

Ep #168: Regret is Self-Abandonment



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, and Life Coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. I was on a call today with a woman who had applied to my Anchored program, my six-month program for overcoming codependency, perfectionism, and people-pleasing. It's really a program about finding your self-worth and self-love. Woah, it's powerful.

So I was on the phone with this woman, or on Zoom, and she was talking about how much she regrets not applying to and joining Anchored two years ago, and how all these things have happened in her life. She married her then-boyfriend and has now divorced him, and all these things have happened, and she was telling this story, "If I had just joined Anchored then, I wouldn't be regretting the last two years."

Oh, my goodness. That felt so heavy. She was telling this story about her life has been regrettable. And I have a lot of thoughts about this. But first, let's start with a definition, because my nerds love a definition. So the dictionary tells me: Regret is to feel sorry, disappointed, distressed or remorseful about the past. To remember with a feeling of loss or sorrow. To mourn.

Well jeez, that's dire. Regret is some heavy business. It's all Shakespearian, and it's very definition. "To remember with a feeling of loss or sorrow. To mourn." I want to talk about regret today because this conversation, and because I hear my clients talk about their past and their choices with so much of this heaviness. So much regret. So much blame, shame, and guilt towards themselves and others.

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And what I want to say from jump is this: When we are living in regret, we are abandoning ourselves. We are abandoning and exiling the version of us that made those decisions. I'm going to pause to let that land. Because that too is some heaviness, and I stand by it. Because when we play the old "could've, should've, would've" with our past choices, we are leaving that version of us, that inner you, whether it was 20 years ago, two years ago, or last week, like an inner child but sometimes a more recent you, we are leaving that part of our Self, capital, S, "Self," out to dry.

We are disavowing them, saying, "They made a terrible decision," and that they, thus you, should feel really bad about yourself. And baby, baby, baby, that doesn't serve you. It never has and it never will. So why would you choose that? Yet, we do it over and over and over again. So let's answer this question: Why do we regret? And the answer, my nerds, is evolutionary: Because we think it will protect us. We think it will keep us safe because we think regret will keep us from doing that same thing we judge ourselves for again.

But rolling around in regret about it is not going to do what you subconsciously think it's going to. It's not going to save you from repeating your old patterns, it's just re-enacting the old pattern of beating yourself up under the guise of thinking you're going to create change this time if you're just cruel enough to you now.

My sweet kitten-mittens, if I've said it once I've said it a thousand times: You can't heal hurt with more hurt. That's just not how it works. Because science. Because while you're sitting around filled up with regret, you're slamming your foot on the gas of your nervous system, spinning and ruminating and filling your perfect bloodstream with those sympathetic fight-or-flight chemicals: Adrenaline. Cortisol. You're creating stress in your body hormonally, chemically, about something you cannot change.

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Berating yourself about how dumb and terrible you are, and likely telling everyone who will listen all about how much you suck because you dated a jerk again, or you fell off whatever wagon you put yourself on, or you made a work or a business decision that didn't work out exactly how you dreamt it would.

And once you've spun and spun and spun on it in your own mind, in your own world, all full up with stress, chemicals, you collapse, into dorsal, into freeze, into that checked-out, foot-off-the-gas, isolating, self-flagellating place where you say, "This will never change. I'm the worst. I make terrible decisions. I can't trust myself."

And that's the rub with regret; you strengthen the neural groove in your mind that says, "I cannot be trusted." And from there, what do you think is going to happen the next time you try to make a decision or change your life? You're not going to trust yourself.

Your intuition, your discernment, you're going to look outside of yourself for someone else to make your life happen, to decide for you, to tell you what to do and how to do it, all the while strengthening that "I'm not to be trusted" story more, and the codependent story that says that someone else, everyone else, knows better for you and your life than you. Which of course is a huge hit on your self-concept, on your sense of self, and your authenticity. Right?

Because authentic, real you, well, that person messed up real bad, which leads you to want to people-please those people who know better about your life even more, which strengthens your perfectionist story even more, and makes you want to shape shift and chameleon to keep them happy, because after all, they know best about your life. What a quagmire. What a hot friggin' mess, my darling squash blossom, and it all starts with believing that there is a right and wrong way to do things.

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To live, to be, and believing, again, from our codependent conditioning, that you don't know the best way for you to be because you're inherently unworthy. My tender little cupcake, oh, how painful. How painful that you've been living this way. And of course, I get it, I used to roll around in regret too, until it hit me one day that I was rejecting the parts of me that made those decisions.

And we'll come back to that in just a moment, but first, to be clear, I'm not telling you not to have your feelings. Always and forever, the opposite. I encourage you to safely feel it all without judgment or criticism, so you can process your feeling somatically, meaning through your body. I'm never telling you not to grieve or be angry. The patriarchy told you to trust a man's opinion more than your own.

I'm never telling you not to be pissed off, sad or disappointed that you spent years wrapped up in diet culture, or that you grew up in the family condition that you did, or that you learned to take others' opinions and advice instead of following your own. Have all the feels about it. But just don't get mired in regret again, because it doesn't change a darn thing except your story about who you are, how trustworthy you are and what you are capable of now, in this new and precious moment, now.

And I can hear your brain saying, "But wait, if I don't regret, how will I learn? How will I change? How will I grow? How will I hold myself accountable and take personal responsibility? Won't I just be a jerk forever if I stop regretting? And this is vital, my love. It is only when we drop the regret that we can truly bring in personal responsibility and accountability. Because your vision is clouded when you're in regret. You can't see the ways you can make change now and for the future when you're focused on beating your past self up.

Living in regret is, in fact, a self-centered, short-sighted state of being. We think if we beat ourselves up now, then we're not being selfish and

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self-absorbed, but the truth is you are, because all you can think about when you're regretting is how terrible you are. So how exactly are you to take accountability and responsibility when you're focused on you and beating you up?

Furthermore, when you are rolling around in all that regret, you can't see much beyond blaming you. You can't see all of your conditioning, socialization and family teaching that led you to make the choices you made.

You can't see the systems at play like the patriarchy and white settler colonialism. You can't see interpersonal systems like codependent family blueprints that taught you to be exactly who and how you are, and led you to make the choices you did because of outside pressure, influence, or from the lessons you carry in your body as your childhood survival skills.

And if harm was done to you from regret, you often dismiss it and take all the blame, shame, and guilt onto your own little shoulders, which is something we chronically do from our codependent thinking that says, "I'm inherently unworthy." And I know I myself did this for quite a while about being in an emotionally abusive relationship for years. My brain went to stories like, "I regret being with that person. I regret staying once they started screaming at me and gaslighting me belittling me and constantly disregarding my boundary."

And all that thinking did was strengthen the neural groove in my mind that said, "You are responsible for other people and their choices. You are wholly to blame for staying," instead of what I now know to be true: "I am not responsible for their unacceptable behavior. I can and do take responsibility for staying, and what happened is not my fault." But I couldn't see that truth while I was in regret. And I sure can now from a place of self-compassion and self-love.

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My ex's choices were not my responsibility. Getting myself out was. And I did that for myself, and I'm so darn proud of me. And I recognize that the me that stayed did so because she didn't yet know how to get out because she kept believing and wishing and hoping things would change, and because she was being gaslit, manipulated and lied to. That's all super-duper real. And regretting her choices, after seeing, pulling back, really zooming out and seeing the full picture, the whole context, regretting her choices would only be abandoning her once again.

And, babies, I'm not here for that. It's important that we recognize that inherent in these stories, the "I should've known better" stories, is you rejecting the you that could not possibly have known anything different. And frankly, self-rejection, staying mired there instead of taking responsibility and owning your part, is buffering. Buffering is anything we do to detach from our feelings, to push our feelings aside.

I think we can use the self-blame of regret, the beating ourselves up, to buffer or distract ourselves from the deeper feelings. For example, the disappointment of being raised in the homes we were raised in, being raised with emotionally immature parents like we talked about last week, being raised to believe other people's voices matter more than ours, being raised in the patriarchy and having learned that one should defer to men, to white-bodied people, to thin people, and that there's something wrong with you if you are not all of those kinds of person.

Of course you want to buffer and push your feelings away if you do not know how to do thought work and somatics, if you don't know how to manage your mind and be in real and deep conversation with your body and your nervous system, your inner children. Because systems, from family systems to larger systems of oppression, taught us to buffer so that we don't have to feel those feelings.

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And remember, those systems, both co-dependent family systems and the larger systems of power and inequity, oppressive systems, taught us not to feel our feelings. Taught us to buffer. And in so doing, it keeps us from questioning systems that keep us locked in those boxes, and prevent us from speaking truth to power, and keeping us from changing our lives.

And once you can recognize that your personal choices are both your personal responsibility and are shaped deeply by the systems you grew up in that taught you who and how to be, then you can tap into and can recognize that you do in fact have significant power in your own life, in your own mind, in your own body, which admittedly can feel scary when you've never tapped into or felt your own power.

So it's no wonder we buffer against all of those feelings, and we go instead to regret and self-blame. Of course, you did, baby, of course you did. Furthermore, we beat ourselves up instead of realizing when we've been operating from our childhood survival skills, and co-dependent perfectionist and people-pleasing thoughts and habits are one hundred percent once brilliant childhood survival skills. Of course they are.

So if you made a decision, and you did a thing you maybe didn't want to do but you did it to keep someone else happy, perhaps you were doing that because you realized in childhood that people-pleasing was a brilliant way to feel safe, loved, worthy, cared about. And frankly, the fact that child you realized that and came up with this brilliant strategy, that is something to be celebrated, because it got you through. It's not something to beat yourself up about.

Now, I'm not saying to keep making your decisions from that place again. Right? I'm not saying it serves adult you now to act for those childhood scripts. You get to grow and change, it's what we talk about every week here on Feminist Wellness, it's what we do in Anchored each and every

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day, you get to learn who you want and need to be for you now so you can do it differently now.

But you didn't know how to do that then. Did you? Did you even realize you were operating from survival skills? I sure didn't until I did. And listen, come on, of course I've beat myself up for being a human with amazing survival skills. Before I learned about somatics and how to be in touch with my inner children and the exiled parts of me, before I learned how to regulate my nervous system and repair it myself, I would get mad at myself for being anxious or worried.

I would get mad at myself for having a nervous system response because I didn't know I was having a nervous system response. I would get mad at myself if I, I don't know, snapped at someone. And I would get mad at myself and I would regret doing it because I didn't know to give myself the context I have now.

For example, my nervous system just got activated, perhaps even triggered, and I'm responding from that bodily somatic energy of sympathetic activation. I'm responding from fight-or-flight. I'm not a bad person who does regrettable things, I'm a human mammal filled up with cortisol. And I get to both give myself the grace, and I get to take responsibility for when I act outside of my integrity. I get to apologize, and to do so earnestly, which isn't possible when I'm filled up with regret because all I'm thinking about is how terrible I am.

And likely you are too. When you get mad at yourself, judge yourself, are mean to yourself and stay in that energy, you take away your own ability to get curious, and to ask questions that help you to move your life forward, to behave differently next time, like, "Why did my body create that response? Why is my mind telling that story? What story is my mind even telling? What self-love or self-care do I need right now? Have I been self-abandoning again? Am I trapped in a self-abandonment cycle like we

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talked about a few weeks ago? How can I show myself kindness and care right now? Am I hungry or thirsty? Do I need to pee or take a nap? Do I need to come correct in a situation and apologize?"

Listen, you know I love a good metáfora, my sweetcakes. Regretting your choices now is like being mad at the sweater you wore a newborn because it doesn't fit you now. It's like being like, "You dumb sweater, how dare you not fit me?" But it's not a bad sweater, the wrong sweater, there's nothing at all wrong with that sweater, it just doesn't fit your adult body now. But that's what we do, right?

When we spin around in regret, it's like being mad at the sweater for being baby-sized while you grew and changed and got longer arms. And that's not loving. It fit the you you were then, like all your choices fit the you you were when you made them. You see what I'm saying? Don't be mean to a sweater, my love. That's not kind. And don't be mean to past you either, because we choose kindness around here. Right?

Regretting your choices is only possible when you know what the future will bring, and you don't. I don't. Regretting what you currently see as the outcome of your choices now is frankly like playing goddess. It's saying you know what is right and best and good and that this outcome isn't that.

When you actually don't know the eventual outcome of your decision down the road, and by staying in that regret cycle, you're cutting yourself off from seeing the possible good that may come from whatever decision you've made in the past, which you can't possibly know now because it's not the future, and you have no clue what the universe or whatever you believe in has in store for you based on the decision you made when you were wearing the sweater you were wearing when you made it. Way to mix your metaphors, Vic.

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Finally, before we move on to remedies, and yes, remedies are coming, you know they always are, let me answer the question I know you've been asking: "How will I iterate if I don't regret? Won't I stay stagnant? How will I grow?" And to that I say, when our focus is on what we regret, we are focused on the Self that made those decisions. "She should have known better. She should have been a better person. She should have known things she couldn't have known when she couldn't have known them."

'Inherent' in the story of regret is the idea that there is something wrong with you, and that's the part I take the most umbrage with, because, my beauty, you are perfect and amazing and worthy of love and good things right now as you are, and you were then, too, when you made the decision that you now don't love. And it's only by accepting and honoring past you that you can build the self-trust that will guide you to make the most aligned next-right-choice in the future.

So, yeah, review your choices. Contemplate them. Take responsibility for what's yours and nothing more and make a plan using thought work to slow your role when you make the next decision. Make a plan using somatics to get more embodied and present in yourself and with your intuition and discernment so you can make different decisions in the future. Not better decisions, oh, no, no. Just different.

Okay. Now let's talk remedies. So when you find yourself flipping to regret, your foot is squarely on that gas pedal, shunting you right up into fight-or-flight. The invitation is to move to compassion and curiosity.

So Step 1: Return to your body. Whenever you're spinning in your brain, return to your body, to your breath, to your feet on the floor, clasp your hands together tight. Get present. And whatever you find there in your body, even if you just feel numb, promise yourself you will meet you with the three Cs: Compassion, curiosity, and care. And ask your body curiously what it wants and needs from you in this moment. A slow breath, hand on

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your heart or your belly, a walk in nature, a nap, a cup of tea, a hug to co-regulate with a human, a plant, with mother nature herself, with a pet.

Pause. Check in. Get present with your body when your brain is spinning out, and make sure you've taken care of your mammalian self. Hunger, thirst, sleepiness, feeling isolated, all of these things keeping the spinning thought spinning, so run a mammal check and give your body what it needs.

Step 2: Check yourself for catastrophizing. We make things bigger problems than they actually are from our fears that were actually insignificant. So ask yourself, "Am I making this bigger than I need to?" And remember, Episode 134 is all about catastrophizing if you need a refresher on that theme.

Step 3: One of the first things that thought-work teaches us in an empowering way is to ask yourself: "Do I believe my thoughts?" This question, I love this question because it reminds us that so many of our thoughts are not ours in origin. We are often monkey-seeing and monkey-doing what we saw our parents, caregivers, community members doing.

From there, ask yourself, "Do I believe my own thought that this choice was regrettable? Am I regretting this because I regret it, or because I was taught it was a regrettable choice?" Remember, we only have shame about something when we are taught that what we are doing is shameful. So you can ask yourself, is this even my own story of regret? You may ask yourself, "Whose story of regret or shame is this?" And be thoughtful not to get mired in that, because that's a rabbit hole we can slide right on down and get lost in.

We don't want to make this work about someone else, and we can simply name it. "This is not my thinking. This is my dad's regret," or, "My religion

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taught me to regret this. Society taught me to regret this." Remember that there is something so moralistic about regret. So we have to take a step back and to look at the system without moralism, and instead with some distance and some objectivity.

Once you've gotten some clarity on that, you can remind yourself that regret is a feeling caused by the thought, "This is a regrettable choice," and you can remind yourself that that's not a choice you have to continue to make.

Step 4: Knowing the root of regret is the story, "I should have done this better or differently." Get real with it. If you actually think you should have done something different, what's that something different? And I really want you to answer the question. Put pen to paper about it. Because maybe there's an answer there.

Or maybe your brain is just telling you you should have done something different because you don't like the outcome, when your decision was the best one you could have made in that past moment, and with the skills you had then. Which brings us to this question: "Did I actually have the capacity to have done it differently?" And we ask that not with the energy of self-judgment, but truly with one of self-love and self-reflection.

Do you currently, or did you then, have the nervous system regulation to have responded to that co-worker differently or to a sibling differently, to your partner differently, to have made a different choice in that moment? Did you have the somatic skills to have remained embodied, to stay present in your body in that moment of stress?

Is it realistic that you could have done it differently in that moment or is it just some perfectionist fantasy that says, "I should have done it differently," and that takes us way on back to Episode 18 about negative self-talk. We tell stories about ourselves that we have some kind of fixed identity. But

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you're human. You can only do what you can do with the skills you have and "mistakes," in air quotes of course, just point out places for more growth.

So you get to ask yourself, "When I put the regret aside, what can I learn from this? How can I grow from this while being compassionate, curious, caring?" And when that old regret monster pops up its head to blame, shame, and guilt you, remind it that it's not welcome here.

That you're choosing now in this moment to not listen to those old self-flagellating thoughts anymore, because you know a kinder, more loving way now, a way that centers the truth of who you were then, honors it, respects it, praises it, even, and honors the you you are now, and the future self that you're growing into being each and every beautiful day when you choose to be kind with yourself instead of choosing the buffer and self-abandonment, that is regret.

Thanks for listening, my love. I hope this show has been helpful for you. If you enjoyed it, I want to invite you to head on over to Apple Podcast or Spotify, wherever you get your shows, rate and review the show there. It really helps get this free resource into more ears to help more people to step out of regret and into more self-love. And if you've been curious about Anchored, well, I can't tell the future, so I don't know for sure if there will be any spots left in the May cohort when this episode goes live.

You can head on over to victoriaalbina.com/anchored to see if you can grab one of the few remaining spots, maybe even the last spot, or you can get on the wait-list for the next time Anchored goes live.

Thank you again for listening, for loving yourself up, and let's do what we do. Put a gentle hand on your heart if you feel so moved, and remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

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If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety, overwhelm, and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive, intimate group coaching program. So head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.