# Your Body Remembers: Trauma and Becoming a Mother Transcript

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## Why our past shows up in motherhood

Our past experiences, whether they be buried in our memory from childhood or whatever, can impact our current life and especially if we're going into motherhood, whether it be trying to conceive and maybe struggling there with our fertility, struggling with pregnancy losses, or just trying to be the best parent we can be.

## This week's guest, Angel Sierpina

Our wounds can show up and can give our nervous system the signal of not being safe even if we are. And I think all of us, especially those of us who are really on top of things and high achieving could really benefit from more conversation around this of what we can really do. And this week I have Angel Serpina who's an integrated health coach and certified meditation instructor. She's also the founder of the whole mother program at Redefine Wellness and Treatment Center. And we talk about what we can actually do in our day-to-day life to help our body feel safe again and be able to process the previous trauma, all the stresses that we have, all the comparison, and be able to move forward and really have our body be in the best positioning to do all the things that we want to do. was really a beautiful conversation about how she works. And again, she really leaves some very actionable tips that you can do right now today, even while you're listening, but also as soon as you get off of the, you know, as soon as you finish listening to this, some things that you can start putting into your routine right now to start changing your body's perception of its safety and really start to move the needle on again your fertility, your hormones, or just feeling present and really calm and satisfied. as a mom. I hope you enjoy.

## Angel's postpartum story and how it led her here

Angel, thank you so much for being with me today. Thank you for inviting me. I'm really grateful to be here. Now, before we dive in, I'd love to hear a little bit more about your journey if you don't mind sharing how you came to support women in the way that you do now. I'd love to share that story. I have three grown children. They're all in late 20s, early 30s. And when they were very small, it was sometime right around the birth of our third child that I experienced some postpartum blues. And no one talked about that. I had no idea what that was. I started to feel like, oh my gosh, what's wrong with me? Am I going to be a good mother? Am I going to be able to handle three kids under the age of five? And the really the turning point for me was when I went to my family care doctor, explained what was going on and I started crying. I was doing a lot of crying in those like the first 8 days after. So I thought, you know, there's got to be a solution to this. There's probably something physically wrong with me. I had no idea. So I talked to the doctor and he said, "Well, why don't I give you a prescription for Prozac and and just take this until things smooth out." So he handed me the prescription and I walked out of the office and I sat in my car and cried for 20 minutes. I didn't feel all heard and I didn't think that a prescription was what I needed. I didn't know what I needed. But what I realized in the following weeks and months of getting some counseling and some therapy was that there was a lot of my childhood that was coming up and I was experiencing a lot of overwhelm and fear around am I going to be able to do this right now? That was a long time ago. Now I see what young mothers are going through with the constant comparison, looking at social media, Instagram, the perfect mom doing everything right.

She's back in shape. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, I thought I had it bad with no resources." But now in addition to limited resources around this, there's also this tremendous pressure that moms have about being the perfect mother. And then the the topic of getting pregnant is also really charged for moms who are trying to get pregnant and can't. And then they're seeing all of these Instagram photos of like, "Oh, I'm pregnant again." And no one really ever talks about what that journey is like and that it could be difficult and there could be some, you know, problems along the way. So that was when I decided I wanted to help mothers and I wasn't really feeling like I was fully qualified to do that. So, four years ago, I went back to school and I just graduated last December from ASU and got my degree in integrative health. And in my last semester, I was required to do an internship and I chose Redefine Wellness and Treatment.

## Finding her way into trauma informed care

And I started working there in the mental health field and traumainformed care, which I wasn't planning to go into, but I started to see and and the beautiful way that the universe works is everything started to point to this is what you want to do. This is what I was trying to help people do is learn about their nervous system and calming their nervous system. And then we also have a postpartum category there where we see moms who are in postpartum. And so it was just a natural fit. They said, "Well, why don't you bring your whole mother here and you can further develop our postpartum program." So >> yeah, >> that's so beautiful. I love when you know you can go through an experience.

It sounds like that was very hard and overwhelming >> and just >> be able to though use that for good and transer transform so many other women's lives and their experiences in motherhood and postpartum. That's so incredible and congratulations on your recent graduation.

>> Well, within a year so yeah you >> Yes. I think I think what I really realized when I saw my doctor and left their feeling unheard was that's that's where I really wanted to pour into other mothers and women is letting them know they are heard that it's not just their labs. It's not just what the doctor sees. There's a lot of other things going on inside of us.

>> I completely agree with you. Yeah. Unfortunately, that is all too common still to this day with just, you know, conventional doctors not having enough time or the right focus to really be able to support women and so many women feel completely, you know, dismissed, unheard in their experiences. So, it's incredible to have practitioners like you who can really spend the time to make them feel completely understood.

That's so that's that's a lot of where the medicine is in my opinion. >> Yes. And I I talk about that medicine a lot in in terms of our wounds, whatever's happened throughout our life.

It can either deter us from living the best possible life that we want for ourselves and our families, or we can take that and turn it into medicine for ourselves and for the people around us.

>> Yeah, it's beautiful. It's really like a a shift in perspective, right? Is it destroy me and just tear me down or is this going to, you know, >> give me that fire to to create a new normal for other people? I love that >> with that. You know, you mentioned some of the comparison and overwhelm that comes up, you know, with being a mom, with just being a woman nowadays.

## What unresolved trauma tells your nervous system

And and then you also mentioned sort of some of those wounds. Maybe to start, how do those things play into our nervous system? like what what is that doing to our nervous system and you know what is the message that our body's getting?

>> So constant stress or unresolved traumas and traumas can be either little tea traumas or big tea traumas. So whatever happens in your life that you don't fully digest or process, it stays in your body and it kind of becomes a signal to your nervous system that I'm not safe. And so when I look at a woman or we sit down and we talk about things, that's usually the first thing that I'm kind of looking for is to see like how does she even present in her body?

## How to tell real danger from a triggered nervous system

Is it kind of a tight feeling of like I'm not safe here? when we're in a situation, we can tell ourselves, I'm feeling activated, but I know that I am safe.

You know, and that's part of the work that we do there is helping them differentiate between when they're actually unsafe or when their nervous system is just feeling unsafe.

## Big T trauma vs little T trauma

I love that that you differentiate between I can be big trauma. I like the big T or little T trauma because that's one thing that I I notice when talking with people. They're like, well, I didn't have anything major. I didn't have anything major. And it's like we're always comparing to someone else like, well, I didn't have to go through a war or something like that with any like worst case scenario. It's almost like a little bit of I don't know, like minimizing our own experience a little bit of, oh, well, I didn't go through something. People go through worse.

Right. You know, I like how you mentioned it's just something that's unresolved. So, it could be something so small that like >> we thought we were being abandoned and we weren't or something that just been there and wasn't processed ever and then we're now we're afraid of abandonment or whatever it may be. So, that's that's such a beautiful example I think for women to be able to kind of open up their mind to what could be present for them. what could be present and also to your point not dismissing things that bring up a feeling in us. So all of our emotions carry information and so whether it was a little tea trauma like you know it it could even be something like being in a car accident you know is a trauma for someone or being having a medical procedure that was very scary.

All of these things count. So on the spectrum of traumas, yes, you could say there are these big T traumas like being abused as a child, but it doesn't discount that all of those traumas make a difference in our nervous system and really not dismiss anything. And it's not even about reliving a trauma to heal it. It's really about just starting to gently look at the things in our life that are still there that we never fully digested. We never fully process those things. And particularly with motherhood, there's so many wounds around motherhood. You might have heard of like the mother wound. So things that our mothers did or said with us and how we take that into our own motherhood.

## Fear and shame around fertility and miscarriage

So, I'm curious in your practice, you're working with women who are having fertility challenges. Do you ever hear much about fear or shame around miscarriages or fear or shame around whether or not they'll be a good mother?

You know, yes. And I think the impression that I get is that people that's not the on the forefront of their mind. >> But when I ask about it, especially if I ask that specifically, then then they'll sort of admit that, oh yeah, well, you know, I didn't really have a great role model or my mom wasn't the best and I'm changing that. Like they they may feel like they've processed and healed a lot of that, but it's still walking into this unknown of now they're going to be in the role of mother or parent. And you know, it's a big mystery of how am I going to be able to handle that? So, absolutely. And especially with pregnancy loss, too. I mean, even for someone who maybe wasn't afraid before it happened, once someone has a pregnancy loss, >> Yeah.

>> every single couple that I've ever talked to who's had a pregnancy loss, even if it was something, you know, oh, we weren't even trying and it happened, they're still afraid it's going to happen again.

## Why pregnancy loss carries so much hidden grief

>> Yes. >> So, it's there is definitely a lot of fear there >> and that itself is a very real trauma. Yeah. >> The interesting thing about miscarriage or or having a difficult time getting pregnant is that people don't really talk about it. They and again this probably comes to the comparison thing where they don't want to say what's going on because are they going to be judged as you know oh you're not able to get pregnant and then after miscarriage it's there's so much ambiguous grief because nobody acknowledges it really you know someone dies in your family you have a funeral or you have a celebration of life it's not something that you just brush over. But with miscarriage, it's every bit as much a huge loss, but it's not talked about. Right. Absolutely. And I, you know, I think it's it's good more and more people are talking about it and there are support groups and things like that, but still often times with the people that someone's closest with, they're they don't want to talk about it with their mom and dad because they're pushing them to have kids or something like there's there's all this, >> you know, conflicting feelings. And so, yeah, often times women or couples are going through it alone. And with pregnancy loss, you know, oftentimes

they haven't even told anyone yet, so they don't tell them after. And I'll have people ask me too, you know, once they do get pregnant finally and it's staying around like that, you know, the pregnancy is going really well.

Sometimes they'll ask me, well, should I tell people or not?

## Should you tell people you're pregnant again after a loss

And I'm always like, I mean, it has to be what you're comfortable with, but just think about this. I was like, do you want those people to be on your side and supporting you no matter what happens, >> or do you not want the pressure? like what is it going to be for your experience and so that you know you know there's there can be beauty in sharing it and also sharing the loss even if it is it means they're also disappointing those people around them they also get the support to not have to go through it alone >> yes >> that's an excellent point and I think you do have to selectively choose who you're going to share those kinds of things with because when you go through any kind of trauma One of the things that's very beneficial is being able to have another human being witness your grief, witness your loss.

## The power of

But that's a very specific kind of person, right? Like you said, someone that you know, you can completely trust that loves you just the way you are, that isn't going to try to fix anything.

They're just witnessing the loss and the grief. >> Yeah, that's beautiful. And you mentioned too, you know, like moving things through our body, experiencing the grief. I mean, you point to one piece of it, too, of just letting someone witness that experience with you. I feel like that alone just helps move it through and help you process it.

>> But what you know, how what does that look like for a lot of people? How can they if they are identifying okay I have some you know some stuff some baggage that is maybe affecting me currently and making me feel unsafe what do they do from there so first of all having a trusted person is really important and I have one very close friend who also happens to be a first cousin and we call each other our confessors because whenever I have something that I feel is even the slightest bit like, "Oh, I'm so ashamed that I even thought this about this person or or I did this or whatever it is." To be able to verbalize that, have her witness it and not judge me. That's very powerful. And it works for grief, it works for shame, it works for trauma.

The other thing that you can do is a somatic work just means working with the body. So, therapeutic touch is something that I practice where I work. And it's done fully clothed and usually light music if if the client can tolerate that.

And we just start at the head and move our way down. And it's just very light but very intentional and intuitive touch. So, a lot of times clients report to me that, "Oh my gosh, when you put your hands on my chest like this, I started to shake." So, you don't need to identify what the emotion is that you're releasing, but the body will give you signs that it is releasing. So, that therapeutic touch, I think, is really important. And it's a little bit different than traditional massage therapy. You need a practitioner who is very keyed into that sort of energetic work with with trauma and what the body's holding. So that's a good way if you don't have access to therapeutic touch. I love just doing this for myself. Like a couple times a day, I put my hands on my heart like this and I close my eyes and I just ask myself, "What am I feeling right now?" And we do this five or 10 times a day at Redefine Wellness Center. And people sometimes get annoyed with it. We'll be like, "Let's do a feeling check-in. How are you feeling?" They're like, "We did this this morning. We've done this five times." But the reason that we encourage people to do this throughout the day is you could be feeling one way in the morning. You could wake up feeling really great and by 10:00 something has happened. There's been an interaction. Somebody said something to you. Maybe you had a tense moment with your partner.

And so the internal landscape is already changing. And now your nervous system recognizes that as a threat. So now you're in fight or flight and you take that into the next moment. So just checking in with yourself, you know, hands over the heart. If you're in a place where you you feel like you can't do that, maybe you're in the work environment, you can simply bring your attention to your breath and just notice, I'm breathing in and I know that I

am here and I am safe in this moment and I'm breathing out any worry or anxiety about my future. That's a real simple quick thing you can do.

A lot of times when I drive, I have a a 30 minute commute to work. So driving is kind of in a good and bad way my think tank. So if I'm getting into ruminating thoughts about the past or the future, then I just do that quick breath check in and just tell myself, I'm here right now in this moment and I am safe. And then I just notice I'm breathing in, I'm breathing out. And when you bring your awareness to your breath, you really can't be thinking about other other things, you know?

>> It's meditative practice, too. >> Yeah. Oh, that's so wonderful. I feel like those are really such like attainable tips that you know that you can just really do in any setting, any time of day. And it sounds like maybe the more the better even to do those to really see how am I feeling. It is really amazing to me. You know, I >> wasn't always aware that I am now >> and and so it's very like very fresh in my mind to know how I'd go through the day very blindly to not knowing how I was feeling and what things were making me feel. And you just it's like reactive reactive reactive to everything.

>> Yeah. And now I'm being more intentional and more aware. And it really is fascinating to be able to see it in real time of like, oh wow, that tiny interaction that that email I got somehow sort of triggered me a little bit, but then you're able to just catch it so much more quickly then to say, "Oh, but wait, it just it's triggering that one little thing. Oh, that's silly. Okay." And then just move on rather than have it really have this domino effect throughout your entire day. So that is really powerful.

>> Yes. And especially when you're busy, like in your practice, I can imagine there's not a lot of time between seeing patients. And so that checkin is really important because you're giving it kind of a placeholder. Even if you don't have time to fully deal with what the email brought up for you, you're giving it a placeholder. You're saying, "I'm here.

I'm feeling this. I don't have time to dive into it right now, but I will get to that later today or whenever in the evening. And then that lets your your nervous system know, oh, okay, we're good. And then you walk into your next meeting or your next patient or your next interaction with your kids free of that. So, you're not piling it up as the day goes on.

>> Yeah, I love that. And I I think it's again it feels maybe more attainable to me than you know the typical thought about therapy or something like talk therapy.

You know the impression that I get. I think a lot of people have the feeling of oh trauma like you mentioned earlier you have to think about it and process it and relive it and it feels like such heavy work. And I like the fact that with this kind of more sematic approach it's like you don't have to understand it. You don't necessarily have to figure it out. you can just let it go. I think that's very free probably to a lot of people. And I guess a question on that of like where how do those two things play into it? You know, especially from, you know, dealing with trauma and maybe some more, you know, big trauma or little trauma in processing it. Can we get away with just processing it sematically or is there a place for sort of both and working handinhand with those?

>> Yes, there is definitely a place for both things. Our practice is very integrative. So as I I mentioned in our our brief little chat at the beginning, we do have a clinical psychologist. We have a psychiatric nurse practitioner who handle the medication and prescribing if that's necessary. We also have talk therapy with our licensed therapists. So we have close to 40 different modalities, but that's definitely part of it. We don't see it as you can just come and do sematic work. It's it's kind of a a blend of a lot of things.

>> That's great. And I feel like that, you know, I I think of things as a spiral like is a negative spiral again like going through our day and it's everything's compounding or is it a positive spiral of you know I imagine those things then just impact the other so beautifully and really help you know if you can stay grounded and safe feeling in therapy and be able to talk through something gain some tools. Okay.

Okay. Then you go into the next scenario with tools and regulation like you know what a beautiful ripple effect that that has then. Yes, that's exactly that's exactly what we do because most of our clients are there minimum half the

day.

Some of them are there the full day. So they start at 8:30 in the morning and we have meditation and we have yoga and we have somatic therapeutic touch and and then they have their group sessions and a session with a counselor or a therapist. So it is a beautiful way each thing builds on the other and each thing also you know just helps the other piece work that much better.

>> Amazing. I want to touch on generational trauma and sort of that idea of, you know, how does how do you see that at play especially with mothers? >> I do. I see that at play with women who are actively being mothers and also with women who have had miscarriages and haven't been able to conceive. Yeah.

Well, you know, from my standpoint with all the medical background and seeing the physical piece of it, I do of course there are other barriers at play, but to me it's really interesting because the more we learn about the ovaries in particular and our hormone production, the more we realize that it's so tied into our nervous system >> and our body's perception of >> and so it is very interesting to me. I do think that there's a physical energetic connection there and I I I really believe you know if we have such a deep feeling that is like so ingrained in us that it's truth you know it might not actually be truth but it becomes a truth to us like to her that you know that client that you mentioned I'm I'm not worthy I'm not going to be a good mom I'm not lovable whatever the story is >> right so ingrained then our body can follow along and be like well we're not meant to do this we're not going to be good at this. So, it's almost like, you know, all of our cells are getting this message from our brain, even if it's not true. And so, I do I, you know, again, the more that I, you know, look at all the research and everything, I think the more we we don't really see the whole picture. And I think that that is a big driver for a lot of things. I I love that you actually are thinking about all of that when you're helping somebody on their fertility journey because gosh, you're your patients are so lucky. You know, I don't know how many doctors are doing that.

I think it's again, it's just so important to me. You know, I have the the ability to look at the big picture in in functional medicine. We're able to zoom out. We're able to spend a lot of time And it's it's a piece of it for sure. And again, you know, I I've seen it again and again too where we have some, you know, past trauma or sort of the type A personality I see a lot where someone a woman's trying to do it all perfectly and and that's where it becomes a really tough point. She's really trying to get pregnant and do it all right, but then it's also just she's kind of working against herself and she's so stressed out. So yeah, it's it's definitely a piece of it for sure.

>> Yes. And that particular situation when a woman is trying to do it perfectly, what I've found in in my experience is that usually comes back to a childhood belief that I'm not enough. So the way that we become enough is we're continually trying to do everything perfectly because the messaging that we received or our interpretation of it was that we were not enough.

>> So Oh, go ahead. >> I was going to ask, are there are there ways that this shows up outside of, you know, when someone before someone already has recurrent miscarriages or something like that? Are are there also kind of warning signs that you see in you know the clients that you work with?

Something where you'd say okay this is a sign that you're you know you're in fight or flight you have some past stories. I think that if you want to call it type A personalities or let's call it um person who really strives for perfection in everything they do. I see them having a much more difficult time because even if they successfully get pregnant then every step of the way they are maybe in my opinion over researching everything. And so everything becomes this this ideal like there's only one perfect way to do this. And as we know in pregnancy, a lot of different things can happen and for sure in motherhood.

So just because somebody gives you this picture perfect template on Instagram and says this is the way a good mother does it or this is the way a perfect pregnancy goes. It's not reality.

So I do think that people who have that not enough story or living in that idea of perfectionism in everything they do, it's going to be hard. So that would be I mean that might be a place where you you would notice if someone is asking you a lot of questions and you kind of know the type right when they want to know exactly how to do it exactly right and that that could lead to disappointment.

>> Yeah. Yeah. And it's not that you know just so everyone knows type A people are great. Oh, >> right. I am one tend to be same. And these are the people too. I mean these are a lot of the women that I come to have come to see me as well because they're also very high functioning.

They're very successful. They do really incredible things in the world. Yeah. >> But then they're also just kind of burning the candle on both ends, so to speak, a lot of the time and they're getting burned out and they're having these types of issues. So, it's it's definitely a double-edged sword in my mind.

>> Yeah. And I think to your point, those personality types are really high producers, too. And with that high production, usually we see that there's very little time for rest, for true rest. So, another great tool that we can give your listeners is just a 10minute meditation every day. You can do it any time of the day, but typically in the morning is what I like to recommend because it sets a nice tone for the rest of your day. And it's a way to check in with yourself. Meditation to me is quieting the mind and and listening to source for how I want to move through my day. And in most of our lives, we're we're thinking beings. So we have thousands of thoughts a day and typically we have a thought and we have this tiny little space before the next thought and the next thought and 90% of our thoughts are recycled. So we're thinking about things that happened last year, last week.

We're ruminating about the future, but there's no room or space for new thoughts. So in meditation, we're just creating a pause, a longer gap between this thought and the next thought. And one of the easiest ways that you can do that is bringing your awareness to your breath. So that breath, that beautiful life-giving breath that animates everything we do, that's the quickest, easiest tool to bring us back into regulation to meditate with. So that's that's another easy one, I think.

>> Amazing. Just getting into the present and turning the thinking with all that. >> Yes. And you know, it's hard to turn it off. So when you bring your awareness to your breath, then that's what you're on and you you really can't think about anything else. And then of course the thoughts continue to come and you just notice them without any judgment and return your attention to your breath.

Amazing. That's so beautiful. And again, so simple. I think that's amazing to just like give busy women and moms something they can just do anytime, you know, maybe before bed having little Yes. And you can even do that when you're driving to work with your eyes open, of course, but just bringing your attention to your breath and and doing a round of 10 breaths while you're driving.

>> Yeah. Beautiful. Well, I appreciate you sharing this incredible insight and these actionable tips where again I think it's so important where we can just, you know, not just get information and more and more information because there's overload of that nowadays being able to take something away from it and really start to change >> right now today, you know, start with this is so powerful >> right in this present moment.

>> Well, thank you again, Angel, for being here today. Where can people find you? >> Thank you so much for having me. This has been a real joy for me to be able to share and get to know more about what you do. They can find me on Instagram, Whole Mother Angel, and also at Redefine WT, Redefine Wellness and Treatment.

Incredible. Well, thank you so much. >> Thank you. I hope you have a beautiful day. And when we end our little chat here, take a minute to check in and see how you're feeling.