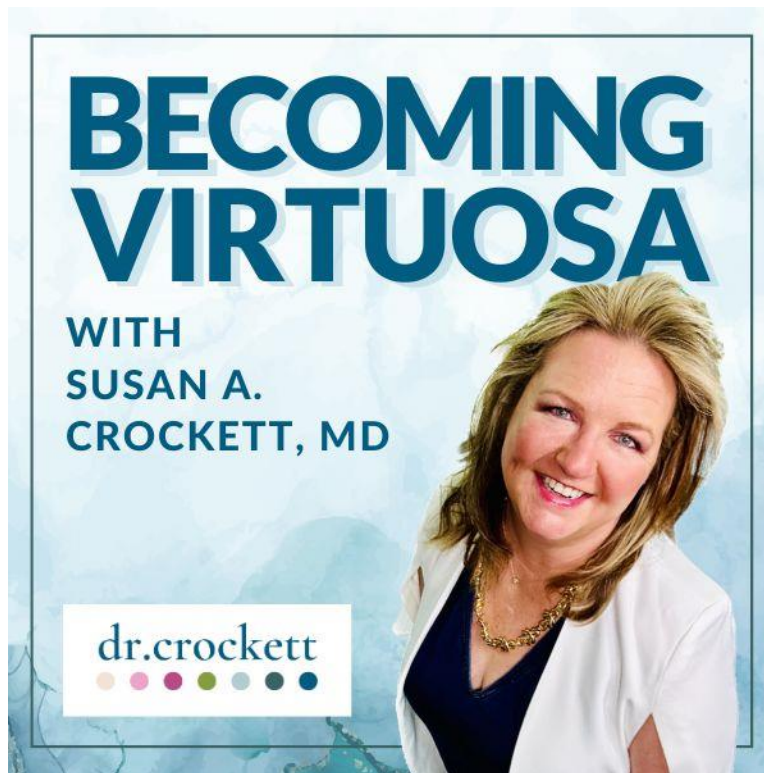


Ep #112: The Science of Connection: Attunement, Addiction, and Attachment with Brittney Lollis Tolar



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susan A. Crockett, MD

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Dr. Crockett: In our theology, prayer is the asking or the petitioning or the talking to God, and meditation is what I teach as what we do when we listen to God.

Brittney: Absolutely. It's beautiful. The Bible even tells us to meditate on the word.

Dr. Crockett: It does.

Brittney: It tells us to meditate on the word right.

Dr. Crockett: Welcome to *Becoming Virtuosa* the podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Susan Crockett, you're listening to episode number 60 Addiction, Attachment, and Attunement. The first interview with licensed clinical social worker and therapist Brittney Tolar that we did last week was so great that we just kept going and decided to turn it into a bonus second interview for you all. Hope you enjoy it.

Welcome to *Becoming Virtuosa*, the podcast that encourages you to become your best virtuosa self. Each week Dr. Susan Crockett goes where the scalpel can't reach, exploring conversations about how to be, heal, love, give, grow, pray, and attune. For the first time ever, she's bringing the personal one on one teaching that she shares with individual patients to you on this broader platform. A weekly source of inspiration and encouragement designed to empower you.

By evolving ourselves as individuals. We influence and transform the world around us. Please help me welcome board certified OB-GYN specializing in minimally invasive GYN surgery, internationally in the top 1% of all GYN robotic surgeons, a certified life coach, and US News top doctor, your host Susan A. Crockett, MD.

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Dr. Crockett: I have an amazing guest back again today, the amazing Brittney Tolar who is a licensed clinical social worker. Brittney, welcome back.

Brittney: Oh, thank you for having me.

Dr. Crockett: You're welcome. So those of you that are just tuning in, please go back and look at our first interview that was on addiction. We had a whole conversation, lots of storytelling, great interview. We talked a little bit about dopamine.

So we're going to pick up where we left off on that interview. We're gonna start with how dopamine and addiction affect our lives. We're gonna talk a wee bit more into attachment and attunement, which is my favorite topic, and one I haven't gotten to talk about yet. Right?

Brittney: Right.

Dr. Crockett: So I know Brittney because of her husband, her adorable husband, Nick. They're an adorable couple. He helped build the studio, and we're gonna show that one of these days. But one of the things y'all might be asking about is these colors. We've talked about the colors being our curriculum. Be, heal, love, give, grow, pray, and attune. The first talk that we did was be which is about self-care. This one today is the first show that we are doing about attunement.

So I'm not going to give it away all at friends you can listen in, we'll get to it. But this is all about the relationships and how we interact with each other. I think this is a really important conversation for us to have today. I think it's interesting how we're getting here from addiction and dopamine to how we are in the world and with each other.

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So we were talking about dopamine and how dopamine is kind of our pleasure, joy, contentment kind of thing. One of the things that I have seen in addictions, whether it's addictions of substances or alcohol or, like you mentioned previously, sexual addiction, pornography. It can be anything that we do call buffering, which is distracting from our normal day. It can even be something that seems good on the surface like working, work addiction, or exercise addiction. So anything that's causing us to not be able to live in the moment.

One of the things that I was really impressed upon recently was about how when we're buffering or doing those things are turning to our addictions, a lot of the time in our society, it's because we are not able to sit with being bored. We have a discontentment with boredom. So I want to give you a chance to kind of talk a little bit about dopamine and that whole thing and how that plays out.

Brittney: I mean, boredom is such an activator. Earlier we were talking about triggers and activators, right? Things that activate the need to use, and boredom is a huge one. So in addiction treatment, we use the acronym of HALT. Hungry, angry, lonely, tired.

Dr. Crockett: Oh wait.

Brittney: Sorry, they always come out.

Dr. Crockett: There's my Instagram for the show. Okay, H-A-L-T, H-A-L-T. Hunger, anger, lonely, and tired.

Brittney: So when people are new to recovery, and when I say recovery, I'm not just talking about recovery from addiction treatment. I'm talking about recovery from work burnout, recovery from toxic relationships, recovery from trauma, right. So when we're trying to recover, and we're trying to get those dopamine receptors back online, we have to be aware of

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things that activate the need to numb or the need to escape. Right? So some of the things that we kind of highlight is hunger. Right? Are you feeding your body?

Dr. Crockett: Like, do you really want that glass of wine when you get home from work? Or are you really hungry or thirsty, and how you figure that out?

Brittney: Yeah. It's simple as like have I eaten today? Have I eaten something that's actually nourishing to my body, or am I just feeding it crap? Like, what does my body need? Right, kind of going back to what we talked about in the last episode with our check in. Like, what's my body doing? Angry? What's my mood? Right? Am I hangry, which is a combination. The loneliness can come with the boredom. I think that ties right into it.

Am I tired? Right? Do I need a nap? Do I need spiritual rest? Do I need mental rest or emotional rest? Like, what does that tiredness mean? What does that look like? Then boredom. Like, if my hands aren't doing something.

Dr. Crockett: If I'm not scrolling or interacting or getting a hit from my Instagram posts or whatever, yeah, can I just sit? That's a lost skill. I think it's coming back. I think there's so much more conversation about meditation and mindfulness and becoming able to sit and be still. That's been a game changer for me. A lot of times, I get patients who are confused about what meditation is. They think it's something woo-woo or against their religion or something. Really, it's just being able to still your mind and listen.

My background happens to be Christian. We're non-denominational, non like, we love everybody on the show. Everybody's welcome. My patient population is Christian. A lot of times, they are hesitant to embrace a

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philosophy that they see is being typically more Buddhist or Eastern religion, such as meditation.

One of the things that I talked with them about is that a lot of times in our theology, prayer is the asking or the petitioning or the talking to God. Meditation is what I teach as what we do when we listen to God.

Brittney: Absolutely. That's beautiful. The Bible even tells us to meditate on the Word.

Dr. Crockett: It does, doesn't it.

Brittney: It does. It tells us to meditate on the Word, right. So one of the most simplest definitions that I've come across when teaching mindfulness, I actually got it from Brené Brown, which is it's simply paying attention. So when we're being mindful, we're just simply paying attention.

Dr. Crockett: To what's here.

Brittney: To what's here, what's right in front of us, this present moment. Who am I? What am I? Where am I? How do I feel in this present moment?

Dr. Crockett: Oh, my gosh, you just gave me such joy. You know, I'm sitting here having this conversation with you. I'm thinking about other things like the camera what am I going to say next? Like, oh, this is great conversation. All of a sudden, you said that I'm like oh, this is like a great moment. Like, I want to take a snapshot and remember this. That's really cool. Give me a little jolt of joy.

I think the other thing that has come from me practicing meditation besides just being able to still my brain which has helped with my stress and being able to handle everything. The other thing is that it's the place at which ideas and creativity come in. So, for me, if I'm not able to sit there and still

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my brain, it inhibits my ability to think of what am I going to teach next? Or what do I want to create next? What do I want to do? So that's the be, heal love, give, grow. That give grow is the create. All right, oh, this is cool.

Okay, wait, I got lost. Where are we going with this? Okay, dopamine, and addiction. So where do we go to, how does that dovetail with attachment and attunement? Because I told y'all that attunement is something that I love talking about, but I want to give you a chance to talk a little bit about the relationship between addiction and attachment.

Brittney: A lot of the clients that I have worked with over the past couple years, whether they were in active addiction, whether they were coming out of bad relationships. We somehow get to this conversation about attachment. So when I teach attachment, I try to teach it in a very simplistic way. So we have two types of attachment, either secure or insecure.

Dr. Crockett: That's easy. Can't get more basic than that.

Brittney: We either feel securely attached to a place to belong or we don't. When we find ourselves on that insecure attachment side, that's when we have to fill that void with something.

Dr. Crockett: Oh, there's a bullet point. When we're not attuned, we're not attached right.

Brittney: We're not attached. We're not securely attached and have a place to belong. We will search for that, and we will fill that void.

Dr. Crockett: Okay, so I just had a thought. So I'm going to talk about my philosophy on attunement right now. Okay, so when I teach these things, I teach the first six dots are all things that we do internally and that we're taking care of ourselves. The last one is how we relate with relationship. So

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that may be interpersonal relationships like this. It may be my relationship to a sound I hear, sound wave in the world.

Or this is ironic. We're filming this today during an eclipse. Right? It's this the lunar eclipse. So there's that whole idea about everything is energy in our solar system, and everything influences everything else. I can't tell you how I'm feeling any specific way from an eclipse. But attunement is also an internal attunement.

So when we talk about attuning our brain, what I mean by that is I'm trying to align what I want to do with what I'm doing. That's the split brain, and we learn in life coaching to be the watcher of your brain and like watching the thought stream that's going on and being this other self-watching that and then making the decision.

So when we're self-attuned, that's an attunement between what we're doing and what we want to be doing. I think when you talk about people being out of alignment are out of attunement, it doesn't necessarily have to be an external thing like a broken relationship or trigger from an outside trigger. It can just be that knowledge that we're sitting there not attuned to ourselves, right? Like we're not doing in living the way we want to be living for whatever reason.

Brittney: You got me so excited. So I want to kind of give you some information and then highlight. So there's five primary components to secure attachment. So the first one is protection, a felt sense of safety. Number two is attunement, feeling seen and known. Number three is soothing and reassurance. Four is express delight, and five is support for your best self. So unconditional support.

So I want to go back to number two, which is the attunement piece and why this is so important. So in early development, babies aren't able to do for themselves, right? They cry, and they need to be taken care of. So from

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before we have language, before we're able to speak words, we have attunement.

Dr. Crockett: To the mother's eyes and the facial expressions. Like babies know that first, and they learned super quick.

Brittney: They learn it super quick. So that then begins to tell us the story that we know about ourselves and about other people. The first attunement that we have is to our caretakers, our protectors, and then that gives us a sense of attunement to self. Because when we start trusting outside of us, then we learn the trust internally. When that's broken early.

Dr. Crockett: Oh, that makes so much sense.

Brittney: Right? When that's broken early, we're either searching for it outside of us. We don't know how to develop it within us because no one ever taught us. So here we are developing all of these insecure attachment feeling insecure about ourselves, not seen, not known, not protected, not delighted in our best self and unconditional support. Right?

Dr. Crockett: Right. Wow, that makes so much sense. That's great. Then you go seeking it from whatever gets you that dopamine hit because the alignment's not there.

Brittney: Absolutely.

Dr. Crockett: Cool. There's the show. I'm just kidding. We have a little bit more to talk about. So go over the five things again. Tell me the five types of attachment.

Brittney: So the first one is protection. Attunement is number two. Soothing and reassurance. Okay, is number three. So soothing our emotions, having a reassurance that things are going to be okay.

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Dr. Crockett: Being able to do that to ourselves.

Brittney: And in our relationships. Express delight. So one thing that was really exciting whenever I opened the door. I knocked to come in today, and you opened the door. You had this huge mound of face, and you're like oh, my goodness. Hi, Brittney. That does something chemically to us.

Dr. Crockett: Oh, wow. Yeah, I was delighted to see you.

Brittney: You were delighted to see me. I'm delighted to be here. In that delight, we were able to connect.

Dr. Crockett: Yeah in that instant.

Brittney: In that instant. That made us feel more secure with each other, made us feel more secure within ourselves.

Dr. Crockett: That's how we ended up here a few hours later having this kind of depth of conversation.

Brittney: Absolutely.

Dr. Crockett: Yeah, that's a cool modeling, isn't it?

Brittney: Yeah. Then the last thing is the unconditional support.

Dr. Crockett: This is really important one. You're in a really awesome marriage. Y'all are adorable. I know your husband, Nick, is great. So there's something to that within relationship between people and specifically in marriage, but that also translates to like the job and the employees, the people we work with, ourselves. So I'm single. So how does that apply to all of the viewers that I have that are single.

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Brittney: So you have relationships outside of romantic relationships. We have like a tribe. Having your tribe, having your girls. This is a ritual. This is your tribe, right. This is the support, the unconditional support that you get from the people that work with you, from the people that listen and call in and say hey, this has changed my life. That keeps you attuned and feeling secure in what you're doing.

You feel attached. You feel attuned to your guests. You feel attuned to your audience, right? Then that helps build that self-esteem, that self-confidence, all the things that you need to continue to do more of what you're doing. It's an endless cycle.

Dr. Crockett: It's a trust cycle.

Brittney: Absolutely.

Dr. Crockett: So I think that is just hitting at a core spot with the philosophy. I mean, learning how to do this. So I know a lot of y'all don't know me. A lot of you do because you've been my patients and supporters for a minute. But for those of you that don't know me, like this is not my natural state. This is not my comfort zone.

In fact, when I started doing the podcast in 2020, the very first podcast if you go back and listen to it, it's about how to transform to becoming like the next step that you want to be. So we call the podcast *Becoming Virtuosa*, the best version, feminine version of yourself. But it was really like y'all, I'm putting myself out there. This is scary.

Then the same thing happened with starting to develop this format and this show. The reason for doing this whole thing isn't like oh, I want to go be famous on YouTube. Right? It really sprung out of a desire to be able to share meaningful information with a wider audience than just you and I sitting and talking.

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I think that the authenticity of service and the desire to help other people is part of that cycle. So I'm just riffing here. I'm just y'all, we had not talked about this ahead of time. But how does that kind of, how does that play into the marriage relationship or the attachment thing?

How is it different if somebody is coming into it with a genuine openness and transparency and availability and sincere desire versus somebody that's coming into it like for themselves or for ulterior motives? Like, they want something from the other person, whether it's money or stature or to be married or a name or whatever? Can you talk with me about that? How does that work itself out? Does that play into addiction theory at all?

Brittney: How does that play into attachment or attunement? Both?

Dr. Crockett: Yeah.

Brittney: I guess we're kind of talking about it together. When we are broken, when we have insecure attachment. So since we talked about secure attachment, may I touch on insecure?

Dr. Crockett: Yeah.

Brittney: So insecure attachment shows up a couple of different ways. So one is anxious preoccupied. We become very preoccupied and anxious about the relationships and the attachment. So this can show up in romantic relationships. This can show up in friendships too. The friend that's always super attached, very clinging and things like that. That's showing that insecurity. I don't feel good enough, worthy enough to be in this attachment in this relationship.

Dr. Crockett: Okay.

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Brittney: We have dismissive, which is like I'm not trying to be with nobody. I'm not trying to have a relationship. I'm a single strong, independent woman. Like I can do it on my own, right? Then we have disorganized, which kind of like a combination of the two. I don't want to get in relationships, but once I do get in relationships, I'm just overly attached. Right?

When those are our primary ways to attach to people, so they're disingenuous. I need you to fill me up. I need you to complete me, right. What ends up happening is we express what we call protest behaviors, right?

Dr. Crockett: That's a phrase for me. Protest behaviors.

Brittney: All right, I don't feel attuned. I don't feel heard. I don't feel seen. So what do we do when our needs aren't getting met?

Dr. Crockett: We act out.

Brittney: We act out. Right? So when you have someone that's coming into a relationship, and they're already bringing in insecure attachment, then a lot of times you'll just see a lot of the protest behaviors. The jealousy, the insecurity, all of those things. So, to work through that, and we all come with our own baggage, right? Like I'm not coming from a high horse.

Dr. Crockett: We all have some of these behaviors some of the time.

Brittney: Absolutely. But we're walking in our authenticity. We're intentional about building the secure attachment for ourselves and for the other person, right? I want to be attuned to my partner, right? I want to be attuned so when he walks in, and he's had a bad day because he went to Sue's and she had a whole laundry list.

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Dr. Crockett: Plant some cactuses on the roof I'm going to ask him to plant next to the other happy cactuses.

Brittney: Exactly. I can be attuned to that because I want to know his story. I want to know what's going on with him. I want to know how his body feels. I want to know what he's thinking. I want to know his emotions. I want him to do a check in with me so that we can both feel secure and attune to each other.

Dr. Crockett: Yeah, that's beautiful. I'm thinking about it in terms of my workplace. So I own my own practice. I have employees. There are times through the employment cycle where there will just be like this unrest within the staff. It'll feel very anxious. Yeah, just doesn't feel secure. Then there'll be cycles that we go through where everybody's on board, and everybody's like attuned to each other and being kind to each other.

Not that everything goes perfectly all the time, but there's just a trust and a secure attachment to each other in the workplace. A trust that you're going to show up. A trust that you're going to be kind to the patients and not throw each other under the bus. So I do think this is a broader picture than the relationship, but you just painted such a beautiful picture. It's awesome.

Brittney: The great part about that is even as an employer, you can delight in your client, or in your staff.

Dr. Crockett: I do. I do. I've got amazing staff, and it's taken a decade. But I do. I delight in them. It's really fun to have a team where you know that your patients are being taken care of, and the patients delight in it. I can't tell you how often my patients will come in, and they'll say oh my gosh. This is the most amazing practice because every single person has been kind and taking care of me. To be in that place is just fun.

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The same for a marriage. Like, it's really fun to be in a relationship where you trust that you're there for each other. You are building on that. You're both in it to win it. Yeah, that's cool.

Brittney: If I could add one more thing, kind of going back to our conversation earlier about music and being in band. Attunement is so important. We can always tell when we're out of tune. Yeah, so you asked me if I played an instrument, and I played in band in middle school. I played the French horn. So think about little hundred pound me with a big, old French horn.

Dr. Crockett: I can see that. I can totally see that.

Brittney: But before every concert, we would tune up. We would tune to each other.

Dr. Crockett: Yeah, the oboe plays the tuning. I'm an oboist. I would play the A for the orchestra, and the orchestra tunes to it, and we listen to the sound waves. It's not just the notes that you hear. When it's really out of tune, it goes, wa, wa, wa, wa, wa. Everybody's like.

Brittney: Absolutely. We can feel that in our day to day life. We can feel that in ourselves. When we're out of tune with self, we can feel that wa-wa inside. It shows up in our thoughts. It shows up in how we present. It shows in how we connect with other people.

Dr. Crockett: Wow. Wow.

Brittney: That's very tell, tell.

Dr. Crockett: It was very tell, tell. So you're speaking to my musician heart. I love that. The further I get in medicine and just doing this type of work with wellness and philosophy, the more convinced I am about that theory of

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sound and energy being what connects us all. We're all one. We're all connected. I love that you're coming in as a counselor and a scientist and affirming that with what you see within the mental health field too. So beautiful. Attunement.

Well. Thank you for coming in, doing another amazing interview Brittney. I sure do appreciate you coming on the show. I know our listeners do too. Thanks for listening. Please like and share the show. Subscribe. Tell all your friends. Maybe you have somebody that's struggling with these kinds of issues that needs to hear it we had to say.

Thanks for being part of our Virtuosa community. If there's anything we can do to help support you, give me some comments below. Tell me what you'd like to have us talk about on the show that would support you in your community and in your growth journey. Until next week, take care. See you. Bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Becoming Virtuosa*. To learn more, come visit us at DrCrockett.com, or find us on YouTube for the Dr. Crockett Show. If you found this episode helpful or think it might help someone else, please like, subscribe, and share. This is how we grow together. Thanks, and I'll see you next week. Love always, Sue.