



998: Somatic Healing For Moms: How to
Regulate Your Nervous System in Real-Time
With Brittany Piper

Child: Welcome to my mommy's podcast!

Katie: This episode is brought to you by Native Path, and I'd love to talk about something that might surprise you. When you think creatine you might think muscly gym bros, but here's what the research actually shows. Creatine is most incredible for your brain because your brain uses about 20% of your body's energy and creatine helps fuel those neural pathways.

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When it comes to creatine, though, quality matters. Creatine monohydrate is the most researched form and I use Native Path creatine. Most research says to start with three to five grams a day, that you don't need a loading phase, despite what some sources say. I personally have experimented with up to like 10 grams per day for the mental benefits. But as always, talk to your own doctor or healthcare provider before starting anything, especially if you have any health concerns. But for many women, creatine can be one of the safest, most researched supplements available and for too long we've thought of it as for just men.

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and this episode is all about somatic healing for moms. How to regulate your nervous system in real time. And I am back with Britt Piper who is an amazing voice in this realm. She's a renowned speaker and author and a somatic experiencing practitioner.

And in this episode we get to go deep on this topic. Especially to moms. Why this is so important for moms, especially because of the nervous system connection with our kids, especially when they're little. And she gives a lot of hands-on and practical tips, as well as some statistics that I found personally very relieving and helpful. Including that we really actually only need to show up and be attuned, not even perfect, but just attuned with our children about 30% of the time for them to develop secure attachment.

That they don't need perfection and they don't need a hundred percent. And that actually when there are moments where we don't get it right and don't get it perfect, or there's

rupture and repair that could actually strengthen the bond. It can help them develop more resilience and better nervous system regulation over time.

She gives advice on how to support our children and nervous system regulation at various ages and how to support ourselves in the busyness and overwhelm of motherhood.

Definitely a lot of practical takeaways in this one. So let's jump in. Brit, welcome back.

Thank you so much for being here again for this episode.

Brittany: Yes. I'm looking forward to this one.

Katie: Well, if you guys missed it, we got to record an incredible first episode all about the science of safety and there were so many actionable things that you mentioned in that episode. Great starting points as well as a ton of resources that I have linked in the show notes. And in this episode, I would love to really dial in on something that I think is especially relevant to our listening audience, which is somatic healing for moms.

And I think obviously somatic healing is important for everyone, but it feels especially impactful and important for moms who often set kind of the nervous system tone for the entire household. But I would love to hear your perspective on this. Why is nervous system regulation and safety in this work so important for moms especially?

Brittany: Yeah, so I think you just touched on it there. That moms or caregivers, they really do set the tone for the home. Their nervous system does. You know, children, when children are born, they don't have developed nervous systems and so they do something called co-regulate. Or there's a lot of other ways that you can think of it.

It's also referred to as affect synchrony, mirror emotions, mirror neurons, heart coherence. It all means the same thing. And essentially it is that our children borrow our nervous systems up until a certain age because theirs are not developed. And theirs develop and adapt based on the health of nervous system. So if we are dysregulated, our children will be dysregulated.

And as a mom myself to two littles, I have an almost 2-year-old and almost 5-year-old next month, that felt like a lot of pressure. Especially as someone who came from a history of attachment wounds. Growing up in a dynamic where there wasn't a lot of healthy regulation modeled to me. Either there was explosive emotions in our home and walking on eggshells, or we would push things under the rug and act like it wasn't there. So there was avoidance and overwhelm and chaos.

And so, as a new mom myself, what I found is that the most important for, most important step for me in becoming an attuned parent, a supportive parent, was focusing on my own nervous system. We often focus on, like, what do I need to do for my kids? How do I help

them regulate? How do I, how do I help them move through a big emotion? And what the most important thing to do is actually make sure that in those moments your system feels regulated and safe. Because that's gonna set the tone, as you said, and set the standard for how they're able to move through big moments of activation and stress and dysregulation.

Katie: That makes so much sense. And I didn't, I dunno if I had the words to explain that before, but I think my family growing up my parents were amazing and very loving, but we definitely had more of that, like, kind of avoidance dynamic in our house. And my brother and I were having this conversation recently of how interesting it is even as adults, even within ourselves to learn or, like, attempt to learn, how to be able to do that even within ourselves, much less in relationship with other people because that was ingrained so early.

So it makes sense to me that you say like, we're kind of very co-regulate with our parents. We adopt these things early and then even when we're logically aware of them as adults, that doesn't mean we just get to resolve them because we understand them. There's actually, like, work that goes into that as well.

Can you talk a little bit more about how a dysregulated nervous system can affect parenting and the parent child bond? Like you mentioned the avoidance aspect. I would guess this can show up in a lot of different ways depending on what we went through in childhood.

Brittany: Yeah. Yeah, so it can create either direct dysregulation for a child, so, or it can cause indirect dysregulation. So, I'll give some examples of direct. So let's say that we're really dysregulated and that we have a system that is really either shut down, so we dissociate a lot. We're not super emotionally present, or maybe we're stuck in that sympathetic overdrive, anger response, frustration.

And so when our little ones have big emotions, that might trigger our system to either get frustrated and to lash out at the kids. Which then creates direct dysregulation in them. Where, you know, children are biologically and instinctually wired to come to their caregiver, their attachment figure, for regulation. So when the person that they're instinctually drawn to, to come to for safety, is now the thing that they fear, it creates a lot of this disorganized dysregulation within the system. Which can then create, you know, we could talk all about attachment styles and patterns and things like that.

Another one would be, you know, if again, a child gets upset, has big emotions. And in our system that feels really dysregulating. So we completely shut down. That again, can lead the child to feel now neglected, not safe, alone. Like they don't have this safe haven. This attachment to help them regulate through it.

Now indirectly how this can show up is, let's say that we have our own trauma and our own stress that is creating conditions in our life that is also impacting our little ones. Let's say

that we have chronic anxiety, and this anxiety shows up even in moments that have nothing to do with our kiddos, right? They're fine, they're regulated, they're over in the corner. They're not, they don't have big emotions, but we are carrying this anxiousness around. Over time, the child's nervous system will start to pick up on, my caregiver is not consistently and consistent is the big word here.

I should probably pause and say that there are moments and we can talk all about the, you know, the imperfect parent and all the research behind that. But we are not perfect as parents. We are not perfect humans. We get dysregulated all the time. Rupture and repair is really important. What I'm referring to here is that if we are chronically shutting down or lashing out at our kiddos. Or if we are consistently and constantly and chronically anxious around them or shut down around them, that will start to send a signal to them that the caregiver, the person that I rely on for safety, security, and regulation is themselves never regulated. Therefore, I do not feel safe. My system doesn't feel safe.

And so what we do is we create an environment that doesn't really foster resilience, presence, connection and safety. We are creating an environment where this nervous system is now wired for survival, for disconnection, for dysregulation, and for danger. Yeah, those are some examples.

Katie: Yeah, I feel like that...

Brittany: But again, the consistency thing is important.

Katie: I feel like that is a really important distinction. Because I would guess likely no mom listening has had an experience of never feeling dysregulated or never having a moment of overwhelm or losing our temper. Like, of course that would be an unreasonable expectation that I think that's a really important perspective to remember is it's like the consistency over time, not perfection, but like that connection and presence most of the time.

And like I agree with you, like I think those, that actually, like, sometimes those moments when we are overwhelmed, depending on how we navigate those, might actually strengthen the bond long term if we use those as an opportunity to, like, reinforce the connection afterwards. But, I think that perspective is super important before we go forward in the conversation.

And I also know, like, motherhood feels like a very hands-on place to get to learn this because it is so, like, demanding of time and resources and energy. And I know for moms that, like, it often feels like there's, like, time and energy and attention or stretch thin, often. And so it's not like we have all the extra hours in the day to just, you know, focus on our own nervous system regulations.

So what are some kind of hands-on, quick, somatic tools that are especially relevant to moms that we can use when we're feeling overwhelmed or we feel that nervous system dysregulation starting to happen? Maybe to kind of help before it escalates.

Brittany: Yeah. Yeah, so I'm gonna answer that, but I wanna add one more thing to what you just said. And in my book, *Body First Healing*, I talk about, you know, it says somatic, it's a book for somatic, excuse me, somatic healing. There is a lengthy, lengthy, lengthy chapter on attachment. And you're probably wondering why is attachment so important when it comes to somatic healing and nervous system?

And that's because kinda what we're talking about here is that the relationship that you have with your caregiver is going to set the tone for how your nervous system develops in childhood. Especially those first three years of life and then the first six years of life. But really those first three years of life.

But there's a study called *The Good Enough Mother*. I think it was Donald Winnicott, infant child psychotherapist. And what he found is that as long as mothers and caregivers are attuned to their child 30% of the time, and attuned means I am with you in your discomfort, even if we're not getting this right, as long as they were attuned 30% of the time, they would have a secure attachment and a secure and regulated nervous system.

And what he found is that having moments where there is healthy rupture and repair, which is kind of what you just said, is that these moments where we feel dysregulated or overwhelmed can actually be a really great teaching moment to our kids as long as we're not over the top right? Not lashing out, not being, you know, not creating harm for our children. But it models to our children how to move through these inevitable moments of imperfection, of disconnection, of dysregulation. And it makes kids actually more emotionally resilient.

So when we try to carry this perspective of, I need to be perfect, I can't show emotions in front of my kids, I can't be upset, I can't be dysregulated, that actually does them a disservice because that is not how we are wired. We feel activation all throughout the day, moment to moment. And it's more about having the tools and the capacity to move through it.

So I just wanted to say that. Just to add some science and even more validity to that. But yeah, somatic practices or, you know, I would even say like a somatic approach to everyday life. The pressure that moms are under, which is insurmountable at this point in this modern day that we live in. We are juggling so many things and there is kind of this pressure of I have to be the regulating force in my home. Like that is a lot of pressure.

And so I think what we were just speaking to here is giving yourself some grace and recognizing you don't have to be perfect. And that moments of dysregulation are not just normal. They're almost to be expected. And a moment for opportunity and growth for our kids I think allows us to, like, let up some of that pressure a little bit, which is really nice.

But some tools that you can do, okay, so, you know, structure and routine can be really, really helpful for a nervous system. And of course we know that structure and routine is really helpful for children, right? So having a routine can be helpful. And then I would say that having some type of movement. This doesn't mean that you need to go to the gym. This doesn't mean that you need to work out. This means even just taking like five minutes to stretch or going on a short walk around the block, or, you know, walking to lunch instead of driving your car if it's right down the block. These are small things that you can do to help regulate the system.

The nervous system gets dysregulated when it has chronic stress, chronic adrenaline, and cortisol. So when you think about playing and mobilizing the body, we are exerting adrenaline and cortisol. So one of the things you mentioned, Katie, was that you found that you wanted to go on these walks as you started doing this work. So the body will naturally start to crave movement.

And you can even do that through play. Like, play with children provides a lot of sympathetic discharge as well. So whether it's like playing at the playground, throwing a baseball, something that you're doing to allow the body to move even for just a few minutes a day can be really helpful to kind of keep the system at baseline.

And then another thing that I would say is taking time throughout the day. What I've had clients do in the past is I'll have them set a reminder like two times a day. And when the reminder goes off, what they do is they take just 60 seconds to do what we call resourcing. It's a somatic practice where you allow the sensory motor system, your senses, to just start to orient. So you just start to orient to the space that you're in.

You can notice thin... and I just took a breath as I did that. So you can notice things like texture on the wall, colors, shapes, patterns. And if you can allow the full head, neck, and eyes to orient, allowing the neck to stretch. What that does is it stretches your sternocleidomastoid muscles in the neck. And it also activates the vagus nerve, which stimulates our parasympathetic rest and digest.

So we call this exploratory orienting, and it's kind of like a, what we call a postural attitude. Where you're doing something with your posture to switch your nervous system into a more present, curious and rested and digested state. Rather than defensive orienting, which is

being hypervigilant, right? How often are we tense around our kids? What are the millions of things that I need to be doing? Oh, that kid's climbing on the window.

So exploratory orienting. Just do it for a minute. And then tracking your body, how is my body experiencing this? So I noticed I took a deep breath. I also noticed that my shoulders kind of dropped a little bit. I'm also recognizing that I'm breathing into kind of my deeper, diaphragms into the belly. So more access to breath. So noticing now, how is my body experiencing that? And that really kind of sets an imprint, a somatic imprint, of okay, we can have a moment of safety and a moment of reprieve.

And then the last thing that I would say is that when you do feel dysregulated, which is inevitable, I encourage you to follow the three E formula, which I talk about in my book. And the three E stands for experience, express and expel. So the first thing you wanna notice is, I'm feeling dysregulated. How is my body experiencing this? And if it feels okay to do, can you just track how the body is showing you, I'm really anxious right now, or I'm really frustrated.

So that could be a sensation, it could be noticing a behavior of the body, like I'm clenching my fist, or I'm clenching my jaw. A sensation would be, there's constriction in my shoulders, or there's heat coming up my neck as I feel really heated. I'm sweating, I'm per, you know, perspiring. You wanna allow yourself to notice the experience for just a little bit, maybe like, I don't know, 20, 30 seconds.

And then the second E is express. So as I'm noticing this experience, is there anything my body naturally wants to do to express how I'm feeling? And you might notice that it's like, oh, I just wanna, like, shake my arms, or I just wanna, ugh. Or maybe I just wanna, like, move or I wanna stretch, or I wanna get up and leave this room. Maybe you notice that tears start to emerge.

So the body is now expressing or moving through some of that activation, which leads to the third E, which is expelling. This is your body's way of expelling the adrenaline and cortisol that enters into our system when we feel stress and activated. So you're releasing the lid of that pressure cooker of stress, allowing it to move through.

And this is something you can do with your kids. So when I feel dysregulated in front of my kids, we have fun little exercises that we do. I will usually name, I'm feeling really frustrated right now. So I'm gonna just be with myself for a moment and I'm gonna be with that frustration, okay?

And usually, like, I like to co-regulate, so I'll like, hold their hands or something. And then I'll notice it. And then maybe after 30 seconds I'll be like, you wanna do some dinosaur stomps with me? Or do you wanna do some growls? So we'll do fun, playful things to help

express and expel that energy. And at the same time, it's again, showing our kids that we have emotions, we are emotional creatures, and that's okay. So yeah, there's a bunch of different things you could do.

Katie: I love that. It feels extremely reassuring that statistically you mentioned that really we only need to be actually attuned and present 30% of the time, and not even perfectly in those moments, but just present. That feels probably, like, very relieving to a lot of moms listening.

And you touched on this a little bit, but I would love to go deeper on this. Like, what, how can we best navigate when there are those inevitable moments of kind of like, rupture and repair? Like, how do we best both prepare for that and navigate those moments in the moment to strengthen our bond with our kids over time to help give them good nervous system regulation tools through the experiencing and the modeling of that. And or, at various ages, are there things that we can do, kind of in a practical and hands-on way, to support our kids in developing healthy nervous system responses, even if we didn't get that experience as a child?

Brittany: Yeah. Yeah, so I think the rupture and repair, kind of the healing bomb that we have found, which is actually the most impactful thing in rupture and repair, is what you actually just mentioned, again, which is attunement. And again, it sends that message of, I am with you in this discomfort. I am with you in this disconnect. I am with you in this moment of dysregulation or whatever is happening.

And the example that I often give is, if you think of a baby, how often do we not get it right? Right? They can't explain to us in verbal measures. So they're sending us all of these cues, these protests, what we call social cues, for help.

They're crying, they're screaming, they're flailing their arms and we can't figure out what's wrong. And so there's this disconnect, right? And so it's, okay, I'm gonna change their diaper, and they're still crying and they're still protesting. And I'm gonna change their clothes. Maybe they're hot and they're still crying, they're still protesting. We're not getting it right. I'm gonna rock you for a bit. Still don't get it right. I'm gonna try and put you down for a nap. No, that's not doing it. Okay, I'm gonna just take you outside for a moment. And the baby starts to regulate.

And so it was not about getting it right. It was never about, I need to fix this, I need to make you better. It was this sense of we're disconnected, but I am with you in figuring this out. And sometimes that attunement and that sense of a child feeling like, even though we're disconnected, I know I still belong here and I belong with you, I think can make the biggest difference.

And so, yeah, I would say that's probably the, the one thing I would mention with rupture and repair is that that attunement, consistent attunement, the willingness to work through it is probably what matters the most. And then your second question, can you repeat your second question again?

Katie: Yeah, just speaking to like at various ages, maybe there's like developmental stages with this, but how do we best help our kids to develop healthy nervous system regulation and attachment, even if we weren't necessarily good at that, at their ages? Like if it wasn't something we got in childhood, how can we help our kids develop that foundation in a healthier way?

Brittany: For sure. Yeah, so I would say age-wise, you know, when it comes to nervous system, but also brain development, what we know is that infancy, of course, is zero to three years. And so during those years that's when children are really going to be, learn how to regulate through co-regulation. So it's less about, you know, teaching them how to move through emotions.

And it's more so that co-regulation of I can be a safe anchor for you, your safe haven of regulation when you're upset or dysregulated. So zero to three it's focusing on your own regulation and knowing that that is most important for your child in moments when they are upset or dysregulated. After the age of three is when they start to have that verbal language.

And even still though, they, they're still operating very much so from their emotional brain. Not so much from their conscious cognitive learning or rational brain. And so even now, and, you know, they have the, the big leap at the age of four, the, what they call the limbic leap, which is the emotional brain, even at the age of four.

And they also have, for young boys, the testosterone surge that happens. They still have very big emotions, but they don't have this cortical brain, this conscious cognitive brain that is really developed yet to make sense of their emotions. So, usually from the ages, I say, of four to six is when we're just helping them to hold space for the emotions, to express them, to be with them, to move through them.

Also doing some co-regulation, doing some expressing and expelling at the same time and modeling. And then after that, then that's where it really starts to come in, of understanding and making sense of our emotions. So yeah, you're feeling that way. You're really frustrated. I hear that. I'd be frustrated too. Let's talk about it. Right? So then you start to talk through it.

And so those are kind of the stages for early development. I'd say around the age of 12 when we start to hit puberty and a whole new level of hormones, right? That's where I think

all of those things can come into play. There's co-regulation, there's making space for emotions and expression, and there's also talking through it.

So all three of those things can be at play. And as you do that, what you find is that your kids will naturally learn how to self-regulate as well. So in those first, kind of, you know, that first big chunk of adolescence, a lot of it is co-regulation. Because you are helping them to navigate their emotional landscape.

Either through your nervous system, through helping them and guiding them on how to express how they're feeling and get it out. Or number three, making sense of it. And as you do that, you are now setting the foundation for how they now self-regulate, learn how to self-regulate on their own later on in adolescence.

Katie: Amazing. That is super helpful. And I feel like there's so much more we could go into on this. We'll have to maybe do more rounds in the future. But the last thing I wanna make sure we talk about today would be what would be your advice to moms who feel guilty about struggling with their own nervous system regulation or their own emotions?

I know mom guilt is its own big topic. But any quick advice for moms who like, that's another source of maybe stress for them, is their own guilt about their own emotions.

Brittany: Yeah. You know, so what I say is that especially when we talk about attachment styles and nervous system regulation, you know, people often will, will put labels on our styles, for instance, right? So I have a lot of clients that come to me and they're like, well, I'm just anxiously attached and that's how I will always be.

And yes, we can look at, okay, you're anxiously attached because your first however many years of life that was the attachment development or the attachment relationship that you had with your caregiver. But when it comes to nervous system development and attachment development, what we find is that our earliest experiences in childhood do set the, they set the tone and the patterns. This predictable path for how we will either be regulated or dysregulated as adults or securely attached or insecurely attached as adults.

But these are patterns that are not set in stone. They are set in place. And so when we have, if we feel like we've come from a place of, hey, you know, and I hear this a lot, there's a lot of, women who have older children in my program, they'll say, I messed my kids up. Or there's no turning back, or what did I do right?

And there's all this guilt. And I have to remind them that our brains and our nervous systems and our bodies are incredibly plastic and malleable if we have intention to change. Nothing is set in stone. It's just set in this predictable path. I also remind them too, you know, how would it have felt for you as a child to see your parents doing the kind of healing

work or regulation work that you're doing now? Right? And so for anyone listening to this podcast right now, my assumption would be is that you are in the throes of self-development, of self-healing, of regulating a nervous system that's maybe been wired for survival. And that is incredible, profound, heavy, heavy work. And so that also passed down to your kids. So just as trauma, just as dysregulation can be passed down so too can healing no matter what age in life.

Katie: I love that. Yeah. This feels like a very important and poignant reminder, and, I know you have a tremendous amount of resources available. For anybody listening who's really resonating with this and wants to go deeper on this with you, where can they find you and what, what's the best place to start?

Brittany: Yeah, so you can find me on social media at Heal With Britt, with two T's. And then you can find more information about working with me, purchasing my new book, Body First Healing, joining my program at bodyfirsthealing.com.

Katie: Amazing. Well, I feel like this has been so deeply touching and impactful, and I'm a big fan of your work. I will link to all of your programs and your social and everywhere people can find you in the show notes. I hope that we do get to do more episodes in the future. I think this is so important and the work that you do is so impactful, especially for moms. But thank you so much for your time and for all that you've shared today.

Brittany: Of course, thank you. Would love to stay connected.