



Episode 22: Somatosensory Foundations of The Self

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder



LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

This one goes to the heart of why touch matters, not just for babies and attachment, but for the whole of a life. We follow the somatosensory system from the felt sense of safety in our own skin, to empathy and belonging, to the careful, consent-led work of meeting a child's need for touch without ever crossing a line. It is warm, a little wide-ranging, and it lands somewhere important: boundaries themselves come from the body. We start this one already mid-thought, with Tracy marvelling at how deeply the somatosensory system is wired into our sense of self. From there it opens out: the research on somatosensory amplification when early attachment is shaky, the way a soothing relationship teaches a baby's body to trust its own signals, and the reminder, via a paper that calls infant body maps a brand new area of study, that Jean Ayres was decades ahead. We talk about empathy and belonging as somatosensory acts, about relationships robust enough to carry across distance and time, and about the fine clinical line between not forcing a child and not abandoning them either. There are ball pits and penguin eggs and the small, deliberate moments of shared touch that change how a child shows up. And we sit, honestly, with the hardest part: how to meet a teenager's real need for connection through touch while holding every boundary that keeps everyone safe.



Resources & Mentions

- Somatosensory amplification when attachment is shaky, when early relationships do not reliably soothe, the system can start over-signalling, feeling every sensation as a negative.
- Attachment teaches the body to trust its signals, Tracy connects the synchrony of interoception, physiology and touch to lifelong regulation and what happens when it is missing.
- Empathy and belonging as somatosensory acts, we take on and feel the experience of the other, remapping it in our own bodies.



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

- 1** We make the case that boundaries themselves come from the body. How does that land for you, and where do you notice your own felt sense of safety shaping the boundaries you hold in sessions?

- 2** Think of a child whose system seems to read every sensation as a negative. How might somatosensory amplification, rather than wilful resistance, be at play, and what would that change?

- 3** We describe the fine line between not forcing a child and not abandoning them either. Recall a moment you sat on that line. What helped you stay alongside a child without pushing or withdrawing?

- 4** Kids who do not feel they belong often are not using the shared somatosensory experience. For a child who seems on the outside of the group, how could you build belonging through shared, body-based moments?

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We sit with the hardest part: meeting an older child or teenager's real need for connection through touch while holding every boundary. How do you navigate that consent-led work safely in your own practice?
