

## Ep #9: How To Get out of Survival Mode



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

**Kelle Cobble & Nina Lynch**

## Ep #9: How To Get out of Survival Mode

Nina: Panic attacks, GI trouble, chronic pain, migraines and even dizziness can all be signs your body is in tension, that it's stuck chronically somewhere in survival mode.

Kelle: Yeah, fight, flight, freeze and fawn. The four survival states of your nervous system also block you like a linebacker from logic and reasoning, concise and confident, decision-making and creativity. Science tells us you're not showing up as your best but that's where smart driven women unintentionally spend a lot of their time.

Nina: Join us as we explore how your nervous system shows up in your daily life, how to appreciate it. And also how learning to work with it instead of against it, we call this self-regulation, isn't a luxury, but a necessity for unlocking peak performance, resilience, and true fulfillment in every aspect of your life.

Nina: Alright, let's get going. This is *Ambitious-Ish*.

Burnout? Check. Daily overwhelm? Check. Resentment rash, stress, and a complete lack of well-being? Check, check, check! You're not alone. We're your hosts, Kelle & Nina, and we are here to help you feel calm, balanced, and empowered so you can redefine success, make choices that feel authentic, and ACTUALLY enjoy the life you work so hard to create. You ready? Let's go.

Kelle: Hey, I'm Kelle.

Nina: And I'm Nina. Hey, do you follow us on Instagram yet? Come check us out. We give pretty good gram. DM us and let us know you're a podcast listener and introduce yourself. We'd love to hear from you and get to know you.

Kelle: Yeah. Let us know what you think of the show so far and what you'd like to hear more of or less of. Head on over to @kelleandninacoaching on Instagram. That's Kelle spelled with an E, K-E-L-L-E and Nina Coaching. Alright, let's dive in.

Nina: Yeah. Okay, let's dive into all things survival mode.

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Kelle: Okay, you know, survival mode, right? The smart driven women we work with know all about it. It's where we meet most of our high achieving clients.

Nina: So we touched on this in episode five when we talked about how both awareness and mindfulness are the solution to being in an activated state. We talked about how being the watcher of your thoughts and feelings creates awareness for them. And ultimately opens you up to so much more choice in your life, choice to show up the way you want to, not activated or dysregulated, with more intention. We practice awareness to be more intentional.

Kelle: And when we say activated state, you can call this many things. It's when you're reactive or dysregulated or triggered. It's when you're in literal survival mode. So we're going to explain today what exactly survival mode is so that you can be more aware when you find yourself there. And remember, awareness is the first step to changing anything.

Nina: Exactly. We've introduced you to the concept of thought work. And today we'll take a deeper dive into body work where your nervous system lives, because the two of these combined, help you create more awareness for what you're thinking and feeling, and also open you up to the choices you have available in any moment of your life.

Kelle: Yeah. We always say, where your thoughts go, your life will follow. So in coaching we help you edit your unintentional or default thoughts, thoughts you've been thinking and believing sometimes for a really long time, so you show up more empowered in your life.

Nina: And our smart driven, *Ambitious-Ish* clients, when we first meet them, their thought patterns involve so many have-tos. If you feel this way, you're not alone. We learned a long time ago that we have to do everything a certain way for everyone, always with a smile and feeling grateful and looking young and pretty doing it all.

Kelle: Oh my God. Alright. Okay, yeah, obligation after obligation. It all starts to feel overwhelming, and we inevitably shift into survival mode. We can't keep up

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with the unreasonable expectations we have for ourselves. We're doing a lot of things, but we're not really doing any of them very well.

Nina: Yeah, coaching is all about opening you up to awareness, the choices you have and living with more intention.

Kelle: We show you how to reframe what you're telling yourself is an obligation or duty into a choice that's either in alignment with or not in alignment with your values, what's most important to you. More on this, your core values are in episode seven, so go back and listen to that if you haven't caught that.

Nina: Yeah, this is all about checking in on what you're saying yes to, what you're saying no to and why. And then taking a different action in your life from that awareness. You self-regulate, get out of survival mode, and show up in an empowered way.

Kelle: Most of our clients come to us looking to create more calm and balance in their lives and this is literally the opposite of what it's like to be in survival mode.

Nina: When you schedule a consultation with us, we ask a few questions ahead of time so we can prepare for the call. And one of those questions is, "What results are you looking to create from coaching?"

Kelle: Almost all the answers to this question have something to do with more balance or more calm, more peace in our clients lives, hands down.

Nina: Yeah, hands down. So in this episode, we'll talk about how to shift from constantly going and doing and feeling overwhelmed by it all, from survival mode to living in a state of regulation and calm. And most importantly, how important, and actually foundational calm is for your health, your mental and physical well-being.

Kelle: Yeah, calm isn't a luxury. It's not something that people do who don't have to work or aren't ambitious or don't have goals, people who are lazy. It's also not something you wait to feel and do until your kids are older or until you have more time.

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Nina: The ability to create a state of calm is your superpower. It's that grace under fire skill set. It's literally using your executive functioning, that CEO part of your brain in times of crisis and shitshow, instead of your monkey survival brain, that is panicked and scared, on high alert, apprehensive and reactive.

Kelle: So let's jump in. We're going to go super basic today like we love to do when we introduce complicated topics. This is nervous system 101 and of course, we'll do a deeper dive down the road. Your nervous system exists to regulate your body like a thermostat in your home. Its only job is to keep you safe. It's designed to keep you safe. Safety is literally your nervous system's only job. So it's always scanning your body and your environment for danger to see what's safe and what's not safe.

Nina: If your brain perceives danger, it will go into survival mode. Whether it senses an actual threat like someone is going to hurt you or a perceived threat like an email from that challenging colleague, you will go into one of two survival states.

Kelle: Yeah, there are two, activation or shut down. So activation is fight or flight, shut down is freeze or fawn. So any time your nervous system perceives a threat, it'll throw your body into a dysregulated state, fight, flight, freeze or fawn. When there's no threat, it's in a state of calm. This is called rest and repair or rest and digest.

Nina: So your body is always in either one of these states, dysregulated or rest and repair, it can't be in both at the same time. So let's walk through all four survival states, the dysregulated states so you can see how these might be showing up in your life.

Kelle: Alright, so when you find yourself in the fight mode of being activated, you might feel nervous or anxious. You might have the inability to relax. You might have obsessive thoughts, your brain is overthinking, ruminating. You might have this kind of frustration and anger you'd associate with a fight or feeling combative. You might feel ragey and hostile, which, oh gosh, those are so fun. You might be really reactive, so your body feels tense in your shoulders or arms.

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I actually feel tension in my neck when I am in survival mode. For me, I have this aggressive posture, there's no way I'm going to feel calm in the next 10 minutes. And really part of feeling in fight mode, being in fight mode is this focus on unfairness and injustices kind of like victim mode.

Nina: Yeah. And you can identify some of these states as personality traits. Your go to state of survival is where your brain thinks it needs to go to keep you safe, it becomes kind of automatic over time. So I used to have a colleague who was very focused on justice and fairness. And to me it seemed like they were always tit for tatting to make sure they had equal face time with certain stakeholders and decision-makers like their colleagues had.

And I realized years later that that colleague was actually in an activated fight mode, a survival state. It's so interesting to look back on, knowing what I know now, I probably could have managed them so differently, so much more productively. It's just one of those takeaways I keep in my back pocket to this day.

Kelle: So interesting. Onto flight, when you're in flight mode, you're also in an activated state. So instead of sticking up for yourself and fighting, you go, you bail, you're out of here. So you're doing, you're jumpy. And when you're not doing, you're thinking about doing so. This is our clients, this is us and our clients. You're running through your never ending to-do list. It's hard to sit still and connect to your body because you're always busy. It's the idea that you always have more to do and there's never enough time to do it.

Nina: Yeah, this sounds like pretty much every woman I know, including myself. Our clients are not the type of women who come home after a long day and lie down on the couch. Some clients who come to us even have a hard time walking slow and relaxing for this reason, right, Kel?

Kelle: Yeah. In a yoga practice, a lot of our clients have a hard time quieting their nervous systems for yoga at first. There is just a subconscious need to move, to get things done. It's like an antsy-ness. They're allergic to sitting still. I mean, I, in much of my life have been allergic to sitting still.

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Nina: I can really relate to being jumpy. I used to startle easily when I was in a relationship with someone who was just chronically dishonest. There was a lot of trust broken in that relationship. And I didn't realize it at the time, but my nervous system was on fire and coded this human as a threat. Looking back now I realize I spent a lot of time in flight mode. I'd startle and scare really easily. I was jumpy at seemingly small alarms. And it really took me until recently when I learned to map my nervous system and become more aware of these states to realize this.

Kelle: Nina, I totally get this about you.

Nina: Oh, really?

Kelle: Yeah, when we would be on Zoom for clients in the morning and you would already be on and I'd hop on Zoom and I'd be like, "Good morning." And you'd always jump. And I'm like, "Why are you jumping? You know I'm coming. It's not like you're not expecting me."

Nina: I know, it's interesting. The jumpiness is something I'm super aware of now. It's pretty interesting.

Kelle: Alright, well, shout out to that awareness muscle you have.

Nina: Totally. Yeah. And so to recap, fight and flight modes are two ways you'll find yourself activated in a survival state when your brain perceives a threat in an environment.

Kelle: And you might also be someone who goes into freeze or fawn. We all have our go-to states of survival once we start paying attention. We tend to shift into one or two of these states more often but freeze or fawn looks like this. This is where you go into shut down.

Nina: Your brain thinks, I can't fight or outrun it so the thing that'll make me safest is to just shut down.

Kelle: Yeah, in freeze mode, you can feel disoriented, disconnected. You hide or withdraw. You disassociate from your senses. You experience feelings of

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abandonment or feeling unwanted, like you're not good enough. And you tend to numb to feel better, like overeating and oversleeping, drinking too much, watching TV. You're low energy and sort of lifeless.

Nina: I can totally get this way when I'm face to face with someone who's really angry. I used to get this way. Now I know I didn't cause their anger because in coaching we learn and understand that feelings are created by our thoughts. So that person's anger is coming from their thoughts, not me. But I used to perceive anger as dangerous, and I would just absolutely shut down and withdraw.

Kelle: Yeah. And now you can regulate and handle that. You can cope with it.

Nina: Yeah, totally.

Kelle: Alright, the last state is the fawn state. So I don't want to call this controversial, but there are differing opinions on this. fawn is considered more of a coping mechanism than an actual survival state of your nervous system. And we'll unpack more on this later. In the interest of keeping this simple today we're going to keep going, but it's really hard for me because I just want to nerd out on all this polyvagal theory, and we will get there. Nina's, holding me back right now.

Nina: Trying to keep it simple, but Kelle is just a savant when it comes to this part of the coaching and so trying to constrain in the interest of the listener.

Kelle: Fawn state. Again, given the perceived threat, your nervous system thinks it's best to shut down. And fawn is particularly interesting, we can relate to this one big time. fawn is when you give up your own needs and comply to feel safe.

Nina: This is when you people please, you're the peacemaker at your own expense. You don't really have solid boundaries, you over-apologize. You're hyper aware of other people. You walk in a room and scan everyone else's states, their moods. You're taking everyone's temperature in the room.

Kelle: I think this happens a lot with children and family members of addicts.



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Nina: Yeah, I'm learning a lot about this right now. When you grow up with a parent who's an alcoholic, for example, the child never really knows who's going to show up, friendly parent, angry parent, withdrawn parent. And they wind up growing up in sort of unstable and uncertain or taxing circumstances. And that child might learn to stay safe by just keeping the waters calm, to disrupt as little as possible so as not to set off the unpredictable addict parent. fawn or people pleasing becomes their go to survival state into adulthood.

Kelle: Just talking about that addict parent too, it's not even necessarily an addict parent, it's also a moody parent. You don't know what mood they're going to come home in. And so it's just kind of, I'm just going to tiptoe around them. So these are the four survival states of survival mode, fight, flight, freeze and fawn. And how lucky are we to have this amazing nervous system to keep us safe. But the problem is as humans, we have the ability to think about the past and think about the future.

So unlike wildlife in the woods and mountains where we live here in Utah, we can have regret about the past and worry about what's going to happen in the future. So this can put us into a chronic state of survival if we aren't aware and careful.

Nina: Yeah, think about that gorgeous moose basking in the sun. It's not thinking about what happened last year or what might happen tomorrow. It's scanning for the predators around it or resting and digesting.

Kelle: Humans can get stuck in survival mode for extended periods of time when we aren't managing our minds, when we aren't aware of the thoughts we're thinking, when we're ruminating on the past or future tripping or worrying about what might happen down the road.

Nina: Yeah. And we can start to identify personality traits that are actually us in survival mode. Like my jumpiness or that colleague's tendency to fight for time with the stakeholders or someone else's tendency to people please. Overworking can also be a sign of flight.

Kelle: So we don't rest, we don't allow ourselves time to recover, rest or restore.

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Nina: I used to totally think that rest was lazy, Kel.

Kelle: I mean totally.

Nina: Yeah, but now we understand after doing this work how important rest and digest is and how we need to prioritize it. Spending time in a calm state increases immunity, digestion, and connection because you'll have increased oxytocin.

Kelle: Yeah, I was just in Hawaii on vacation with my family. I took my computer, but I really did not use it, hardly at all. I rested and I connected with family members. I really made it intentional. It was such a gift.

Nina: Oh my God. Yeah, showing up is so key along with increased immunity and digestion and connection. You also have an increased capacity to think consciously and reasonably and on purpose. You'll have thoughts like, I'm enough. I'm safe. I'm not in danger.

Kelle: Yeah, you'll have fewer things that bother you in your environment. So a shout out to all the pillow fluffers out there. You're inspired. You're curious. You're expansive. You have more access to your intuition. You're more creative and you can think way more clearly.

Nina: Yeah, geez, Kel, when I think of rest and digest, there was a time when I was really slammed, working bell to bell. And I didn't used to have bowel movements on weekdays, on workdays, only on the weekend. Seriously, I literally was in survival mode all week with no rest and repair until the week ended. It was brutal.

Kelle: Okay. constipated for a week, come on. I think most of the women that I know have had that at least at some point, and it is just so not fun.

Nina: I think it is a statistic that women are more constipated than men generally.

Kelle: I believe it.

Nina: It's drastic.

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Kelle: Yeah. So many of our clients come to us with IBS symptoms or gut trouble or migraines or panic attacks or even chronic pain. Not always, but pretty often these symptoms come from being stuck in a chronic state of stress and survival. So the tension builds up in your body and creates the chronic pain.

Nina: This is one of the reasons why rest and repair is so key. Creating it for yourself is so important to your mental and physical and emotional health.

Kelle: Yeah. This is why it's really important to check in with your body. And we're going to talk a lot more about that, checking in, listening to your body. And there is an email coming out on that soon too, so just FYI.

Nina: Yeah, just noticing where you hold all the clench and tension and letting it go. I notice that a lot in myself.

Kelle: Okay, let's check in for a sec. Does this all sound crazy or foreign?

Nina: You're not alone if it does, nothing's gone wrong. You can start to create calm, though any time, it'll be hard at first, though. Your brain won't think it's safe. It won't want to rest because it's not in the habit of doing that.

Kelle: Your brain thinks a survival state is the thing that's going to keep you safe, but 99% of the time in today's world, it's not necessary. Our brains just go there on default and that's why we really need to learn how to manage our minds.

Nina: Yeah. So some examples of triggers our clients come to coaching with include, this is just from the past couple of weeks. You don't get the VP promotion. A co-worker tells you to eff off. There is a health diagnosis. A really tough 360 review, those 360 reviews keep popping up. The client cuts you out of the deal. The patient is belligerent and offensive. She unfriends you to your face. Your boss emails over the weekend and it makes you think you're getting fired. You accidentally copy the Time Magazine editor on the email to the client. This actually happened to me.

Kelle: Wow. Okay, that sounds fun. Not.

Nina: Manage your mind around that one.

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Kelle: Alright, your brain thinks the best thing for you to do is to go into fight, flight or freeze or fawn, but it's not true. You're not actually in life or death danger. There's no lion chasing you. You can actually survive in a more productive way when you're calm.

Nina: Now, the whole point here isn't to never get stressed out, to never shift into survival mode. No, no, no.

Kelle: No. The goal is to be able to self-regulate. So that is where your power lies. That's what we all need to practice, to notice when we're in fight, flight, freeze or fawn and to have the ability to shift out of it and into a calm state when that's appropriate.

Nina: Yeah. One of our colleagues explains this concept like a shopping cart that's out of alignment. You know what we're talking about, that cart with the wobbly wheel. You're shopping along, but the wobbly wheel keeps pulling you left when you want to go straight.

Kelle: That damn wobbly wheel.

Nina: Yeah, you're constantly self-correcting the cart as you shop your list. You're pulling the cart right when it lists left, and this is just like self-regulation.

Kelle: Your brain will always pull you left, to go into survival mode at the slightest hint of danger. It's your job to be onto yourself and self-correct, to pull right, get back into alignment so you can finish shopping or whatever you're doing.

Nina: So how about we share a few tools and strategies to help you get out of an activated state.

Kelle: Let's do it. Alright, so let's say you get an email from a client on a Saturday night while you're out for drinks with friends, and your first thought is, I'm going to lose my job.

Nina: And then you have an anxiety attack.

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Kelle: So what's happening here is your nervous system is kicking into an activated state, even though there's no imminent threat. It's an email, a screen full of words, but your brain is telling you that you're going to lose your job.

Nina: So of course you're going to shift into survival. It makes complete sense that your nervous system kicks into anxiety and panic and survival under this circumstance.

Kelle: Especially when we have big jobs, big ambitions, and big responsibilities. We're typically overwhelmed in the first place, so the smallest hint of a threat can easily throw us off balance and into a spin cycle, into survival.

Nina: Yeah, I can totally relate to being set off by the smallest alarms. So here are a few strategies to self-regulate in that moment. The first might be simply putting the phone down, stepping away and getting some fresh air.

Kelle: And can I just point out, let's not check our emails when we're out to drinks with friends.

Nina: Great call, as we evaluate next time.

Kelle: Or right before we're going to go to bed, don't do that. Don't do that to yourself.

Nina: Good call.

Kelle: Okay. So another practice is a grounding practice, so you can get out of your head and into your body. So one that we like to use is an orienting practice and we have so many practices. This is just one. So what you want to do is turn your head all the way to the right. If you're driving, please don't do this, keep your eyes on the road. And take notice of all the things that you see as you move your head to the left.

So for me, I see books, microphone, grass, trees, crystal, picture, printer, piano. Just naming things helps to bring you back into the present moment back to where you can literally feel safe, connected, and grounded. And just to get a little nerdy here, you're also flossing the vagus nerve when you move your head.

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You can move it from right to left or left to right. We'll talk more about the vagus nerve too, but I just had to throw that in there.

Nina: That practice is actually super useful for me. You all need to give it a try. It's just super doable and useful. And another strategy along those same lines might be practicing some thought work. So identifying the default unintentional thoughts in your brain that are shifting you into survival, fact checking them and then thinking on purpose. So in this circumstance, we could bring in the watcher and see that your response to the words on the screen may or may not be valid.

Kelle: Our brains automatically go to, what if everything falls apart? This all or nothing thinking or this going straight to what is the worst that can possibly happen. But there's so many other options. We'll talk more about unintentional and intentional thoughts next week.

Nina: Yeah. So to bring it all home and summarize. Survival mode prevents us from resting, recovering and relaxing. We're not reasonable, logical, playful, calm, present or curious.

Kelle: Without noticing we lose connection to ourselves, to our bodies, to our values and our people. And this isn't where we show up as our best selves, our favorite version of ourselves.

Nina: Yeah, we have yet to meet a woman who feels like she gets enough rest, downtime, and pleasure in her life. And we're on a mission to change that, to collectively give ourselves permission to rest and repair and ultimately restore.

Kelle: And actually enjoy the life you work so hard to create.

Nina: Heck yeah, I'm in for that.

Kelle: Me too. Alright, we love you guys.

Nina: See you soon.

Kelle: Bye for now.

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Nina: If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, we would really appreciate it if you share the podcast with others who you think would benefit from it, and leave a rating and review to let us know what you think.

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Thank you so much for listening to today's episode of *Ambitious-Ish*.

Nina: If you're ready to align your ambitions with your heart and feel more calm, balanced, and connected, visit <https://www.kelleandnina.com/> for more information about how to work with us and make sure you get on our list.

Kelle: See you in the next episode!