaming around our own responses, whether that was in childhood, or through past relationships. I know several people who have a hard time sitting with their own discomfort, sitting with what their own responses are, and they go into this, oh my gosh, what am I doing? And they can start spinning around that.

That's one of those places where our self-relationship can be supported, by having the right people around us, whether that is with loving, caring professionals, loving and caring family, friends, peers, relationship support groups, and so forth.

This is why I come back again and again to this idea of a self-relationship. I think that this idea gets misunderstood. People think, oh, it's just like you married yourself, or people think it's a fad. Or I've heard all sorts of things said about this now. Or they think it's like creating an artificial hierarchy.

And I'm like, this is about showing up for yourself. So many of us have been habituated in, I would say toxic, monogamous, heteronormative behaviors, to not show up for ourselves, to show up for what our partner wants instead.

So to turn that around and say, I'm going to choose to show up for myself, and I'm going to choose to have this relationship with myself, where I'm in conversation with myself about what I'm experiencing from moment to moment.

And if I don't know what I'm experiencing, I'm going to slow down, just as if you saw a partner in a state of panic, you might go, hey, let's take a breath, let's take a moment, let's pause. If this isn't feeling good, we don't have to do this right now.

To have that level of connection with yourself, that you can have that conversation, and notice when those red flags are coming up, either in what you're experiencing around you, or you notice those little indicators in yourself that, this is how I react when there's a red flag around.

The more we hone that relationship to ourselves, the better equipped we are to notice. Am I safe right now? If I'm not safe, or if I don't know that I'm safe, what information might help me to know whether I'm safe or not?

What is it that I, as an individual, need in this moment? Because we're all going to have slightly different needs, and this is applicable to all kinds of relating. But I think in non-monogamy the more we can be clear in that in ourselves, the easier it is for us to show up with others with clarity, so that they can know where their safety lies with us.

[00:42:48] Jaï Bristow

It's really important, the way you were saying, a self-relationship doesn't, or prioritizing your relationship with self, it doesn't mean turning into a hermit and cutting off all relating. It's actually the opposite in some ways.

I spent the majority of this past year in a monogamous relationship with myself, and now I'm dating again. And I see how differently I'm dating, because I really learn to tune into myself, to prioritize my own needs, to put myself first for the first time in my life.

I really appreciate everything you've brought in.

We touched upon some of this, and more, on your Solo Polyamory Conference, that you did for Solo Polyamory day, where you interviewed me and many, many other speakers about their experience. People can watch that on YouTube.

I'm wondering if you want to say where people can find that, and also how people can find out a bit more about you and your work.

Mel Cassidy

Absolutely, so the main place to go is radicalrelationshipcoaching.ca, that's my main online portal, and you'll find all those things connected, and linked in there. You can also find me on social media, on Instagram and Facebook, at radicalrelating.

Jaï Bristow

Fantastic. Thank you so much for your time today, Mel. It's flown by, as always. I wish we had more of it, but I think we've touched upon some really important topics. So thank you.

Mel Cassidy

Thank you so much.