

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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 am delighted, as always, to be here with you. I look forward to recording the weekly podcast and sharing some of my thoughts with you. So let's dive in. I've got a two-part podcast for you this week and next, because you know your gal loves a series on a hot topic, and this is one that I've been getting a lot of requests for. It's one we've been talking about a lot over Anchored, my six-month program, and it's the perennial relationship question: "Do I stay or do I go?"

Now of course this is just one podcast. There is a lot of complexity to this issue, so I'll be covering some of the top points that I think really matter that we get to look at when we're in that moment of deciding, "Well, do I stay or do I go now?" So let's say you come up with some challenges with a partner, and it can be so challenging to know what to do. Do you stick it through and make it to the other side of a rough path or do you cut and run?

I wish I had the answer for you, my darling kitten. If I could look into my crystal ball and tell you each and every time the absolute best choice, you know I would. But since I can't, yet, what I can do is offer you some thoughts about how to approach challenging moments in relationships so you can lean into your own intuition, your own discernment. You can use the tools we talk about here, thought work, somatics, breath work, to get in touch with your own deep knowing.

Today we'll focus on some signs that it may be time to pack it up and move on. In Part 2 we'll look at a case study from an Anchored client and we'll explore when moving through discomfort in a relationship points to a further opportunity for growth and self-discovery, remembering of course that often

our most intimate relationships are often the very most challenging because it's where we work out so much of our childhood pain and wounding.

Nerd alert. I feel like I haven't said it quite like that in a hot minute, and I feel you deserve it. You deserve a good nerd alert. So here we go. While the beginning of a relationship is a time ruled by delightful love and lust hormones, all sorts of dopamine and oxytocin flooding your body from that beautiful brain of yours, those are the hormones that honeymoon period exactly that, when you're like, "This person is my absolute dreamboat and everything about them is completely perfect."

What's true is that eventually, those hormones stop their cascade, and relationships change over time, and that's normal and natural, because science. Just because your relationship has changed a year in, five years, ten years in, doesn't necessarily mean it's time to hit the road. Relationships are work after all. But if a relationship changes in ways that leave you feeling more lousy than happy, then there are questions to ask yourself so you can suss out what's you, what's them, and what's the third party in every relationship, which is the relationship itself.

The coming together of two people with all their thoughts, feels, somatic experiences, and the work they're individually doing or not doing. And I'm talking about two people here, not in a Pauli exclusionary way, but rather because each polycule is made up of multiple two-person relationships. Come on, now. Inclusivity is a core value here.

So of course the core thing to think about when you're thinking about whether to stay or go, is your own thinking. Do you go into relationships expecting your partner to save you, to finally validate your worth, to make you feel good in the world finally? Do you go into relationships expecting the worst? To be abandoned and rejected at every turn? Maybe that was what you saw growing up. Divorce, relationships that ended in flames, cheating, painful relationships.

Do you spend your time in otherwise happy, healthy relationships, waiting for and expecting the other shoe to drop? Both vantage points are so common, my love, and remember, nothing is wrong with you if this is resonating, and it's worth looking at your thinking using the thought protocol I teach, and that you learn to be a champion at in Anchored, because until you can see the chronic, habitual, unintentional thoughts swimming around in your mind without your adult consent, they will continue to rule your life and your relationships.

So, it's vital to get in touch with your inner children, and we've talked about them in tons of shows, specifically Episodes 22 through 25, and Episode 153 where I got real nerdy about limbic system science and our inner children, and we discussed the inner child in so many episodes because it's so important.

If your inner children are holding onto old stories about relationships for dear life, then you will keep living by their old stories until you can shift your relationship with your inner children, and can learn to reparent them so they can stop steering the bus, and let adult you be, well, an adult making choices in their own life.

Now, I have to say this at the top because this is capital-i Important. If you are in a relationship with an abuser, someone who hits you or hurts you physically, yells at you, belittles you, gaslights you, tries to control you, your finances, limits your friendships or otherwise is controlling, my beloved, it's time to call in your people and get yourself to a safe place.

If the abusive relationship has left you without people, which is really common, check out your city or town's resources for people in abusive relationships and start carving a path for yourself to get to an emotionally, physically, psychologically and financially safe place, and I will, of course, put links to some hotlines in the show notes for this show at victoriaalbina.com/169, the episode number for this show.

To be clear, I'm not saying you need to pack your bags and leave tonight. I would never, ever tell anyone experiencing abuse how to handle their particular situation, but I will say this: You do not deserve abuse. You did nothing wrong. You have more people than you know in your corner. Start reaching out, and you may find many helpful and loving hands reaching back.

So maybe you're thinking, "Well my partner isn't abusive, I just don't know if they're the one for me." And that, my love, is a fine and fair place to be. In fact, you get to think whatever you want to think, right? That's how thought work works. You get your thoughts, I get mine, and you get to explore where your thoughts are coming from, and to then decide what you want to do with them, what actions you want to take, keeping in mind the result you want in your life.

In the same way, as I share some of these indicators that it may be time to move on from your relationship, you get to sit with these ideas. See how they land in your mind, feel how they resonate in your body, and be with that experience. It can be really challenging for us to sit in discomfort, and it's a vital skill to cultivate. You don't need to move into action right away, just tune into your inner wisdom, and chances are, you have more than you give yourself credit for, and see what comes up.

As we learn to see and overcome our codependent perfectionist and people-pleasing thought habits, we may start questioning all of our relationships, and that's normal. Some of us may be tempted to swing from deeply enmeshed and codependent to wildly unattached and independent. But, my love, the place of deep peace and connection lies in the middle. In interdependence. A framework for living and relating that holds as central the idea that as human mammals mammaling along, we need one another.

We need each other for companionship, support, safety, and community, for coregulation of our nervous systems, and to keep us from making really

questionable fashion choices. Come on. I'm an Argentine Leo. I'm never not going to talk about fashion choices. Right?

The key part of embodied interdependence is the recognition that while we do need one another, we are also, at the same time, autonomous beings. That is, we get to think about and act upon what's right for us. Each one of us has our own thought work protocol running in our minds, and our own somatic experience of being alive that guides us in our life. Key to interdependence is mutuality, and reciprocity, which of course we'll be touching on today.

So what does that look like? Well, you can take your best friend out to dinner on their birthday because community and connection matters, and as an autonomous being, you can make the best choice for yourself while you're out celebrating someone else. For example, I choose to skip the champagne part of the birthday toast, because I know what alcohol does to me, and I'm not here for it. We are there for our people to support and love them, and we're also there for ourselves. Interdependent.

Meanwhile, codependent thinking would say, "Oh, jeez, I have to have the champagne, or she'll be upset, and that's my problem to solve by self-abandoning me to fix her feelings for her." And if you listen to Episode 163 and 164, you know just how detrimental it can be to all of our relationships when we self-abandon like that.

In our intimate relationships, we can strive for the same interdependence, and a flag that something is amiss in a relationship is when one or both partners are functioning from a codependent, or independent framework, instead of coming together interdependently.

From that codependent framework, we can often start to lose ourselves. And if you find yourself losing yourself in your relationship, that's a flag for you, my darling, to take a step back, and to really question what's going on. When our edges blur, and we find ourselves always deferring to our partner's wants, and start to lose track of what we want, not just in the

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relationship, but in general, that's called enmeshment, and is a key core part of what happens in codependent thinking, because remember, we define codependent thinking here as chronically, habitually outsourcing our sense of worth, value, and validation to everyone and everything outside of ourselves, which leaves us wanting others to approve of us and wanting their validation more than our own.

So of course we get enmeshed, and we take on their everything as our own. Remember, we all learn how to relate and be in relationships based on what we saw modeled for us as children by our family and the societies, cultures, and religions we were raised in.

If your family blueprint includes codependent perfectionist and people-pleasing thinking, if you saw a parent or two self-abandoning and meshing their identities and sense of self with yours or someone else, which can look like, "I'm not happy if the kids aren't happy, I can't be happy if my partner's not happy," right, where your feelings are enmeshed with someone else's.

If you saw a caregiver chronically putting themselves last, or if you saw them full up with resentment. If your caregivers were emotionally immature like we talked about in Episode 167, if there was an intense drive for perfection at all costs, if love was tied to perfection and A-pluses and gold stars, or if your caregiver lived to please others above themselves, then monkey see, monkey do, my darling, you likely learned to follow in their footsteps, and to mesh deeply with others to prioritizing fixing their feelings, their life, their everything, instead of focusing on your own.

And you're likely doing all these things, operating from roles like the martyr, savior, saint, fixer in your adult relationships now, if you haven't done the work to reclaim your autonomy, and to live in an interdependent way using thought works, somatics and breath work along with the triple A cycle: Awareness, acceptance, and action. Again, again, again, no shame, no

blame, no guilt. You were doing what you were raised and taught to do, right?

And, that cycle gets to stop with you now as you look at your relationships and ask yourself, "Am I enmeshed here? Am I taking on their life as a habit?" And from there, "Does this connection still serve me?" I'll also add that in particular, human socialized as women in the patriarchy are actively taught to self-abandon in so many ways. We are taught that what matters to us is to be attractive per societal standards to be likeable, to be a good wife and a good mother, and in partnership, in friendship, the societal teachings get blurred with our family teachings.

And we spend a lifetime trying to be everything to everyone, enmeshing our self-concept, the story of who we are in the world, with all of these other people's stories until we lose sight of who we are entirely.

Now, my darling, any relationship, every relationship has its give and take. There's a healthy amount of, "I don't super want to, but okay," in any relationship. Perhaps you really don't want to take out the trash, but your partner did do the dishes and fold the clothes and walk the dog and water the plants. Hmm. Sounds like walking the trash to the curb in that case is perhaps but a minor annoyance, and is one that, in the grand scheme of the relationship, can maybe be filed under, "Okay, fine."

But not in a tit-for-tat kind of way, because remember that our codependent minds just love to keep score. But rather, you do it from a place of really valuing balance. Because mutuality and reciprocity, are the cornerstones of interdependent relationships. So you don't do the thing just because your partner wants you to, and you want to take action, so they'll validate your worth and lovability which is a codependent motivation, in interdependency, you do it because reciprocity matters and you want to contribute in an equitable way to the maintenance of a life together.

But it's a different story when you find yourself eating food you don't really like because your partner does. Wearing clothes that don't feel like you

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because your partner prefers that look. Keeping your thoughts and feelings bottled up to avoid conflict or doing activities you dislike to keep the peace.

For example, I had a client who only discovered after her divorce and ten years of monthly camping trips that she actually hates camping. She hates every little thing about it. She does not have one nice thing to say about sleeping in a tent in the woods. But she did it because her ex wanted her to. And from her codependent and people-pleasing habits, from her enmeshment with her ex, she didn't want to say no to them and risk upsetting them or disappointing them.

So she chameleoned. She shape-shifted. She convinced herself she liked something she didn't, just to avoid having a real conversation. When you lose track of who you fundamentally are, who is the beautiful you in there, and you get enmeshed in a relationship, it can be a sign of a few things. One, that you have an opportunity to do some work around reconnecting with yourself and learning how to own your preferences.

That is, maybe you learned in childhood that to be lovable meant to enmesh with others. Maybe you saw your family of origin being codependent instead of interdependent. And your brain's neural grooves are singing the siren song that says, "I'm only lovable when I give myself away." Or, "Keeping others pleased is more important than pleasing me." Then the issue may not be in your relationship with this other person, but rather in your relationship with yourself.

So you have to start with looking at that and rewiring that through thought work and somatics. You get to know yourself before putting that job onto your partner, friends or family. And once you realize what it is that you like, and you propose those things to your partner, maybe they're open to exploring new recipes, trying different activities together, or just giving you more time to do the things that bring you joy on your own.

It could well be that as you connect more fully with yourself, and are more able to speak up for what you want and need and desire, your partner is

more than happy to go along for the ride and support you. However, when there's push-back or resistance, when your partner insists that you like what they like, behave how they want you to, and essentially change in order to make them happy, then it's time to ask yourself if the relationship truly serves you. If there's space for the authentic you in the relationship, if there's room to grow.

And if there isn't, it may well be time for a change. And that change may be having some real conversations about your shared values or lack thereof. And that change could mean walking out the door. Because ultimately, we connect with other people in order to support us as we journey through this wild ride called life, and to reciprocate and support them as they grow and change. We link up with friends and partners to feel their companionship as we move through life's phases, growing and changing and learning.

If you are in an intimate relationship that blocks or limits that growth because despite your best efforts, there's simply no room for you, then that, my love, may not be a relationship that serves you.

So let's go back to a question I asked. Is there space for you in the relationship? So this is an important and nuanced one for us, because from our codependent habits, we both crave to be seen, and fear it deeply. Another holdover from childhood. Right? A time when we deeply craved belonging and significance in order to feel safe and lovable because we were very small. We needed adults. And when we aren't seen or met in childhood in the ways we want and need, we may retreat into our own dorsal vagal cave.

Remember, that's the freeze, or detach/isolate part of the nervous system. And we may guard ourselves against true intimacy and vulnerability from fear that we will finally be seen, and that there will be a cost, which will be that we may be told we aren't lovable. We aren't okay. We may be negated. Remember that developmentally, kids take on all the family issues and energetic mismatches onto themselves as evidence that there is something

wrong with them, because it's way too scary to believe that there may be something amiss with the people who are meant to keep them safe.

So we learn to hide ourselves away as kids and we come into our adult relationship with that same story that being hidden will keep us safe. So yes, of course. Ask yourself if you feel safe being seen and vulnerable in your relationship, but also ask yourself if it's the relationship or if it's you. Knowing that it may be both for sure because we tend to pick people who aren't willing, able, and ready to see us deeply, when that's what we fear.

And both the asking and the answer to this question, it is, in part, cognitive, and in my world, it's been largely somatic. Remember, our brains hold our socialization, conditioning, and family training, and will tell us things that will keep a safe base on all those teachings. Meanwhile, our bodies and intuition hold our deepest truth.

So my clients in Anchored and I coach on these issues, this is a place where I would recommend somatic, or body-based coaching, instead of just working on the mind and the thought work protocol, because the truth is in the body in all its brilliance. Just as unhealthy as it is to have a partner who wants you to change to meet their unmet needs, a flag to watch out for in a relationship is when you are holding on to hope that your partner will change in ways to make the relationship to want it to be.

When you tell yourself, "Well, if they could just be like is this instead of that, then we'll be great. This relationship would just be amazing if they were a different person." Then that's a sign you may be in a relationship that doesn't truly serve you or your partner.

And again, this is so classic to our codependent brains, and this is where you get to do your own thought work about what's getting in the way of accepting your partner as they are. And this kind of thinking, "I'll be happy when they change," keeps us in relationship because we fear the alternative, which is like such a for-realsy thing for us.

We were talking about this in Anchored the other day, how we stay in relationships that we don't enjoy or aren't growing in or even hate most of the time because there's this almost whisper of a thought inside us, that's like, "You tricked them into being in relationship with you. This sucks. But it's better than being alone. And if you leave this relationship, no one else will be dumb enough to date you." Ouch, right?

But I pulled the group, and this, some variation on this theme that being alone is really scary, wow. It really resonated. And if that's not your particular script, then maybe you think that being single says something negative about you as a person. I mean, hello perfectionism. Maybe thoughts, like, "What will the neighbors or our parents or the kids think if I ended things?"

And I will remind you, there's nothing inherently wrong about being single, just like there isn't anything inherently good about being in a romantic partnership we get to take those morality stories about what's good and what's bad right out of our minds, so we can learn what actually matters to us as our own people, independent of what we've been taught by society. What matters truly is the substance of the relationship with yourself and your significant other.

Now, if your partner's behaviors, actions, beliefs, values are ones that you cannot live with, but justify to yourself in the hopes that they will change, then, my love, take a little step back to start. But chances of your partner magically changing, especially if they don't want to change in the ways you want them to, are on the slim side.

And if your partner did change who they were, just for you, then they would be compromising who they are. And sure, the compromised version may be more appealing on the surface, but then you're in a relationship with someone who may be compromising themselves to make you happy. And this is the flip side of what we were just talking about. Our brains say that

because we have always chameleoned and shape-shifted and people-pleased, then others should do the same.

Again, it's like what we talked about in Episodes 163 and 164 about the self-abandonment cycle. We want others, subconsciously, I don't think we're walking around being like, "I really want you to abandon yourself," but subconsciously we want others to abandon themselves just like we have always done. And it's not loving. It's not kind, my darling. And waiting around for them to self-abandon is not a reason to stay in a relationship.

And if you're like, "This relationship will be worth it once they treat themselves as lousily," that's a word now, "as I treat me," then I will be happy, then there is self-work to do. And yeah, maybe that's not the relationship for you. In either case, whether you're bending yourself backwards to please your partner or wishing your partner were, well, just different, just basically not themselves, then these can both be flavors of codependent thinking.

Needing others to behave a certain way to make us feel okay, or working our tails off to read minds and meet the unspoken, unrealistic or undesirable expectations of someone else, takes us out of honest and authentic relationship with ourselves and them, and is no basis for a healthy relationship.

These thought patterns tell us that we are not enough, that they are not enough, and we find ourselves in this really problematic dance of self-deceiving to be other pleasing. And that, my love, is not what you deserve in a relationship, and it's frankly not what your partner deserves either. Instead, you get to have your working list of things you want in a partner. Things you value. Things that matter to you.

Maybe you're a homebody, and you want an extrovert to get you out in the world. Maybe you take forever to get ready to go out. Yes, I am raising my hand. And you want a partner who is patient, self-sufficient, and is able to take care of themselves while you do your own little dance.

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Maybe you're working to regulate your perfect nervous system and want a partner who's doing their own nervous system regulating work, and who gets and respects the moments when you're dysregulated, and who defaults to being loving and kind in those moments. Someone who values coregulation. Maybe you've worked hard on your sobriety and want a partner who not only gets it, but supports you, and has your back.

If you keep hoping that your partner will suddenly develop these qualities or whatever matters to you, if you believe that if you keep pestering, nagging or encouraging them to change when they're not interested, then it may be a sign that the relationship isn't supporting you in the ways you need, that there isn't room for growth and to be met there, and that you get to look at your own stories, your own inner judgment of other people, and to see what acceptance of yourself and that other person might bring.

And if at the end of the day, your values are not aligned, well, there you go. So, my love, all of this relationship business boils down to the fact that in a healthy, interdependent relationship, partners are connected but not enmeshed. To illustrate the point, and if you're driving, please do this later, otherwise join me. Take your two hands if you have the use of both hands, and if you don't, I'll invite you to visualize this with me.

Put your hands together, but just so that the fingertips of your right hand connects gently, so gently, with the fingertips of your left hand. Thumb finds thumb, pointer finds pointer, New York finger finds New York finger. This is the way to think about a healthy relationship. We are connected to our partners. One hand can gently push on the other, encourage the other to move, but each hand still maintains itself to the degree that hands have selves.

Each hand is autonomous. The left can scratch your nose while the right adjusts your glasses. They can reconnect, and they can move autonomously. Now I want to invite you to clasp your hands tight together. This, my kittens, is enmeshment. When we are so intertwined with our

partners so close that we can't even tell who is who, when this happens, when we've lost ourselves in our relationships, or when we're waiting for our partners to change, it may be time to consider if the relationship is really helping each partner grow.

So what's the remedy? Well, it's to get to know yourself. To start to ask yourself on the daily, what do you want, need, and like? And as you get clear on that, you get to start asking yourself if you are meeting your own wants and needs, and if you're being met in a reciprocal and fair way in your relationships.

You also get to ask yourself, "Am I giving too much? Am I asking for what I want? Am I meeting myself and being clear with those I love about what I want for them? Or am I expecting them to be mind-readers, to just magically know how to meet me?"

Are you expecting one person to be your everything? See Episode 158, *Why Friendship Matters*.

Do you know your attachment tendencies? Episode 129 and 130.

And are you working to get into a more secure attachment with yourself and your partner? Are you living in the past in your relationship, stewing about the harms that have been done to you? Swirling around in all of that old resentment? Episode 164.

Or are you living in the future and daydreaming like we've been talking about here, about how things will be better when...? Or are you in the present, here, now, in this one moment with the person you're in relationship with? I'll invite you to ask yourself, does the relationship bring you more joy or more pain on the regular? I'm not asking does it ever activate your attachment wounds. Right? Because romantic relationships are built to do that.

But rather, is your time with your person overarchingly more loving and sweet and connected, or is the balance more towards fighting and disconnection? Are you doing your own work or are you expecting magic to happen in your relationship without putting in the time to work on and with yourself?

Or the flip side of that, since you are spending your time listening to a show called *Feminist Wellness*, are you putting in all the emotional labor while your partner sits on the couch eating hummus watching reality TV, unwilling to meet you even a quarter of the way, much less halfway? Are you showing up as your whole self in your relationship? Are you showing up as who you think they want you to be?

My beauty, these are just a few questions to get us started. Relationships are complex things. They bring up all of our childhood pain, patterns, and wounding, and give us the option to turn towards ourselves, and towards love and care so we can step into our own healing. Or as all those wounds come up, we can stay in our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits until we gain the skills to heal the old hurts. And it's important to know that while you may be on a healing path, a growth path, your partner may not be.

So you get to choose: Is it worth staying with someone you love deeply who can't meet you? And can you meet those needs outside of the relationship, or is it vital to you to be in a relationship with someone who values growth in the same ways you do? There's no right answer, but you get to learn what your answer is. I want to make sure you know.

If your relationship is activating to your nervous system, safely triggering, meaning not like retraumatizing triggering, but just activating, you know what I mean? Please know that that's normal. And signals places you can choose to turn towards, should you desire to do so. And if you feel stagnant and stuck in your relationship, you get to ask yourself: What part is you? What part is them? What part is the confluence of the two of you?

And I'll invite you to do the cognitive work to answer these questions, to talk it out with a coach such as myself, with beloved friends, and this is important, friends who have the kind of relationships you want in your own life, it's really important, and to get real with yourself about the complexity of it all before you resign yourself to stay or decide to just jump ship.

Remember the old saying, "Wherever you go, my darling, there you are." When you're making the decision to stay in a relationship or leave it, make sure you're looking at your own thoughts, your own history, what you're bringing to the table alongside how you're being met by your partner. And above all, let your body guide you. Your deepest brilliance lives there, my tender ravioli.

Thank you for joining me. I hope that this has been helpful, and I'm looking forward to sharing next week's show with you, too. It's going to be a good one. At the time of this recording, the May 2022 group of Anchored is completely full, and we have a wait-list with several people already registered for the August group. So here's the official announcement: We're doing another group in August. It wasn't the plan because I am writing a book. You know, I keep the group really small and intimate, 25, 27 max, so there were more folks that wanted to join than we had room for.

So if you are interested in taking everything you've been learning on the podcast and taking it to the next level, really studying it, practicing it, doing the somatic work and somatic coaching with me, doing somatic practices on your own, becoming a champion at the thought work protocol that involves the nervous system and nervous system science, learning to regulate your nervous system and work with your inner children, and if you're excited to do it with my guidance in a small and intimate community in a beautiful container of really kind and lovely people, then Anchored is the place for you.

Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/anchored to get on the wait-list for August. It would be such a delight to have you join us, my love. All right, my

beauty, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should 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, and I'll talk to you soon.

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.