

Ep #291: Break the Self-Abandonment Cycle and Reclaim Your Authentic Self



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. One of the key things we talk about here on the show, and one of the big things we do in *Anchored*, my six-month program, is learn how to reconnect with our authentic self.

The self we were before life got lifey, before our family of origin told us who we were was not acceptable, was too loud, too quiet, too fat, too thin, too big, too mousy, too nerdy, too gregarious, too or not enough. So when the messages we're receiving at home, from society, from the systems of oppression that impact us on the daily, what we're hearing is that our authentic, most real, most embodied self is not an okay self.

Well we do what's logical, and we step away from that embodiment, from being that person out in the world. Instead, we learn to tap dance for our lovability. We play a role. We get all thespian on it and start acting like the person we believe the people in our life want us to be. The person we believe and think will get us love, will get us safety, will get us belonging, care, validation, value, worthiness.

It makes perfect sense. And the more time we spend not being our authentic self, the less in touch we are with that version of us. And so what do we do? We self-abandon. We don't know our limits or boundaries. We certainly don't set or keep them. We take care of everyone and everything in the world in that emotional outsourcing attempt to get what we need instead of attending to ourselves.

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There's a way in which it's completely brilliant, right? And so, two things. One, I am doing a webinar. It's completely free. It is on September 18th, 2024, 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time; New York City time.

Do you hear me? I always get a slew of emails at 10 p.m. Eastern Standard Time from California being like, I can't get into the Zoom room. And I hear you and I love you. I'm a New Yorker. I'm an East Coaster. All my times are always in New York City time.

So I'm doing this webinar, it's about somatics, to reconnect with and reembody and live once more as our most authentic self. If you've never come to my webinars, it's going to be a treat because it's really hands-on. No one wants to get lectured at for an hour. It's super boring. I don't want to do it. So we do a lot of hands-on, a lot of movement, a lot of writing, a lot of being in our body, because that's my jam, right?

Come join us, VictoriaAlbina.com/authenticity. And yeah, it's free. Register there. That was one, come to the webinar. It's free. If you can't make it live, you'll get a recording. I'm going to tell you all about Anchored on that call. I'll do a live Q&A, and we'll do live practices. So if there's any way you can make it, I highly recommend it. But if you can't, don't stress it. That was one.

Two, this week and next week, we are talking about the self-abandonment cycle because it is vital, and because every time I talk about it, I get a slew of emails and DMs from people being like, "Wait, were you reading my journal? How do you know that this is how I've been living my life?"

To which I reply, "My darling angel, I know it because I lived it too. I know it because I have coached thousands of people through my clinical work, through my functional medicine practice, through Anchored and the Somatic Studio."

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I have worked with so many people who live in emotional outsourcing. And this is what we do, right? We self-abandon towards the goal of feeling safer in the world. And other ways are possible, which I will teach you in this webinar; I will teach you in this week and next week's episodes. And I will teach you all about it in Anchored.

So we have a new group starting in November, and I cannot wait to see you there. All right, that's been enough. Adieu. Without further ado, here's this week's episode, enjoy.

I'm so excited that spring is upon us. I saw a crocus the other day and I squealed out loud. I was on a walk with a friend and she jumped because I squealed. I take great joy in the coming of spring, aah. And I really found a lot of peace in this winter as I've shared here before. I also took my first real, real vacation since the pandemic started.

I did go home to Argentina for two months last year around this time, and that was beautiful and amazing. I saw so many things and really got to travel and explore my country and be with mi gente, which is so important. And was also with family, which was so beautiful.

The vacation I took recently, I went to Miami Beach and just had a really chill time on the beach and at the pool just soaking in the sun and really, really loved it. It's important to take time for ourselves, yeah? And it's a real privilege to be able to do so. It's one I am incredibly grateful for.

So, this week, after talking about conflict for a few weeks, I want to talk about how our conflict aversion, or subtle conflict creation habits, play out and impact our self-concept. The way we think about and relate to ourselves and thus the people we love, the people we are in community with.

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Those of us living with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, where we define codependent thinking as chronically sourcing our worth, value, and validation from others, from outside, ourselves, these habits often stem from not feeling seen, cared for, accepted for who we were as kids.

This can be because our parents were emotionally immature, because they were physically or emotionally not present, because they had demanding, “A+ always” expectations of us, because they didn't expect us to amount to anything and they told us all about it. Or because we were the weird kid, the queer kid, the theater kid in the football family, the sensitive tenderoni in the tough love family.

The immigrant, the first-generation American kid born to parents who grew up back home, wherever that may be, who had a completely different rubric for living, a different story about emotions and how they should be experienced, felt, talked about. Talked about was often not even on the table, right? But here we are in USA, in the U.S., amongst all these American kids talking to their parents about their feelings, and we didn't feel seen.

Or maybe it was because we didn't fit into the narrative of what our caregivers, our family expected us to be, to want what they expected us to perform for them and their benefit. Or because the pressure on us to pave a new way for our family felt like so much.

And one of the methods that many of us used to try to get love, care, and acceptance was to over-function or over-give. I did this myself in childhood. I did it in my romantic relationships and in my friendships. I would overperform being loving, being kind. And that doesn't mean that I'm not loving or kind, I am. I firmly believe that.

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I love myself for being such a tenderoni, such a basket full of love. And I would also chronically give so much more than I actually was capable of giving. I gave till it hurt. And I did this the most in situations where I was under-receiving. Where I wasn't getting the validation I wanted for doing, oh, so much for others.

So my response, a very common response, was to continue to give and give and give. To give more when I was getting less back. What I didn't realize was that I was giving in an attempt to people-please, to appear perfect and lovable, and in an attempt to get back, to receive the love that I wasn't giving myself. Because I didn't know how to give myself love and care the way I needed the way I do now.

I believed I had to get all of that from other people, so I would try to win their affection, attention, and care by pouring from my own empty cup. And again, the less I got back, the more I would give. We do this, this overgiving, over-functioning, over-doing, often from anxious attachment; which we talked about in Episodes 129, 130, and 135.

We do this because our subconscious mind is always seeking two vital things, connection and significance. Our subconscious is constantly asking, "Do I matter to you? Am I significant to you? What is my role here? What is my job in this moment? Are you connected with me? Am I as important to you as you are to me?"

We do this because when we have these two things, connection and significance, and we feel safe in it, stable in it, secure in it, it makes the nervous system feel safer. We can find and stay in ventral vagal, the safe and social part of the nervous system, when we believe that we matter to others.

Because we believe that that means that they will save us when the lions or the marauders come to destroy the village, right? Connection and

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significance. And when we don't feel connected emotionally and physically with our caregivers, when we don't feel significant to them in our authenticity as who we truly are, when we are told we are too much, too loud, too quiet, too smart, too dumb, too silly, too serious, too fat, too thin, effectively not right, not enough, in either overt or subtle ways, then we take that all in and we believe it to be true.

Especially as children, because, well, who else are we to believe if not our parents, our caregivers, the people who are supposed to love us? Somatically then, through the body... “soma” being the Greek word for the body... we perceive this energetic imbalance.

And as brilliant and amazing children, we start to do everything we can to prove our significance, to prove that we matter, to try to connect somewhere, somehow, in an attempt to regulate, and hopefully co-regulate, our nervous systems with someone else to bring ourselves into a calmer nervous system state, ventral vagal, so we can feel safer in the world.

Flash forward to adulthood, if we don't realize that we are still going through life seeking safety primarily from outside ourselves, we will push in all of our relationships to try to get the validation and reassurance that we don't yet know how to give ourselves.

Now, my nerds, a thing that humans do is called “reenactment”. And of course, there'll be a whole show about that soon enough. I love talking about reenactment, worry not.

But in short, this means that we replay our childhood relationships in adulthood to try to get what we didn't get as kids. And often that means, especially for us, that we show up to our adult relationships as over-givers seeking to rebalance the proverbial scales of “give and get”, hoping that this time, this time, we shall get our due.

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Which we believe means endless appreciation and validation, often for doing things that nobody at all, like 0% of people in our lives, asked us to do for them. And because we're over-performing and over-helping and putting ourselves out...

Putting ourselves and our own needs and wants last in doing things for other people that, again, were not asked of us in most cases... because we're doing things for others that they can totally do for themselves... we don't get the immediate and enormous validation we're looking for.

And we abandon ourselves again and again as we seek connection and significance from others. And so this cycle of self-abandonment gets activated. All those years of pent-up feelings of not feeling seen or appreciated, they start to come out sideways in our adult relationships.

It comes out as resentment, as irritability, as annoyance, as passive aggression. It comes out in what's called "protest behavior". Trying to make the other person feel guilty, blaming and shaming them if we are not happy, not feeling fully seen. We make our partners, kids, co-workers, friends, strangers on the bus responsible for our happiness, joy, calm, and peace.

The internal script goes, "Either you validate me in the exact right way, or wow, am I going to be grumpy about it. And you're going to hear about all that grumpety-grump." Then it comes out in phrases like, "Oh," and I have heard this from my clients about one bajillion times. And I've probably, no, I've definitely said this myself, "With everything I do for you, you can't do this one thing for me?"

And we may say it in a regular voice, but it's super melodrama. It's full-on telenovela, full-on soap opera. I couldn't remember the English. Okay, I'm not allowed to talk to my family back home in Spanish for an hour and then record the show, because then my English just goes out the window. Soap opera. Right.

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So we may say it in a normal tone, but in our minds, in our bodies, in our hearts, it's melodrama. It sounds like, "With everything I did for you last week, when I was so exhausted, when I was so tired, when I told you I was feeling burnt out, I did all of this for you and you can't show up for me right now?"

We make our love conditional. And we make ourselves... putting ourselves out... someone else's problem, someone else's fault, their doing. And when they don't reciprocate our over functioning, overdoing every single time, when they don't give and over give and over give until it hurts, the way we did, then we're pissed off. We're angry at them. We're annoyed. We're irritated. We're resentful.

That often comes out in these passive aggressive statements, indirect aggressive statements, or in an explosion of emotion when we hit our limit of pouring from that emotionally empty cup. When we say yes and yes and yes, and we just want to say no, we end up breaking things, throwing things, destroying things, throwing things out, saying mean and hurtful, jabbing things.

Being unkind in word and action because we were so focused on being nice for so long. And until we explode outward, all of those feelings stay stuck in our bodies. This is the important somatic aspect of doing this work. We hold these feelings in, hold all this anger and resentment and annoyance in, we stuff it into our bodies, into our physiology, and we hold it in so tight that of course we have neck pain, jaw pain, hip pain.

And these are the big three areas that I hear my clients having pain. Really holding tension in to these foundational parts of our physiology. And while we're holding in all this anger, we're pointing at others, we're blaming and shaming ourselves, beating ourselves up. And so we unwittingly jack up our nervous system.

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We stay in fight or flight, in somatic bodily overwhelm, in worry, anxiety, stress, full of adrenaline, norepinephrine and cortisol... our stress hormones... until our body cannot keep up with it anymore. And we collapse into dorsal vagus, foot all the way off the biological gas; detached, depressed, self-isolating, sad, lonely, dejected.

All of this happens because we're angry at the people we love. We're angry at the people we want to connect with, who we want a sense of significance from, because they are not putting themselves out the way we do. They are not disrespecting themselves the way we do.

And of course, as always, I'm not talking about situations of abuse here. I'm not talking about situations where we're actually being victimized or taken advantage of. So often it can feel like we're being taken advantage of because we're saying, "I'll do anything and everything for you. I'll take on your life and I will make it my number one priority."

Because we were socialized and conditioned to do just that. We learned to do just that to survive. And let's be real, even thrive in our childhoods. Because everyone loves the good kid, the good girl who always does the chores, all the everything for everyone. And that carries on into adulthood, big time.

Think of the "Supermom" trope. She who does 473 things for the family before breakfast. It's so real, right? And when this is both what we learned in childhood and from society, of course we find people to partner with... this is the reenactment part... who either are subconsciously looking for that themselves, who are used to that in their lives, or people who want someone to do everything for them.

And when it doesn't start that way, if you take overdoing all the things, and you are, here's where the perfectionism comes in. There's an exact right

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way to load the dishwasher, to do the laundry, and if you don't do it exactly right, you're going to hear about it.

Well, most partners or children, roommates, will eventually grow accustomed to you doing all of the things. And we'll find that it's easier to just let you be a whirlwind of doing than to actually do anything for themselves. Because that will likely displease you, and no one wants that.

So of course they don't have to make the bed, or do the laundry, or the dishes, or cook, or grocery shop, or think about much of anything at all, including doing emotional labor, meeting your partner emotionally, because the other person is doing all of this for you, right?

And so they stopped doing the things, if they ever did them in the first place, both because humans socialized as men in white settler colonialism, in the patriarchy, are often taught that not doing the work of running a household is normal and fine. Or because that was modelled for them in their households growing up.

And important side note, it's not just the patriarchy. There's a huge class component to this that goes beyond childhood gender roles. I was in a relationship with someone who came from "exorbitant wealth", to quote them, who was socialized as a girl, and was taught that they didn't have to do anything around the house because either their mom, or one of the women who cleaned in their houses, would do literally everything for them.

So yes, I'm always going to throw the patriarchy the full way under the bus. But there's also very much a class component here too, right? Okay, so either we find partners who don't want to participate in an interdependent, reciprocal relationship based in mutuality. Or if they came into the relationship wanting to do their part, they eventually stop because you're over-functioning to the point where they don't need to.

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And it's smarter sometimes not to do the things if it's going to lead to a blowout. But then they don't do the things, and then you're angry about the situation. One which you unwittingly, no blaming here my beauty, but you played a part in creating it. And of course, of course, of course, of course, my saying this is not in any way absolving the other person of not doing their fair share. Not at all.

I'm just saying, do you see the circular effect of this? This terrible, painful, negative feedback cycle we get into? You do too much, more than you want to or have the capacity for, abandoning yourself, your wants, your needs in service of others. Those others don't appreciate you, validate you the way you want and expect them to, especially when you're doing things they didn't ask for or don't even want you to do.

Then you get mad about them not validating you as the amazing goddess of doing too much. They don't recognize and celebrate your martyrhood, your saviorism, you being the fixer and the saint.

And because you don't realize that you're actually angry at yourself, and the systems that taught you to behave this way, for teaching you to abandon yourself by continuing this cycle of over giving in an attempt to source connection, significance and safety, it all builds up and comes out sideways as you get more and more resentful and feel more and more taken advantage of and disrespected.

So then you express your pent-up feelings intensely. Like when you hold a beach ball underwater for a long time and it just comes shooting up, pow!, eventually. So you say the mean thing, you jab, you poke, you prod. You have an explosive emotional experience. You're reactive and big. You made the other person responsible for all your feelings and blame them for this cycle you find yourself in.

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And then you feel guilty about it. You feel bad about it. Of course you do, because you were trained to not express your emotions, especially not in a way that might make someone else uncomfortable. And because of prosocial guilt, which we talked about in Episode 85, we feel bad when we attack others.

We feel especially bad when we attack the people we depend on for emotional wellness and safety. So the next turn of the self-abandonment cycle from feeling guilty, feeling bad, is that you overcompensate for your explosion.

You do 20 more chores. You buy them gifts. You make their favorite elaborate meal when you actually don't have the time or energy. You shower them with love and affection. You clean everything. You do their homework or laundry or life for them to try to absolve yourself of the guilt... To try to get rid of the guilt of having exploded like that beach ball coming up from underwater.

Not realizing you were taught, in all of the ways, family of origin, society, culture, that it's your job to buy the beach ball, blow it up, and to hold it underwater forever. Which is just too much for one tender ravioli to handle. And so your actions, in an attempt to assuage your guilt from the thought, "I shouldn't have behaved that way," starts the cycle all over again; of over giving and under receiving.

Which, of course, will lead to more anger, resentment and protest, more explosion, more guilt, more overcompensating. And in this cycle, what we don't realize is that we are blocking ourselves from receiving love, care, kindness and support from ourselves and others.

That's often because we don't know how to ask for our wants and needs to be met. We don't know how because it was never okay to do it in childhood, or from our social location. It was never taught to us, and it likely

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never felt safe when we were children to have our own particular individual wants and needs.

Especially if they weren't the wants and needs our family wanted us to have. Especially if we saw others in the household repressing their own wants and needs and that was normalized, and thus really seemed like the smartest thing to do.

And so this cycle is one of detachment from self and in an ironic twist, detachment from your attachment figure, from your partner, parent, lover, child, friend, the person whose support and care you most want as you continue to put yourself last, and continue to make decisions that are based on you ignoring or pushing aside, repressing and not acknowledging your personal wants, needs and desires.

So we keep this cycle spinning and spinning until our relationships eventually implode. And in the meanwhile, we've had a bellyache for decades.

My beauties, I want to pause right there because this is a lot. It's a lot to realize that we've been living in this cycle, often for decades, often for an entire life. And so I want to give you some space and come back next week to talk about the remedies, about how we intervene on our own behalf for our own good and the good of the collective.

This week, your homework... I'm realizing I haven't given you homework in a minute... is to raise your awareness around this. To notice when this comes up in your life, and to just ask yourself, "Am I giving from my overflow, or am I giving from my empty cup? Am I giving more than I want to? Than I have the capacity for? Am I giving with the desire of trying to get someone else to think or feel something about me? Is there perfectionism, people-pleasing, codependent thinking at the root of this act of giving?"

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“Is it actually an act of service? Or is it a covert act of manipulation and control?” Start to feel into it. Start to bring your awareness to it. Make sure that you're subscribed to the show so it populates right into your little phone and just goes “bing.” You've got a new episode every Thursday so you don't even have to think about it; one less place you have to function at all. The show comes to you via the magic of the interwebs.

But really, come on back next week, and let's talk more about this. Let's talk about the remedies, so you can really pause this cycle before it takes over your life.

Alright, my beauties, 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, my beauty, and I'll talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.