



## How Dr. Mariel Buqué Believes You Transform Intergenerational Pain Into Intergenerational Abundance

The Columbia University-trained, trauma informed psychologist and practitioner of holistic healing weaves together scientific research, best practices, and personal experience to help us unpack intergenerational trauma in the service of building a legacy of abundance. It's all part of her new book, *Break the Cycle: A Guide to Healing Intergenerational Trauma*.

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**Alicia Menendez:** If you, like me, have watched Dr. Mariel Buqué's Instagram videos about family or trauma or cycle breaking and wished you could capture all of her knowledge and counsel in a single place, you are in luck. Her new book, *Break the Cycle, A Guide to Healing Intergenerational Trauma*, is deeply grounded in her work. Dr. Buqué is of course, a Columbia University-trained and trauma-informed psychologist and in her own lived experience. In *Break the Cycle*, she's giving language to some terms you may have heard a lot, intergenerational trauma, trauma responses and some you've heard about a lot less, an intergenerational higher self and a generational legacy. All of it to set the stakes for why cycle breaking matters, not just for each of us as individuals, but as siblings, as parents, as role models, as legacy builders.  
Hello, my friend.

**Dr. Mariel Buqué:** Hi.

**Menendez:** You did it. Congratulations.

**Buqué:** Thank you. Thank you. So good to be here in this author world.

**Menendez:** It's so good to have your book in this world. *Break the Cycle*, I'm so excited. I ordinarily, don't start these conversations this way, but in this case, I think it's just really important that we set some terms and that we make sure that we're all talking and thinking about this the same way, especially, since the words intergenerational trauma are actually in the title of your book. It's a word that gets used a lot. It's a big Instagram term of the moment. Define for me what you mean when you talk about intergenerational trauma, how it shows up.

**Buqué:** Intergenerational trauma is the only trauma that is handed down our family line and it happens at the intersection of two modes of transmission. The first of which is, our biology, which is the actual genetic makeup that we in essence inherit from our parents. And if they themselves had actually lived a life that was embedded with chronic stress or trauma itself, like they had adverse experiences that basically led them to be in a constant state of waiting for the next threatening experience to happen. If that was a part of their lived experience, it could have made it so that those experiences would've eventually altered their genetic code and that genetic encoding, we call that, epigenetics, when our environment and what happens in our environment and the stress in our environment basically stimulates our genes to either turn on or off. And so, if that's the case when our

parents conceive us, they actually conceive us with those genetic encodings. And what that can do for someone is that it can create this emotional predisposition to a vulnerability to stress and trauma.

So we already have those initial experiences of trauma being situated in the body and being more of a biological situation. And then comes everything else that happens thereafter. Once you're born, then let's say, that you're born into a family where chaos is the norm, where people are constantly arguing and your little nervous system is developing around a lot of loud noises and around a lot of chaos and it's internalizing that your environment is not safe. You enter the school system, maybe you get bullied there and maybe your first relationship is one where the person that you were with, had maybe some toxic relationship qualities. And then, you're out into the world and you realize that because of the color of your skin, you're pervasively discriminated against and then you have to hold all of that oppression with you as well.

So you're already born with this emotional vulnerability and then all of life presents you with different scenarios that can actually pummel you and emotionally surface what we then call trauma symptoms. Not only were your parents in a state of trauma, now you are too. And now, what we're talking about is intergenerational trauma because it's present in two generations.

Menendez: When you talk about trauma like this, you write extensively about how we carry this trauma in our bodies, but also, how trauma then informs our response to things that happen every day. And trauma response is another one of these terms that has become frequently used to the point that sometimes I don't think everybody's saying the same thing. So when you write and talk about trauma response, what is it you are writing and talking about?

Buqué: I'm primarily talking about a very body-based response that is situated in the nervous system. Because the word trauma has been so widely utilized and popularized, which in part, I really do believe is a good thing. I can appreciate how when we, in essence, over utilize the term, we do contribute to de-stigmatizing it. However, trauma itself is a process that is inculcated primarily in the nervous system in that it makes it so that we're constantly experiencing this perception of threat and we're in essence, defaulting to that more often than not, even when there's no threat in sight. And when that happens, it overtaxes our mental and physical bodies and it makes it so that we become more susceptible to actual chronic illness, both on the mental category and also, in the physical health category.

Menendez: There's so much more we could talk about as it relates to trauma. You write about it so beautifully in *Break the Cycle* that I'm actually just going to allow for it to live there. You give us so many different writing prompts and tools for identifying our own trauma, identifying intergenerational trauma, which I thought was just so generous, given the number of people who would like to have access to a professional of your variety and might not. But I want to talk about what I think is really the linchpin of this book, which is the idea of being a cycle breaker. And I have a lot of questions around that specifically, when you know you are ready to break a cycle that has been decades in the making, what's the tell?

Buqué: Sometimes it's like people just combust. Sometimes it's like you just feel like a volcano. You're like, "I'm going to erupt if I don't really get this out." And sometimes you do erupt and then the remnants of it, the ashes, is where you start

to build your life back up from there. Very often, cycle breakers are able to see that their life has been marked by suffering. And when they start looking back and say, "Oh wait, I've been in these relationships where I've been this perpetual people pleaser and always self-suppressing, always very sacrificial, never really honoring myself and giving myself some level of worth." Would you look at that? My mother carried those same dynamics in her relationships as well. That seems like it was something that was modeled in my home. I learned subconsciously integrated into my own personality and into my own ways of being in relationship with other people.

And here I am a few decades later actually recognizing that there was a pattern and wow, I got a little curious and I asked my mother about grandma's relationship history and would you look at that? Same history. And so we start mapping back the experiences that have actually transcended generations and been modeled forward and many cycle breakers, what they determine in those moments is that they, one, want the cycle to end with them. And two, many cycle breakers also are thinking not just about themselves, but about all of the individuals in their family and in their community that could be impacted by their breaking cycles. And so it becomes this very multi-generational quest toward creating abundance legacies that can have an impact on both the generation's past and generation's future.

Menendez: This is as much a handbook as it is a narrative of what this looks like, but one of the most powerful tools I actually think you give, is more conceptual, which is the idea that in as much as we talk about intergenerational trauma, there's also this idea of an intergenerational higher self. A sort of foil to that trauma. But it's like yes, there is pain that is carried through generations. There also is something bigger and greater that calls us. How do you begin to identify what that higher self is? What did that higher self look like for you?

Buqué: Would you believe that she looked a lot like who I am today? And that makes me so happy. I imagined her in 2007 and she was actually, someone who was surrounded by books just really being so proud of just her nerdy self and just feeling a lot of peace and a lot of love around her. And a lot of those things are true in my life. Life is not perfect for anyone, but I feel like the intergenerational higher self that I had imagined is very aligned with who I am today. And so for all of us, I think there's going to be a version of that. But the intergenerational higher self is a little bit different than the concept of the higher self, which I think has been more popularized in society because the intergenerational higher self, I'm, in essence, introducing into this text and it is a layered higher self.

It's like, yes, our wisest self that is almost like a future self that has a lot of the wisdom that perhaps, we don't hold right now. And in addition to that, there is a layer of the wisdom and the strength and the preservation through life and all the things that other people in your life, particularly, individuals that are now considered ancestors, left you with. The beautiful thing about the higher self is that very often, people are approaching an intergenerational higher self saying, how am I going to even? Where do I even begin? And the easiest thing to do in order to actually connect with any part of our higher self, is to really be still. In this world, we're actually not taught how to be with silence.

My nephew the other day, he came to my home, I just moved. And he calls me Nina. He said, "Nina," for Madrina but, "Nina, it's really quiet in your home. I'm a little concerned for you. Are you going to be okay?" And I said, "Absolutely." In the quiet moments, that's when I can sit and meditate and really be with my thoughts

and connect to other parts of me. It's a really healthy practice. And then a few days later, we actually practiced it together. He's 16, and this was a moment in which I could not only connect to my intergenerational higher self, but do it with somebody who I deeply love and in an intergenerational way because it's two generations connecting within the same practice. But yeah, whenever we sit with silence, whenever we think about what our dreams are trying to tell us, whenever we meditate, those are moments when we can actually connect to deeper, wiser parts of us that wouldn't be accessible with the loudness of life that we're surrounded by.

Menendez: When you're talking about something as big as intergenerational trauma, and go on to write an entire book about it, I imagine that one of the initial challenges is, figuring out how you're going to take the reader on that journey. How did you decide to structure the book to take the reader with you through that journey?

Buqué: The book definitely needed to be, as I said, that it would be, it would be a healing guide. So it's for anybody who's walking the journey or anybody who's a healer and helping someone to walk it. I wanted it to almost emulate the work that I do in my therapy sessions with clients so that people can feel like it was a very comprehensive but tangible and accessible tool. But I start off with first acknowledging the cycle breaker because that's important. Very often, we just want to get into, "Okay, let's dig into the family tree and let's get all the secrets out." And that can be actually pretty re-traumatizing whenever we're doing that without actually doing the grounding work and saying, "Let's hold off a little bit." Let's just talk about resilience. Let's build your resilience. Let's get your nervous system feeling a little bit more settled, and then let's start building out your family tree. Let's go through your intergenerational ACEs so that we can know all of the different layers of adversity that have happened in your family and in your community. And then, let's integrate."

Then let's go through the process of how do we build a legacy from what we now know? How do we disrupt the patterns that are not serving the legacy, and how do we also pass on those tools into the next generation so that they can also have a healthier life and live the legacy that we've created.

Menendez: You used the word legacy, and I want to make sure that we talk about it. For some people, legacy is wealth. For some people, legacy is community change. How do you see legacy, both in the big picture sense, but then also for you, what is the legacy you are working to build?

Buqué: The person that I have influence over is my nephew and the legacy that I desire to leave for him is pretty, there's a lot of things I wish so much. I think that whenever we have children in our lives, there's so much that we wish that they could experience that we didn't get to experience or things that we hope to shield and protect them from. But more than anything, I want him to always feel like there is a place for him on this earth. I think that one of the experiences of being a first-gen Latina in this nation especially, is that there's this experience that seeps into your mind and finds a home there of not belonging. And it's, as I mentioned in the book, it's the intergenerational lie of being perpetually cast out for generations out of spaces that didn't invite us in. And then the idea that we don't belong in those spaces because of that transaction.

And one of the most powerful moments, as I mentioned in the book, was when my mother told me, "You come from a line of strong people, go back in there, just

show them who you are." And my sister actually also gave me beautiful words of wisdom where she mentioned to me when I was entering undergrad, "No one there is any better than you." We're coming from a low-income neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey. And even in Newark, we were poor for Newark. And so I think she understood that, being three years older than me, she had already been in college for a few years and I think, whatever messages she was internalizing, she was trying to help guard me from having internalize those messages. So I wasn't fully effective because I think entering especially, the Columbia school system, it was just so embedded in elitism and racism and sexism and all the isms really kind of represented in one institution, that it was really hard to battle. But I want to be able to equip my nephew in an even better way than I was equipped, even though I got all that love and wisdom. I want him to have even more of that.

Menendez: Why dedicate the book to your sister, Lady?

Buqué: Oh, my sister. My sister is who I call, my person. My mother actually calls my sister and I, her right and left lung. I believe that many eldest daughters never really, or not as frequently as probably they should, get some sort of a paid respects back for what they've done, even if it was not voluntary. My sister, like many eldest daughters of immigrants, like many Latinas, like many women in society are socialized, especially girls, are socialized to care for their younger siblings, which she did for me. And I remember how I felt like, even when my sister, as I mentioned in the book, almost lost her life. Even when she almost lost her life, I felt like I was almost about to lose my mother because my sister took so much care of me.

And so, she deserves those flowers. And also, my sister is really someone who taught me how cycle breakers operate in a very personal way because she actually would do things that cycle breakers tend to do out of sheer intuition. And I had no idea that she was actually breaking cycles back then. I mean, when her son was even born, I remember the ways that she would actually talk to my mother about the tones that we were to use with her child in the room. The fact that she was not imposing corporal punishment, we're not going to use the chancla. And so there were other ways in which she decided, actually, I want different for him.

So because she's an actual cycle breaker, it is because of her that I even get to say that I am a doctor and I believe that she deserves that flower or set of flowers, that bouquet, like my last name. She deserves it.

Menendez: Thank you. Thank you so much for being here.

Buqué: Thank you.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer. Trent Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you, email us at [hola@latinatolatina.com](mailto:hola@latinatolatina.com), slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at [latinatolatina](https://twitter.com/latinatolatina). Check out our merchandise at [latinatolatina.com/shop](https://latinatolatina.com/shop) and remember to subscribe or follow us on Radio Public, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you're listening right now. Every time you share the podcast, every time you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

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