

Ep #231: Needs: Strategies for Healthy Self-Expression (Part 2)



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. If you have not listened to Episode 230 I'd highly recommend it. Because if you jump in right now, particularly if you're brand, brand new to the show... Hello. Welcome. Bienvenida... you're going to be wicked confused. You're going to be like, "Wait, what is she talking about? It feels like a jumped into the middle of something," because in fact you have.

Last week, we talked about needs, and the common misconception, in the world of healing, of our codependent survival skill habits. That common story that to need others is inherently wrong and bad and codependent. That telling someone you have needs and would like to work with them to get those needs met, oh, that's a very bad problem. You are very codependent. Go try harder.

Try harder to somehow be a human pack animal mammal who doesn't have needs? Hm, right. So, that was my whole point. It was that we, as humans, need one another. We are deeply interconnected, and to pretend anything else is just to deny reality. We deeply need one another.

Our rugged individualism has gotten us to some pretty dangerous places with patriarchy, white-settler colonialism, and late-stage capitalism, at the forefront of those painful, painful narratives about what it means to be a human.

When we have grown up around folks who are deep in their emotional outsourcing their codependent ways, when we, ourselves, have been living this way to painful, painful outcomes for so long, I totally get it that some

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part of us is like, “Well, needing people too much is what led me into this pain. I am a rock now. I am an island. And a rock feels no pain, right? I need no one. I'd say for this way, it's better this way.”

It's that whole thing we talked about, pretty recently, the shift from independent to interdependent. That is possible when we practice receiving, right? That was Episode 224, “Receiving and the Trap of Independence.” In that episode, I made an argument towards the importance of interdependence as our lifelong goal.

It's an argument I will continue to make every day, every episode, every coaching call, forever and ever because interdependence is the way. Living in presence, living intentionally, sets the stage for a beautiful life full of mutuality, reciprocity, and care. So, that's what we've been talking about in this conversation about needs.

Now, we ended last week by talking about communication, and how needing other humans is never, ever, ever a problem. What creates a problem is the ways that we express those needs. The expectations we have of one another. The lack of consent, sometimes. The habitual, particularly passive aggressive, ways of communicating that so many of us learned in childhood.

That's what we're going to be talking about today. Because so many of us get mad squirrely, instead of being direct and clear and forthright when it comes to asking for support around our needs. Instead of saying things like, “Can you please open the door, my hands are full,” we try to do it all ourselves and are resentful on the other side, or sometimes create catastrophes. We'll be looping back to that in just a second.

Or sometimes we are super clear and direct, and almost demanding around our needs, from a place of also over giving, over functioning,

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overperforming, being the martyr, savior, and saint who is always doing for others and will then also demand that you do for them because to be honest, you owe them, right?

You might hear them say, “Oh no, that's fine. I mean, look at all I do for you.” It's so exhausting to be on either side of that one. Let's be real. From this internal morass of stories, beliefs, thoughts and feels wrapped up in a hot mess nervous system experience, we can lean on some less than useful, less than healthy, tools for communication that actually, seriously, don't serve us or those we love in the long run.

So, let's get into it. Let's talk about the top passive aggressive, indirect ways we can attempt to speak our needs and try to get our needs met. Though, it rarely results in actually getting our needs met, and often involves a lot of crisis creation, huffing, puffing, sighing, eye rolling.

Here are the top five ways that I could think of: One, the silent, suffering martyr. Oh, this was such a mind bender. This one is cute, said exactly no one. My ex-mother-in-law, ooh, did she love this one. Okay, so here's what she would do. She was constantly long suffering. She would overdo for everyone all the time.

She would make it really obvious she was working really hard on dinner. It was a whole big thing. Then she would come to dinner with her hair disheveled and her dress barely on to make it really, clearly known that she was in full scullery maid energetic, of the long sufferingness. She would not ask her help directly. But she would sometimes order me around; that's a whole other conversation. We're going to do that one soon. Because there was no consent. There was just, “Get that.”

But anyway, she wouldn't ask for help directly. Instead, she would huff, she would puff, it was a lot of sighing, which would call your attention. Because

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then someone would be like, “What is it? Do you need something? Are you okay?” Instead of just saying, “Oh, I'm so upset that the pie crust burned.” It'd be the big huff, puff, sigh. She would create these crisis moments.

So, it was not asking someone to open the door, but instead doing it herself with arms full of groceries in glass jars. Invariably, because of course, because physics and gravity, a jar of fancy chestnuts or very sticky jam or whatever, would 1,000% fall to the ground. But in the kitchen, of course, not outside, because more disaster, more better. It would explode, going everywhere, and getting all over her.

Leading to a nuclear arms race level cusstastrophe kind of reaction. Because then all eyes would be on her. Her long suffering doesn't ask for help, it can do it all martyrness. Right? So, instead of saying, “Hey, we're planning a holiday dinner, here's how I'd like to split up the tasks. I'd like to make sure I get some rest today. Here's what I want. Here's what I need.”

Instead of doing that, she would cause a scene so we would all give her the attention she actually wanted, the help she actually wanted, the support she actually needed to pull this off. But in this really indirect way that was all about her suffering. It's a whole friggin mood.

Then, there's its cousin, the martyr's complaint. “I'm always the one who has to stay late and finish all the work, while others get to leave on time.” Notice the word “get” there. So, they have agency but the martyr doesn't. “I guess some people just have more important things to do than finish this project on time.”

I want to report back from my nervous system that I am pinging between sympathetic and a little dorsal as I'm reading these, because ooh, these hit close to home. They're really unpleasant to be on the receiving side of, and the doing side of; both sides suck.

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Here, one indirectly expresses their need for fairness and support by highlighting the disparity between their own efforts... which let's be real, are probably like 127,000,000% above and beyond what was actually necessary or asked for... and those of others, who may just have healthy boundaries or good work-life balance, whatever.

Meanwhile, casting ridiculous shade on others while lifting themselves up, while making sure that you, the listener, know that they are putting themselves down, putting themselves dead last, martyring themselves through their behavior. They are making quite sure that you know that their needs are not being met. That others, those terrible others, are prioritizing their own interests over helping them, the poor martyr.

There's a tone that implies, well, implies, it actually is. It expresses a boatload of judgment. Those that aren't saving the martyr from themselves, and what they chose do, are terrible people. The martyr wants you to know that because, again, core to emotional outsourcing is positing ourselves against everyone and everything. So, in order to feel good, you have to put everyone else down. That is not interdependence, my darling. That doesn't feel good, right?

Next up, number three, the subtle hint. "Wow, it's amazing how some people are able to recognize when someone needs help without being asked. I guess not everyone has that ability." This one's kind of confusing. It's like it kicks you in the crotch, but gently at first. You could miss the backhanded... it's like a 1,000 little cuts just rolled up in one. You could miss it if you weren't paying attention. Or if you grew up with this kind of languaging, this subtle, backhanded b.s.

This statement communicates a speaker's desire for someone, oh my god, anyone, to recognize their needs and meet them, without them having to explicitly say what it is that they need, right? Because that's probably what

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makes them feel vulnerable, scared, not okay, weak, not enough, or worried. They do all of that while also throwing everyone under the bus.

See that trend of pretty intense judginess is continuing here? It's a key ingredient in this whole sandwich of passive aggressive needs denyingness. Because again, we have to put everyone else down to elevate ourselves to the point of maybe, kind of, a little bit, being okay to have needs, maybe.

Which brings us to, drumroll, please. Number four, the veiled request. "It would be nice if someone around here could take the initiative to do the dishes once in a while, once in a blue moon or whatever. But hey, you know, I guess some people are just too busy playing their video games, hanging out with their friends, staying late at the office, to help out around here. I guess it's all on me."

"Some people" is so well positioned here, as a way to imply that everyone is a total mess up. Without actually saying it. Instead of being like, "You, and you and you and you need to step on up," it's this roundabout way to make everyone in the room, in the house, everyone, feel lousy, without actually getting the help and care the speaker wants and needs.

So, they're not actually asking for it. It is such a doozy. What invariably happens is... People aren't dumb, right? We get the hint. So, someone might step up and do the dishes the one time, but this is not a sustainable way of being. This is not a longitudinally successful plan for getting your needs met. It's a way to make your people feel like crap for an hour so that they'll do your bidding.

But that's the difference. Right? It's your bidding, and not interdependently recognizing the needs of the household, the needs of the family, the needs

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of the friend group, the needs of the worksite, and speaking to those needs directly.

Finally, five, the guilt trip. “I've been feeling really overwhelmed lately, but I guess it's just on me to sort of figure that out. I mean, some people are lucky enough to have others who care, right? Yeah, because no, I mean, I get it. You're like super busy. You like have so much going on at work. If you cared about me, you would totally ask right?” Ooh, damn. That's some business right there.

“I have needs, too,” this screams, like a tantruming four-year-old. But it's actually 42-year-old you talking to your kids, partner, coworker, parents. Letting everybody know you're suffering and need help, while also revealing the speaker's fear that they don't matter, don't deserve care, or won't get it. While also letting their resentment be known in neon. Because oh, how they suffer for you even though you never asked them to suffer.

By the way, that's my favorite emotional outsourcing trait. The doing things “for others” that are actually so you, as the emotional outsourcer, will feel important and like you belong and matter, but then saying you're doing it for the other person who didn't ask you to do it and likely didn't even want you to. Ooh, that is so classic. Wow.

This whole guilt trip gets a cherry on top with the implication that *you* aren't a caring person, or you would care for me. Oh, it's so many levels. It's so many deep cuts. Aw, it's so antithetical to actually getting your needs met. What is a foundational here is the emotional outsourcing expectation of mutual mind reading.

Because the emotional outsourcer spends their life attempting to read everyone's mind and to anticipate their needs in an attempt to keep themselves feeling safe, by being ingratiated to and indispensable to and

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needed by everyone. Well, which, by the way, that is a very sneaky and common emotional outsourcing way to feel safer, loved and approved of.

In so doing, the emotional outsourcer denies their own needs, while making sure to take care of all of everyone else's, towards the goal of never being abandoned. Because that's what you do day in, day out. "What could they need? Let me anticipate, let me anticipate, let me anticipate..." So, we expect them to anticipate our needs. Leaving us not needing to state them directly, and, I remember this one from back in the day.

I remember feeling sad, abandoned, angry, if someone didn't anticipate my needs, because I was like, "I thought you knew me. I thought you cared about me. I thought you loved me. How can you *not* read my mind?" Woof. So many painful layers in there, huh? Yeah.

Alternately, as previously mentioned, we can have the emotional outsourcing, direct communication, with lousy expectations and a boatload of aggression. Which is when we tell people what they should do or nag incessantly or have constant crises; a lot martyr, but with lots of talking about it that the emotional outsourcer will need rescued from.

Because we are constantly seeking a savior, and will badger and manipulate unwittingly and unconsciously until we get the attention we seek. Often, because we didn't get what we needed, as little ones, and so our nervous systems are seeking it out now.

We are going to talk all about this in a future episode about needs. But for now, I want to get to the remedies. We know clearly that this indirect approach can create a vicious cycle of unmet needs and frustration, resentment and just general "yuck" in our relationships with ourselves and others.

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People around us may struggle to understand our true wants and needs leaving everyone feeling confused, frustrated, disconnected, out of sync. Frankly, like a failure, because you're not getting your needs met and the people who love you and just want to get you what you actually want for Christmas, and not, 'oh, I don't need anything this year,' are left scrambling instead of just being communicated with directly.

The journey towards healthy self-expression, and meeting our needs, begins with self-awareness and self-compassion. It's essential to recognize that our needs, your needs, my needs, are valid and deserving of attention and care. In order to be able to do that, we need to start with regulating our nervous systems.

If you're new to nervous system talk, there are dozens of episodes where I sprinkle that science in. In Episode 174, "Polyvagal 101" I give you all the info you need to know to get started on a nervous system healing adventure. Which is the work I do with my clients. We need to start with nervous system safety.

Because if you don't palpably know in your body, not just your mind, that you are safe with you. That you won't beat you up emotionally, physically, metaphorically, actually, how can you feel safe enough with anyone else to get vulnerable enough to ask for what you need? Right? Interestingly, the social science will show us that it is when we allow others to love us and care for us and meet our needs that we are most able to support ourselves.

So, it's a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and all of it starts with the nervous system. Learn how to map your nervous system. Build internal safety and trust, which we talk about in Episode 78 "Minimum Baseline Thinking," which is all about building trust with ourselves.

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Here are a few strategies to help you begin to remember how to speak your needs. One, cultivate self-awareness. Take time to reflect on your own needs and desires. Get to know yourself and build self-intimacy. Journaling, meditation, talking with a trusted friend, or a coach like me, can help you gain clarity about what you truly want.

Remember, you are not learning how to know what you want. You're remembering. Because every little, tiny baby born ever knows exactly what they need. We just lose track with all of that, due to our socialization and conditioning. Again, especially as humans socialized as women. So, take the pressure off. You're not learning a new language. You're remembering yourself.

Two, practice assertive communication. Start by acknowledging that your needs are valid and deserving of attention. Use "I" statements to express your desires clearly and respectfully. Remember, assertiveness is about finding a balanced approach that respects both your needs and the needs of others in true interdependent style. It isn't about bulldozing anyone. It's all about balance.

Brains don't understand time so goodly, so practicing direct communication in the mirror or while walking around actually, really, helps to build new pathways in the brain, where that communication, being direct and stating your needs, feels a little, teeny, tiny bit safer each time you do it. So, I recommend you practice with pets, plants, animals, and then humans, who are gentle and easy to talk with, and work outward from there.

We do this in Anchored, my six-month program. We practice with each other. It's one of the things that makes the program so successful, and so longitudinally helpful to change lives. Being able to practice these new skills and ways of communicating needs with others, who are doing the same,

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and want to support you and cheer you on, that's quite sweet, really. It really works, so that's cool.

Three, consider setting boundaries. Now listen, if you're new around here, I'm very careful with my language; consider setting boundaries. I'm not about to be like, "You need to go out and set boundaries," because while boundaries are crucial for maintaining healthy relationships and honor your own wellbeing, boundaries are a whole thing.

There's something that those of us who grew up the way most of us grew up, just didn't grow up with. They're new and scary and wild. I have lots of episodes about them. You can search on VictoriaAlbina.com/podcast.

Boundaries are incredible and amazing. They're resentment prevention, and they are worth learning how to set, my darling, for you and those you love. Please, go slowly. Be gentle. Don't expect yourself to be a boundary-setting maven in one day. Be patient.

Four, honor the no. Remind yourself that it's okay for others to say no, and it doesn't mean a darn thing about you when they do. When you say no, it's about you and not them, right? When we don't fear the no as much, it's way easier to ask for our needs to be met. More on this in Episode 188 "Stop Taking Things Personally."

Five, don't go it alone. Find people to talk, to grow with, to be in community with, around this huge shift from emotional outsourcing to interdependence. No one gets us like we get us, so find your people. It's worth it, for realsies.

Six, finally, focus on receiving. It's vital for speaking your needs. You have to be able to receive the care you're going to get when you ask for it needs to be met. Right? Right. We dive deep on it in Episode 224 "Receiving and the Trap of Independence."

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My darlings, I could talk about needs for hours and ages because it's so important. I'll pause here to say this once more and to close us out, I see a lot of people get really messed up around needs when they learn the story that in order to "recover" from codependency... like it's a disease, which it's not... you can't need anyone. That's just b.s.

We all have needs and we all need each other. It's impossible to live without help. It's just not how this planet works. We are all breathing the same air, recycling the same water through our bodies. We are all interconnected and form part of a deeply, deeply, deeply intrinsically connected web of life. To believe anything else is just not truthful and more importantly, isn't helpful or supportive. It's beautiful to need one another.

To ask in loving, kind ways for help, and to honor the reply you hear, without taking it personally. It's not a problem to have needs. Problems arise when we ask for support from our old emotional outsourcing habits. Unwittingly trying to manipulate others into meeting our needs, instead of trusting that our needs are worthy of being attuned to, and allowing others to make their own decisions.

Luckily, those old habits don't need to define you today. They're just old survival skills, that I know and believe you can train yourself out of. I did it. So, you sure can.

All right, my beauties. Thank you for listening. This was another really powerful conversation. I love talking with you all here on the show. Thanks for listening. Thanks for sharing the show, with your family, with your friends, on your social media, with the people you love, with people you don't love. Thank you for sharing it.

I'm so glad you are here for your healing and that of the collective. So, my love, let us do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart you, should you feel

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so moved. 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. 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!