

Ep #72: Anatomy of an Apology



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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There is a quiet epidemic I've noticed in my life coaching clients and saw in my patients, particularly my patients with GI issues. An epidemic of shame and guilt that keeps folks feeling small and from living into our truest power. That epidemic is summed up in two words, "I'm sorry."

Yes, my loves, I want to talk to you about apologies. What apologies are, why we need to apologize and get comfortable doing so, and some of the pitfalls that come from when we apologize out of habit, as a knee-jerk reaction to discomfort, instead of apologizing from our truest selves who can see pain or harm caused by our actions, the impact of our behavior, our words and seek to repair that harm with humility and love.

Does apologizing feel so cringy, so challenging and scary and uncomfortable, my love? Is it something you do too easily? Apologizing for having feelings, wants, or needs? Wherever you land on that spectrum, I know there's something helpful for you in this series, so keep listening my love, it's going to be a good one.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health! Here's your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, Herbalist and Life Coach, Victoria Albina.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So I'm just going to dive right on in because this is a huge topic, particularly for my folks out there with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits. It can be so challenging.

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And our topic today is apologizing. So it can be really challenging to give an apology, to hear one, or to not constantly apologize. It's a whole thing and you know I love diving in deep on the things that keep us feeling miserable.

And you know that I love a multipart series, so this episode will kick off a few weeks of podcasts that will center around apologies and apologizing. This week, we'll start at the top. What is an apology? Why do we apologize? What are some things to bear in mind when an apology is due?

In the coming episodes, we'll talk about how to apologize effectively, what pre-apologizing is, and how it hurts your tender spirit and thus, how to avoid it, language shifts that can help us see apologizing in a different light, and finally, the importance of apologizing for the impact of our actions and our words, not our intentions.

If you haven't yet subscribed, be sure to do so, so that you'll get the episodes delivered right to your phone as soon as they come out. How simple and delightful.

Okay, alright my loves, let's get started today. So I want to talk about the anatomy of apologies. What does it mean to apologize, why do we need to do it, and how we can keep our center when we need to apologize to someone.

So, why do we apologize? Well, we've talked at different times about the peculiarities of being a human. We humans, we are social animals. We need and rely on each other for our survival. Not just physically and psychologically and emotionally too. Some critters out there are happy to live solitary lives, but not the humble homosapiens.

Our relationships, the ability to create and maintain them is part of what makes us, well, us. As we've talked about in previous episodes, we know

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that we also need to maintain our autonomy in relationships. In this family, we aim for interdependence, like in any balanced ecosystem, stopping short of codependency or other relationship habits that interfere with us showing up whole.

That, my love, is another story for another episode, specifically episodes 29, 30, 53, 54, and 55. That's quite the perennial topic around here, this interdependency, codependency balance. So we know that healthy, meaningful, and lasting relationships are part of what makes humans human.

And along those lines, making mistakes, saying or doing hurtful things and mucking up relationships is also part of the game. Apologizing is one way that we, as humans needing other humans, get to see what we did that caused harm, to sit in our vulnerability, to hold space for someone else, and to work to repair that damage that we have done to someone with whom we are in relationship.

Now, many of us grew up with the surface level apologies that were more or less forced on us as kiddos. Sort of that like, apologize to your sister or no dessert for you style apology. And I'm not knocking the people who raised us. I never am. It's hard out there.

But that style of apology, the at forced, insincere, robotic apology, that's not what we're talking about here. That's appeasing, and that's not a choice that's full of love. What I'm proposing is that we reframe the idea of apologizing as something empowering to both the person doing the apologizing and to the person who has experienced harm and deserves and wants that apology.

I propose we learn to stand in our integrity. So when we've done harm that would have been avoiding if we had made different choices, we get to

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apologize. When we've done harm unintentionally, we get to apologize. But we apologize not because the apology is what's standing between us and getting dessert or going out for recess, but because we value the person whom we have harmed and we value our own integrity.

We value them not only for the role they play in our lives, for our relationship with them, ranging from life partnership to the regular barista who has your order memorized. We value them as people, as humans, in and of themselves who deserve to be treated well and to process their pain, especially when our actions have contributed to that pain.

When we have transgressed again, whether we did it consciously or not, we have damaged whatever tie binds us. And we get the privilege, that's right, the privilege to show up as an emotional adult, to own what we said or did that caused harm, to hold space with love for the other person's pain, to sit in our own vulnerability and then work to repair the damage.

Let's take some slow, deep belly breaths in together and let this idea settle into your body. Let's breathe in, two, three, four, hold, two, three, four, out, two, three, four. That's right babies.

When we apologize, we do several things. The first is that we own what we have done that caused hurt or pain in someone else. Second, we hold space for the other person's pain. Third, we sit in our own vulnerability, and fourth, work to repair the damage.

When we can do this, and we'll get into all sorts of details on these steps and next week's episode, we open up doors of communication that may be otherwise shut. We can reconnect with the person whom our actions have harmed. And we can do so gently, lovingly, humbly, without losing ourselves or apologizing for things that are not ours to own.

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When our actions or words have hurt someone with whom we are in relationship, they understandably may feel wary of us, distrustful, wondering if going back for more may just cause more pain. A thoughtful, sincere, loving apology in which we center the other person's hurt, when we show up with empathy, care, can also show them that we are conscious of our actions and words and their impact.

We are willing to listen to feedback and we can to the degree that we are comfortable and able make changes that can foster a more mutually healthy relationship going forward. One that holds space for both parties.

Remember when I mentioned that messing up in relationships is as much a part of being human as having relationships with other mammals in the first place? That can be a hard one to accept, but it's a true fact, as they say. We, as people, will step in it.

So maybe Mr. Rogers or Michelle Obama, I'm sure she's never done anything wrong in her life. But the rest of us mammals will inevitably do and say things that can cause harm to those we care about because just as we are growing and changing and going through this stuff of like, our relationship partners are too.

Relationships then need to be flexible and to accommodate the changing needs that arise as we each grow and change. Here, we come to the idea of boundaries and how important it is for us as individuals to have internal boundaries and boundaries with other humans that keep us safe and healthy.

If you do X, I'll do Y, but that also help us to maintain strong and resilient relationships in which we speak our needs and say what we're going to do and do what we say. To learn more about boundaries, check out episodes 5 and 41.

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So when we establish boundaries in relationships, we're teaching others how we agree to be treated. We are saying this works and helps me feel good when we are together, and this doesn't work for me. It won't allow our relationships to flourish.

When we do or say things that harm others, it's often because we've overstepped, misjudged, or ignored a boundary. Sometimes we do this because we aren't being mindful, and other times, it's because we never really got clear on the boundaries or the rules of the relationship.

When we are in a position to apologize for our actions or words, we get the opportunity to rethink or establish the boundaries of our relationships. We get to check in and see if the stated or unstated rules still work or need to be adjusted.

Maybe it used to be okay to make tongue-in-cheek jokes with a friend, but things have changed for them. Or things have changed in the energy of your relationship, and now those jokes hurt their feelings, and that's okay. We get an opportunity to adjust, reorganize, and reset, so we can reduce harm going forward.

My sweet, beautiful darling one, let's pause for a check in. Is there a part of you that right now is feeling nervous or cringy or a tad defensive, protective, extra tender? Are those tears welling up? Are you angry at me?

All of these energies often come up and we talk meaningfully about being vulnerable. And when we talk about apologizing, that's a set of normal reactions. It's vulnerable making for sure to hear all this, to learn all this, to process all this, to integrate all this. And I'll share that it's vulnerable making until it isn't.

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Let's breathe in and out. So why do our nervous systems get a little flooded, a little sympathetic, or do we sink down into dorsal vagal? Why do those little nerves or butterflies, that anger, that defensiveness come back? Why is it there in the first place?

Well, it's because often, needing to apologize and make amends, here meaning to make a change and own what's ours makes us feel inadequate, like an F-up. It's easy to think that our errors are us. Error equals self. That making a mistake and doing or saying something, anything that hurts someone else means that there's something wrong with us.

That on some sort of existential level, we are flawed beyond repair. And part of the protective mechanism of codependency, perfectionist thinking, and people pleasing is that constant need to make sure everyone else is okay because the story goes if they're okay and they think I'm okay, then it's safe for me to be okay.

Through consistent application of the thought work protocol, we can start to see these thoughts for what they are. Just thoughts. A firing of some neurons that have grown accustomed to firing in a particular way. To telling this story that if you mess up, if someone says you did something wrong, you are flawed beyond repair.

That, my love, is a wrong thought. Because it's not true, it never is. You are perfect and amazing and worthy of love and beautiful things. You were born a sweet little star seed, perfect. And yes, you have growing to do. We all do, baby.

And when we make a mistake, we need to own that our actions or words hurt someone. But that, my perfect, perfect love, is different from insisting that we as a person are inherently bad. It's an old protective mechanism and it's one you can lay to rest.

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Because the truth is that, baby, baby, baby, you goofed. We goofed. We all goof. And sometimes we make small goofs, and sometimes those goofs are epic and cause wounds that take a long time to heal.

But when we can get out of our own way and can see the other person's pain, working towards being able to center it and really be present and bear witness to the harm our actions or words caused, we can come out of an apology with our sense of self intact, standing strong in our integrity and wild self-love and our relationships with self and other all the stronger.

The alternatives, my love, are guilt and shame. Remember back to the resentment episode number 64, where we talked about how resentment flourishes when the story within you is that someone did something to you and you take it personally, when your ego gets involved. So too is shame.

Someone tells you that your words or actions hurt them. One option is to feel shame. And we know, because science, that shame blocks change, blocks cognition, meaning you don't think so goodly and throws you headlong into your reptilian brain, from whence you are much less able to think clearly and to properly apologize because your ego is fighting to defend itself because it feels attacked.

Your prefrontal cortex, our perennial BFF in this family is less functional, less online when you're all lizard-y in your thinking. When those feelings of shame, resentment, or defensiveness come up, I like to channel something I learned from a dear friend and later learned was from Stephen Covey. The guy who wrote 7 Habits of Highly Successful People.

While I am by no means a Covey expert, I do know that one of his principles is seek to understand before being understood. When we are in a position to apologize, when the things we have done or said, whether we

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realize or even understand why have hurt someone else, we need to seek to understand where they are coming from first and foremost.

And I'll add, we get to step into our full hearts, full of empathy and love, to feel into what they are telling us they are feeling, versus swimming around in our own defensive thought habits. So when someone says, "Ouch, your words, actions, whatever hurt me," you get to breathe it in and breathe it out.

To get your amygdala, the threat and fear center of your perfect brain under control, and to invite your ego to take a break, give it some other task to focus on while you focus on the person who feels harmed. Work to really listen and seek to understand where they're coming from, and to put yourself in their place and to connect in with what it feels like to have that hurt inside.

An apology made from that place is a powerful gift you give yourself and the other person. Ask yourself what comes up inside you when someone says you did an oopsie or really F'ed up. Does defensiveness come up? What's the thought leading to that feeling?

Does shame come up? Guilt? Resentment? Anger? What are the thoughts leading to those feelings? When you're feeling those things, what actions do you take? Do you negate the other person? To shame them back, to defend your position? What's the result for you in your life of taking those actions, of not showing up with a full and open loving heart, to hear another person say you did or said something and I'm in pain.

And what thoughts and feelings are blocking you from taking the loving action of simply apologizing, not making it about you, but about your oopsie, your F up, owning your part in it all and standing in your own integrity as a loving mammal on this earth.

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What thoughts and feelings are blocking you from seeing what you can do to repair the harm and create harmony and peace in your life? What does your ego need to take a gentle step backwards so you can live from your heart and not take things personally?

I recommend you breathe into this, my love, and that you grab some paper and a pen and write this all out. Don't just think about it. Brains will do funny things when left to spin on a thought. So when you grab a pen and paper, you create a little cognitive distance and you can see the truth of what you are creating for yourself in your own life and in your relationships much more clearly when it's written out in front of you. And the more radically and lovingly honest you can get with yourself, the more impactful this work will be for you and your relationships, my darling.

And if you've been listening to my work or you've worked with me in the past, your brain might be saying, "Wait a minute, you teach us that our own thoughts create our own feelings. How are you saying I can hurt somebody else's feelings? You talk all about emotional adulthood and emotional childhood and emotional childhood is when we blame others for our feelings. What gives, Vic?"

So what I will say is that in this family, we are feminist. We do not coach other people without their consent. You may have learned something from listening to the show, from downloading my handouts, from working with me, but it is not your job to impose that framework, the thought work protocol, circumstance, thought, feeling, action, result on anyone else.

That's not how this works, my darling. It's not a loving choice in the world. You get to hold that framework and understanding for yourself and to do your own work. And if someone wants to learn about this point of view, this way of viewing the world, send them on over to the show, send them to my Instagram, let's connect.

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But it is not your job to teach this to someone else, to make sure they know about it, to throw it in their face, or to try to change their understanding of the world without their consent. It's just not how we do. Stay in your own lane. Stay on your side of the fence.

And remember, whenever I talk about the R line, results, in CTFAR, circumstance, thought, feeling, action, result, we're always talking about the results that you create for yourself in your life. Because when we're raised with codependent and perfectionist thinking, again, our view is always outwards.

We're shining that spotlight of our own consciousness on other people. And this work is about getting back in touch with yourself, healing your own perfect inner children, learning to reparent you, to manage your own mind, regulate your own nervous system, and to show up aligned with yourself, standing firmly in your own ground.

It's not your job to do that for anyone else. And so if someone else believes that what you said, your action, creates a result for them, you get to show up and say, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry about that, my beautiful love." It is not your job to tell them otherwise.

Okay, making sure we're clear on that, darlings. Oh, one last thing, really important last thing. Let's be clear that, "I'm sorry but," and, "I'm sorry you feel that way," those don't count as apologies. We'll talk so much more about that next week for sure as well as what to do if someone won't accept your apology.

But until then my love, if you find yourself given the opportunity to apologize, take a deep, long, slow belly breath. Breathe out slow and long, get ventral vagal with yourself and the other person. Smile from that

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sincere, honest place of wanting to move towards the connection, not away.

And remind yourself that you are not your actions or words. You are a perfectly imperfect human animal muddling through life like the rest of us. Adulting and humaning, they are challenging things, and you're doing great, tender one.

You're right where you need to be and you are more than capable of owning your error, listening to the other person's feelings, and seeing what you can do to put things right. And if you don't believe that yet, that's okay too. You can borrow my faith in you until you've grown your own.

Thank you for listening. I love talking about this. It was such a stumbling block in my own life and I'm so grateful for the privilege to have learned about how to do this differently.

My beauty, if all of this resonates for you and you want to work with me, to deepen your understanding of the thought work protocol and how to apply it to change your life, to release your codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, you have a chance coming up so soon as I open up enrollment for my six-month master class. The Feminist Wellness Guide to Overcoming Codependency starting in the fall of 2020.

Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to complete the short application you'll find there for this high-touch, small group program where you will get literally daily attention from me, lots of time together, and a beautiful family of people who are so dedicated to improving their lives.

It's been - a delight doesn't even begin it. It's been so beautiful to work with everyone in the current group for the last few months and I'm so excited and honored to welcome you to the family. That website again is

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victoriaalbina.com/masterclass. Go to there now, my beauty, to apply and get on my calendar.

Okay, let's take a nice big deep breath in and out. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my love.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to VictoriaAlbina.com to learn more.